



# COMMUNITY FOOD ASSESSMENT: LINN COUNTY



Ten Rivers Food Web



Resource  
Assistance  
for Rural  
Environments





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To all of Linn County: we kindly thank you for opening up your houses, churches, meeting halls, restaurants, grocery stores and lives to tell the stories that informed this assessment.

# FOREWARD

When the first settlers came to Oregon they were amazed by the rich soil, abundant water supply and even the islands of productivity in Oregon's deserts. They were thrilled with the crops, fruits and berries they were able to raise, the rich pastureland as well as the streams teeming with fish and the bounty of wild game available to feed a growing population. It would have been impossible for them to believe that anyone could be hungry or food insecure in this land of plenty. It is incredible that hunger and food insecurity abound in Oregon nearly two centuries later. In fact, many of the areas that seemed so bountiful to those early settlers have the least access to food today.

Three years ago the Oregon Food Bank in partnership with University of Oregon RARE program began to conduct community food assessments in some of Oregon's rural counties. Very few community food assessment efforts have been undertaken in rural America with a county by county approach. The report you are about to read is a result of conversations with the people who make Oregon's rural communities and their food systems so very unique. These reports are also a gift from a small group of very dedicated young people who have spent the last year listening, learning and organizing. It is our sincere hope that these reports and organizing efforts will help Oregonians renew their vision and promise of the bountiful food system that amazed those early settlers.

Sharon Thornberry  
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Sheep at Sweet Home Farms

# INTRODUCTION

Linn County comprises 2,292 square miles (1,466,880 acres) with a total population of 116,672. Located in the center of the Willamette Valley, the county's climate is characterized by a cool, rainy season from September to May and a warm, mostly dry summer season from June to August. From west to east, the county's landscape features the fertile flatlands of the Willamette Valley, the foothills of the Cascades, and the densely forested Cascade Mountains. While the majority of the population resides in Albany, the county seat, numerous small towns are scattered throughout the county typical of rural America.

The sign greeting all who enter Linn County along Oregon's Highway 5 highlights a significant agricultural achievement: Linn County is the grass seed capital of the world. It's rather ironic that the county's claim to fame is agricultural, since an increasing number of residents aren't sure from where their next meal will come. Over 2,000 farms claim almost 80% of Linn County's non-timber land. Yet, in 2009, one out of every five Linn County residents (23,294) required Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as Food Stamps) benefits to help put food on their tables. That same year, nearly 50% of Linn County students were eligible for free and reduced-cost meals, and 28,942 emergency food boxes were distributed to low-income families.

Linn County is plagued with high rates of unemployment, poverty and food insecurity. The unemployment rate was 12% in February 2011, above the state average of 10.2%. Census Bureau Data indicates that Linn County has seen a 1.3% rise in poverty since 1990 to almost 15% in 2009. This translates to nearly 16,000 residents whose family income falls below the federal government's poverty threshold (see Appendix XXX). Linn Benton Food Share, the regional food bank organization, provides emergency food for those in need, but the demand for their services at 14 food pantries and seven free meal sites demonstrates that hunger and food security are serious and persistent problems in Linn County.

The major industries in Linn County terms of percentage of total employment include manufacturing, education, health and social services, retail trade and natural resources. Many of the manufacturing jobs still reflect the county's timber milling and lumber processing history. They also once included

small-scale food processing jobs which have all but disappeared.

While employment in agriculture represents a small percentage of total employment, its effect on Linn County culture is far greater. As a mostly rural county, farms dominate the landscape. A few rural residents still produce their own food in home gardens, small orchards or by raising a few livestock. However, as an increasing number of people leave rural areas for the city, the disconnect between growing and consuming food increases.

Considering the bounty of food crops grown in Oregon and the Willamette Valley, the state's continuous ranking in the top five most food insecure states is particularly alarming.

Yet, Linn County, part of the Ten Rivers foodshed (along with Benton and Lincoln counties), is experiencing greater community involvement each year in reviving a local food system. The number of farmers growing for local markets is increasing, as is support for their work. Schools are serving more locally grown food in their cafeterias, and innovative approaches to ending hunger are cropping up in response to community needs. The wealth of direct markets – from farmers' markets to Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs and farm stands to online purchasing – offer residents many opportunities to purchase locally-produced food.

However, farmers still struggle to make a living. The dominant food system relies on importing food from great distances transported using cheap fuel. Are we prepared for the collapse of such an unsustainable system? For years, community organizations throughout the county have provided food for the hungry, but how much of it is grown by local farmers? Would a stronger local food system result in broader food security?

Such questions are at the heart of this Community Food Assessment. This report aims to facilitate an ongoing discussion about how to create a democratic food system in the Ten Rivers foodshed that provides food security for all. We hope that through continuing discussions with a variety of stakeholders we can, as a community, develop a stronger, more resilient community food system.



# AGRICULTURE IN LINN COUNTY



View from a combine, Open Oak Farm.

Agriculture in Linn County is defined by heavy clay soils, access to water rights, availability of scale-appropriate processing and storage and is driven by consumer demand. On the commercial scale, grass seed, wheat for the international market, sheep, cattle and a few vegetable crops (green beans, sweet corn and pumpkins) dominate, yet over 200 commodity crops are grown. While the commercial goods represent a great deal of food, the majority is shipped away from our area. Focused on the local market are numerous smaller scale farm operations ranging in size of a few acres to a couple hundred acres. Acquiring land, access to water, and poor soil quality are the major issues effecting farmers of all size, and particularly beginning or young farmers.

Once harvested, farmers face challenges in getting their products to market. Smaller scale fruit and vegetable processing has all but faded from Linn County. Meat processing facilities are booked for most of the year leaving ranchers with stress from excess feed costs and difficulty in staying on top of orders. Standard distribution systems favor huge mono-crop farms that grow large volumes of a few crops. Farmers looking to supply locally cannot compete in this system of high volume and wholesale pricing.

While many challenges persist, growers have begun working together to improve the quality and diversity of foods supplied to the local market. By sharing planting times, varieties, organizing work parties, and sharing equipment, the Linn County farmer community offers much hope.



# AGRICULTURE IN LINN COUNTY

## Historical Perspective: “Wheat made Linn County”

Since the first settlers arrived in the Willamette Valley in the mid-1800s up until the 1950s, agriculture was the most important industry in the county.<sup>i</sup> A wide variety of food crops have been grown on a commercial scale including wheat, oats, barley, hops, flax, poppy seed, potatoes, nuts, berries, tree fruits and numerous vegetables. In the early 20th Century, Linn County was seen as the “hub of the Willamette Valley” due to the many fruit and vegetable processing facilities and gristmills found throughout the county.<sup>ii</sup>

For almost 70 years after settlement, “Wheat made Linn County...It was the staff of life,” wrote Floyd Mullen in Land of Linn on the history of Linn County agriculture. One variety of wheat, originally known as Lenore but more commonly known as Zimmerman, originated from Ed Zimmerman of Shedd in the early 1900s and renowned for its superior yields.<sup>iii</sup> In the last few decades soft white wheat, used to make noodles, has been the primary wheat grown in the county. Much of it is exported to Asia.

A great deal of infrastructure was built to process and store grains. In Peoria, four warehouses could hold up to 60,000 bushels (3,600,000 lbs) of grain. Once, 400,000 bushels were shipped from Halsey by railroad. At the peak of wheat production, there were over 20 gristmills in the county.<sup>iv</sup> Today Thompson’s Mill in Shedd, formerly known as Boston Mill, is protected as a State Park and features displays with information of the history and importance of wheat in Linn County.

### *A Well-Rounded Diet*

Over the years, Linn County farmers have grown several other crops on a large scale. In the 1920s, hundreds of acres of dry beans were “profitably grown” in the county until competition from irrigated lands in Idaho and California reduced their economic viability.<sup>v</sup> Poppy seeds were a prominent crop until 1941 when the plant was outlawed. Hop fields abounded until the 1960s, when high production costs and uncertain markets forced them out. Farmers grew potatoes in such abundance that they established a potato growers’ co-op in Albany. Farmers have also grown a variety of fruits throughout the history of Linn County. Most prominent are apples, pears, Italian prunes, strawberries, blueberries, melons and raspberries. Drying and other value-added processing such as

canning were at one time big business. Walnuts and filberts have been produced on a commercial scale. Vegetables, including green beans, sweet corn and peas, were and still are grown here. Dairy cows, sheep, beef cattle, and other livestock have all figured into Linn County’s agricultural production.<sup>vi</sup>

### *Grass Seed: “Cinderella of all crops”*

With the introduction of grass seed in the 1910s, agriculture in Linn County changed forever. Mullen describes ryegrass as the “Cinderella of all crops” and says it is responsible for the county’s agricultural landscape today. Linn County farmers have become famous for growing the highest quality ornamental grass seed in the world. Ryegrass seed is shipped internationally for use in housing developments, golf courses, livestock grazing, and as a cover crop in the Midwest and southern United States. Grass seed from Linn County was even used for seeding the pitches for the 2010 World Cup™ soccer tournament in South Africa.

Grass seed dominates agriculture in Linn County. For almost 100 years, no other crop has grown as well or been as profitable. The poor-draining, clay soils and mild climate of the southern Willamette Valley are well-suited to produce grass seed. Farmers have limited access to water rights in the flatlands, making crops that require irrigation, including vegetables, berries and legumes, financially impractical. Plus, the historical dominance of grass seed has led many farmers to believe there is no better use for the land.

Until the last few years, much of Linn County farmland was used for grass seed production, as was increasing acreage in other parts of the U.S., Canada, Europe and China. This saturation, global competition, and intensified by the worldwide economic decline in 2008, has effected the market for grass seed. Many grass seed farmers are confronted with storage facilities full of seed from previous seasons, and thus have no room for their current season’s harvest.

Investing in one crop left farmers vulnerable to dramatic market change. Many farmers run vertically-integrated companies involving all aspects of the grass seed business (production, cleaning, packaging and sale) to the extent that they are financially committed to producing grass seed, even at a loss.

# AGRICULTURE IN LINN COUNTY

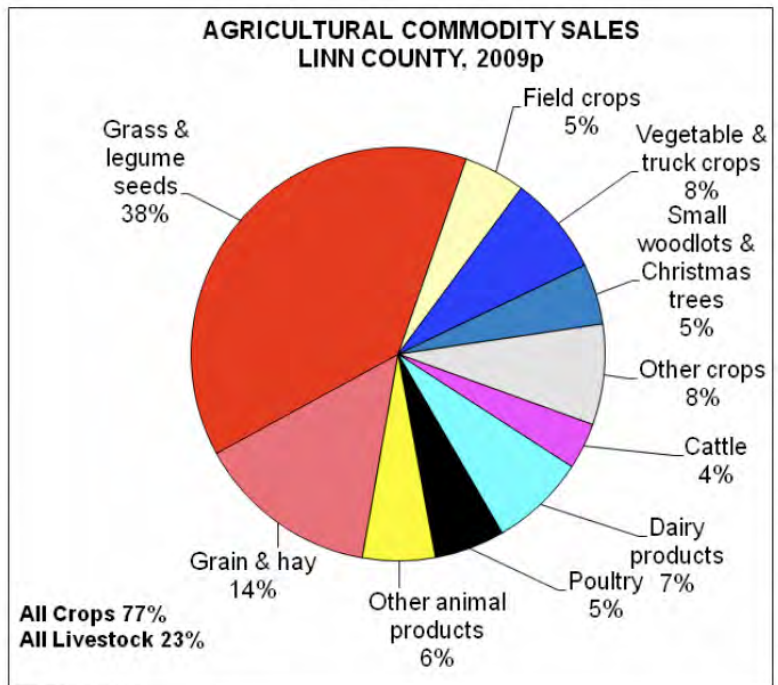
## On the Farm: Soil, Water, and Other Challenges

Farmers are the heart of any food system. For this report, farms focused on growing food crops, along with those transitioning non-food crops to food crops were the focus. Information in the following section was attained through in-person interviews, listening in at meetings, and through informal discussions at farmers' markets. The majority of farmers interviewed for this assessment (14) have small to medium-sized farms (up to 50 acres), but larger farms (3) were included to represent the commercial scale perspective. Aside from the in-person interviews, USDA Census of Agriculture showing trends from 2002 to 2007 were included along with an analysis of the 2007 USDA Census of Agriculture data by Ken Meter of the Crossroads Resource Center. This section identifies specific challenges facing Linn County farmers.

### *2007 USDA Census of Agriculture*

Between 2002 and 2007, 6% of total cropland was lost (30,000 acres)<sup>1</sup> representing a significant loss of food production capacity. Consider that farmers could grow 90,000,000 lbs. of hard red wheat (at 50 bushels/acre), 180,000,000 lbs. of soft white wheat (at 100 bushels/acre), or 30,000,000 lbs. of garbanzo beans (at 1000 lbs./acre) on that amount of land each year. That would meet the yearly demand for flour for over 600,000 people, or the yearly consumption of beans for over 2 million people.<sup>vii</sup> Land used for vegetable production also decreased (nearly a 15% decrease or 900 acres) during this five-year period, as did land for commercial mushroom production (from 117,970 ft<sup>2</sup> to 48,650 ft<sup>2</sup> or nearly 60%).

Only 40 Linn County farms (1.72%), totaling 2,609 acres (.69%) were used for organic production in 2007, with the total value of all organic products amounting to \$2,675,000 and just 1% of the total market value of agricultural products<sup>2</sup>. Only four of these farms raise livestock or poultry, with a total value of \$165,000. Only six were producing livestock or



Top 10 Agriculture Commodities in Linn County, 2009 Oregon State University Extension Service

poultry products (the addition of dairy and eggs), which jumps up to a total value of \$2,049,000.

Linn County saw the loss of 20 farms between 2002 and 2007, representing at least 20 jobs.<sup>viii</sup> The number of households that reported farming as their primary occupation also decreased, from 1,321 to 1,022. Most alarming, 70% of farms reported a net loss in 2007<sup>3</sup>. For those that reported net income, the average was under \$15,000, or \$10,000 less than the state average for farms.<sup>ix</sup> In terms of government payments Linn County saw a drop in dollars received from over \$1 million in 2002 to just over \$700,000 in 2007<sup>4</sup>.

1. Total cropland includes cropland harvested, cropland used only for pasture or grazing, cropland on which all crops failed or were abandoned, cropland in cultivated summer fallow, and cropland idle or used for cover crops or soil improvement but not harvested and not pastured or grazed.

2. TMV of agricultural products = \$213,178,000

3. More than half of all farms have value of sales under \$2,500.

4. This category consists of direct payments as defined by the 2002 Farm Bill; payments from Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), Farmable Wetlands Program (FWP), and Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP); loan deficiency payments; disaster payments; other conservation programs; and all other federal farm programs under which payments were made directly to farm operators. Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) proceeds, amount from State and local government agricultural program payments, and federal crop insurance payments were not tabulated in this category.



# SOUTHERN WILLAMETTE VALLEY BEAN AND GRAIN PROJECT



The Southern Willamette Valley Bean and Grain Project is a small group of farmers and local food system advocates focused on rebuilding the local food system and promoting food security in Oregon's Willamette Valley. The Project intends to achieve these goals by increasing the quantity and diversity of food crops that are grown in the south valley, evaluating deficiencies in the food system infrastructure, building buyer/seller relationships for locally grown food, incorporating the culture of community into the fabric of the food system, and compiling resources on organic and sustainable agricultural practices specific to the region. As the name of the project implies, central to the task is stimulating the cultivation and local marketing of organically grown beans and grains to provide a nutritionally dense foundation of staples for year-round food resources in the valley.

To date, the project has seen much success: over 1000 acres of conventional grass seed land is now transitioning to organic food production; two milling operations and three organic seed cleaning operations are up and running, bringing back the area's once prosperous grain producing infrastructure; and finally, two hugely successful "fill your pantry" markets have allowed the general public a chance to buy grains and beans wholesale direct from the farmer. If all that can be accomplished in only 5 short years, imagine what the future holds.

However, there are still many concerns as the project advances. Finding a viable dry-land bean that doesn't require irrigation is proving to be problematic. On farm and community storage capacity remains inadequate to ensure local food security. The market for beans and grains is underdeveloped; meaning the opportunity exists for many potential customers, yet a cultural shift is required for customers to purchase local beans and grains at higher than commodity prices. Many questions remain, yet only made easier through collaboration on a large scale.

-adapted from the work of Dan Armstrong, Mud City Press

# AGRICULTURE IN LINN COUNTY

## *Scale of Farming for the Local Market*

Linn County farms tend to be smaller than average for the state, more in the small to medium-size range (Average size of a farm is 162 acres with the median being 25 acres compared to the state average of 425 acres). These small and medium sized farms tend to be the main suppliers for local markets as they are better equipped to provide the variety of food crops consumers demand and can adjust to changes in demand.

Farmers report that small-scale, organic production requires a great deal of human labor. Hand-weeding is used instead of chemical herbicides. Machine harvesters (such as those used for potatoes) are impractical on small acreages. As small, diversified farms sprout up throughout Linn County, more jobs become available, an important opportunity for a county with an 11.7% unemployment rate in August 2011.<sup>x</sup> On the other hand, many farmers cannot afford the cost of extra labor. An Albany farmer explained, “We’d like to expand to another farmers’ market, but that would require hiring labor, and if we paid them a fair wage – even minimum wage – they’d be making more than us!”

For new and/or younger farmers, cost of land, access to water and the huge amount of capital needed to purchase seeds, compost, and equipment are huge barriers. While the winter months provide plenty of excess water, during the main growing season (May-October) water is scarce. Few farms possess water rights and therefore the ability to irrigate.

Smaller farms typically lack scale-appropriate equipment. Heirloom beans, which enjoy relatively high demand at farmers’ markets, are not feasible to grow on a large scale in Willamette Valley due to their need for irrigation and inability to dry in the field. Therefore, farmers usually plant only small plots of these beans. The smallest combined harvesters (which picks, threshes and winnows, essentially cleaning the beans) available in the United States are hard to find. Other combines are equipped to handle hundreds to thousands of acres. These larger machines lose 30% of the harvest when they are used to process large fields, a rate far too inefficient for only a few acres. The few local farmers growing heirloom beans are hand-harvesting thousands of plants, resulting in worn-out farmers and beans that cost \$7 per pound. Two bean farmers expressed doubt, “that we could ever go through any more seasons of hand harvesting.”

“I’m not sure if I’ll make it through the year...  
Every day it’s a struggle to make ends meet.”

- Albany area farmer

Solvency is a concern for most small- to medium-size farms, as financial problems abound for these farmers. “I’m not sure if I’ll make it through the year...Every day it’s a struggle to make ends meet,” lamented one 20-acre Albany farmer. The owner of one mid-sized farm talked about its size being a hindrance in securing a bank loan, while mentioning that many other similar mid-sized farms encounter the same difficulty. Many farmers prefer not to calculate their hourly wage, since the number would be further discouragement.

Labor costs are a particularly difficult challenge for small farmers. Hiring farm interns, paid seasonal or monthly stipends or room and board, violates Oregon employment laws which require that all employees be paid minimum wage. In order to hire interns, farmers are also required to have employment insurance and pay appropriate taxes. Some farms have recently canceled their internship programs, leaving a gap in training opportunities for new farmers. The knowledge and experience gained from several years of working under successful farmers helps new farmers develop skills to start their own farms. Andrew Still of Open Oak Farm explained, “there is an incredible desire among young people to start farming, which is great. However, it also absolutely essential that these young farmers know exactly what they are getting themselves into. Farming is hard work and requires experience. Internships are the best way for new farmers to understand farming. The restrictions on internships, and the subsequent lack of internships, are stifling this enthusiasm.”

However, small and organic growers are now eligible for increased support from state and federal agencies. For instance, the U.S.D.A. provides grants to farmers for cost-sharing of organic certification, growing specialty crops, and through the Farmers’ Market Promotion Program, assistance in expanding farm-direct markets. Other organizations, such as the State of Oregon Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) provide grants to farmers to protect watersheds and other natural areas on their land. The USDA is also making an effort to support, encourage and fund young farmers through programs like the Value-Added Producers Grant, allocating 10% of grants to new or beginning farmers.



# AGRICULTURE IN LINN COUNTY

## *Conservation Efforts*

Several farmers interviewed for this assessment indicated that conservation practices were important to their overall farm mission. Marco Franciosa, of Sunset Lane Farms, recently acquired a farm near Brownsville plans to protect the river buffer along 700 feet of riverbank on his property. Michael Polen of Sweet Home Farm, is working with the National Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) to dedicate sections of his farm for native wildlife habitat. River Refuge Seed, just south of Brownsville, specializes in wild rice and other native grass seed while also providing a unique on-farm habitat for geese, ducks, herons and other birds.

According to the USDA Census of Agriculture, over 500 farms in Linn County were using conservation methods in 2007. Nearly the same number practiced rotation or management-intensive grazing. While the number of farms enrolled in USDA Conservation Reserve, Wetlands Reserve, Farmable Wetlands, or Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program increased from 15 to 19 farms from 2002 to 2007, the total acreage in these programs dropped dramatically from 655 to 375.<sup>xi</sup>

## *Season Extension*

The Willamette Valley's mild winter climate allows for a number of cold season vegetable crops throughout the year. Farmers can extend the growing season using cold frames and greenhouses. This allows them to offer such crops as tomatoes and potatoes much earlier than they could be grown outside and to harvest other warm weather crops late into the fall. Season extension increases the availability of local food in months when it is most difficult to find. Some farmers are experimenting with greenhouses to grow ginger, lemongrass and other crops otherwise difficult to grow in the area.

## *Regulatory Challenges*

Many of the farmers interviewed for this assessment expressed concerns about the number of federal regulations that adversely impact small-scale growers. For example, in order to sell meat at a farmers' market, the meat must be processed in a USDA-certified processing facility. Until the fall of 2010, when Scio Poultry Processing opened, this requirement was a major hurdle for small-scale poultry farmers that wanted to sell at farmers' markets. Only farmers who have a state-certified processing facility on site are able to sell their processed birds directly to consumers. Such facilities are prohibitively expensive for most farmers. Large animal processing facilities

that are USDA certified and accept animals from independent growers have mostly closed down, resulting in similar problems for large animal growers. Another regulatory hurdle that farmers face involves securing building permits, which can take many years and is expensive for smaller-scale facilities.

## *Sourcing Local Seed*

As the "Grass Seed Capital of the World" sign indicates, Linn County is one of the premier seed growing regions. Seed crops grown here include radish, turnip, mustard and other brassica seeds, which are all grown at a commercial scale. Several small-scale, diverse seed growers including Nichols Garden Nursery, Peace Seeds, and Adaptive Seeds produce seeds for gardeners and farmers in Linn County and beyond.

Nichols Garden Nursery, a family-owned business in Albany, has offered seeds for local gardeners for over 60 years. As signatories to the Safe Seed Pledge, they guarantee that none of their seeds contain genetically modified organisms (GMOs), and they promise to never grow any GMO varieties. Owner Rose Marie Nichols McGee is also the author of *The Bountiful Container*, a guide to container gardening.

Dr. Alan Kapuler, owner of Peace Seeds, is a world-renowned plant breeder. Dr. Kapuler challenges the traditional selection qualities (size, look, yield) and focuses on plant nutrition. Recent plant breeding work aims to increase amino acid concentration which, in turn, will increase the nutritional value of food crops. While many gardeners are aware of plant hybrids, Dr. Kapuler de-hybridizes hybrids in an effort to minimize the proprietary nature of seeds and provide gardeners access to the broader gene pool, as well as an opportunity to develop new plants.

In 2010, Linn County's seed suppliers grew to include Adaptive Seeds outside of Sweet Home. Andrew Still and Sarah Kleeger own and operate a farm-direct seed company that "Grows and stewards rare, diverse and resilient seed varieties." They offer a variety of vegetable, bean and grain seeds adapted to the cool, mild climate of the Pacific Northwest and well-suited for short season northern climates. They emphasize that none of their seeds are proprietary hybrids, patented, or genetically modified. They also encourage their customers to save their own seeds and offer workshops and presentations to teach gardeners these skills. Still says he hopes their company will one day "become obsolete as seed saving is restored to its former greatness as a near universal act."

# THE MUSHROOMERY



Jen and Dustin Olsen, owners of The Mushroomery in Lebanon, are the area's preeminent authority on fungi. With degrees in mycology, and an equally impressive passionate obsession for mushrooms, they are entirely committed to producing food with minimal environmental impact – with the ambitious but achievable goal of a zero-waste farm – something unheard of in commercial mushroom production. Through recycling materials, seasonal growing (accounting for heating, cooling and humidity needs), composting waste, conscious wild-crafting (avoiding over-harvesting and knowing when to pick whole or cut) and careful design of their facility (including rain catchments and solar panels) they are re-thinking mushroom production and collection.

Which is an invaluable to our local food system considering the many nutritious benefits of mushrooms such as the high levels of B-vitamins, minerals and beta-glucanes (immune system boosters). Chantrelles and hedgehog mushrooms contain a wealth of beta-carotene. Certain Elm mushrooms contain more protein (as percentage) than meat. As the industrial food system continues focusing on quantity, producing enormous amounts of nutrient deficient food, locally sourced and produced mushrooms address many needs and nutritional gaps.

As key players in the local food system, Jen and Dustin understand the importance of community and are active in their support of a community food system. “Community is everything to us,” explains Jen, “and ensuring local food security is hugely important.” Whether it is sharing information at food fairs, demonstrating recipes at the local co-op, chatting at farmers’ markets or hosting workshops, Jen and Dustin are eager to share their knowledge of fungi to better both community and individuals’ food security.



Ten miles outside of Sweet Home, on the southern edge of Linn County lay one of the areas most progressive farm operations: Open Oak Farm. In less than two years, Andrew Still, Sarah Kleeger and Cooper Boydston – all in their early 30s – have turned around 20 acres of conventional hay fields into a hub of agricultural biodiversity, growing almost 90 varieties of tomatoes, over 50 Brassica varieties (kale, cabbage, turnip, etc.), 30 varieties of pepper, and with a focus on heritage staple crops (over 60 beans and 50 grains). The Open in Open Oak Farm, refers to their unique approach of focusing on open sourced and open pollinated seed varieties. As opposed to hybrids, or what Andrew refers to as “genetic dead-ends,” open pollinated seeds allow the grower to save seed every year, selecting for desired qualities over many growing seasons, and a process Andrew refers to as “a basic fundamental human right.”

As bright, passionate, and highly capable young farmers, Andrew, Sarah and Cooper represent the future of agriculture, with a renewed focus on community food security and sustainable practices. Through careful land use practices – crop rotations, cover cropping, reduced tillage – they are focused on improving their soil, which will allow for improved food and seed production on their land for years to come. In the short term, they are feeding the community throughout the year. They offer a main season CSA, grain CSA and one of the area’s only winter CSAs, taking advantage of the Willamette Valley’s mild winters and providing customers local produce and grains when they are the hardest to find.

Yet their story is also representative of the financial struggles facing many farmers, especially new and young. Their first year showed signs of success with a sold-out winter CSA, however with all the infrastructure costs in starting a farm, they struggle to break even. Establishing organic practices, soil conservation and permaculture on previously non-organic land are labor intensive and expensive. Paying off the farm loan will take many years. Yet their environmentally conscious approach and emphasis on food sovereignty are invaluable assets to the local food system.



# OPEN OAK FARM

# AGRICULTURE IN LINN COUNTY

## After the Harvest

### *Storage*

As farmers converted fields to grass seed production and food crops disappeared from Linn County, so too did food storage and processing facilities essential in a functioning food system. The cool, wet winters of the southern Willamette Valley create many challenges for storing food including mold, premature sprouting in grain crops, and insect damage. While the ability to grow wheat and other food crops is well documented, there is serious concern for the viability of such crops if proper storage isn't available.

According to the 2007 USDA Census of Agriculture, there are 42 farms with total grain storing capacity of over 800,000 bushels. At first glance this may seem sufficient to accommodate local needs, however most of this storage is used for grass seed or animal feed. It is not simple to replace grass seed with edible crops in the current facilities because food-grade quality storage requirements are more stringent than non-edible storage requirements. Addressing this need for appropriate infrastructure becomes increasingly important as grass seed farmers transition their fields to grow edible beans and grains<sup>5</sup>.

For larger growers, SnoTemp Cold Storage is one possibility. This family-owned business has an Albany warehouse with 375,000 square foot freezer and 12,000 square foot cold storage capacity<sup>6</sup>. Both options offer opportunities for storage crops. For example, the freezer space can be used for winter peas and the cold storage space could accommodate local grains, beans, or root crops. SnoTemp is interested in working with local farmers, but some farmers are concerned about the costs associated with third-party storage.

On the smaller scale, there are a variety of options for on-farm storage. At Open Oak Farm, near Sweet Home, farmers store grains in 50-gallon drums with airtight lids. Farmers Andrew Still, Sarah Kleegeer and Cooper Boydson also use a homemade dryer to decrease the moisture content of their grains prior to storage. This works well for their scale managing 20 acres. For produce, many farms have walk-in coolers to keep produce fresh until it goes to market. However, adequate cooler

space is a limiting factor on production. There are also many other farmers who don't have the capital to acquire coolers.

Meat storage offers many of the same challenges that farmers face with vegetable or fruit crops. On the larger scale, most farmers sell their livestock prior to butchering, resulting in lower profits for the farmer. Marketing and selling directly to customers at farm stands or farmers' markets requires an added investment in time and skills. Some smaller producers are testing the waters for local meat, such as Rainshadow El Rancho (Poultry, Bison, Beef), Sweet Home Farms (Pork, Beef, Lamb, Goat), Harmony J.A.C.K. (Beef, pork, chicken). Many of them store their meat in retail-priced deep freezers.

### *Processing*

At one time, Albany was called "the hub of the Willamette Valley" due to the many food-processing (canning, drying, milling) facilities located in and around the city.<sup>xii</sup> Today those facilities have largely disappeared. Northwest Produce and Oregon Freeze Dry continue to process food, but they serve a national retail market instead of meeting local or regional needs. In Lebanon, a small processing business called Campagna Distinctive Flavors did some small custom processing, but it closed in 2011. The Sweet Home United Methodist Church uses their certified kitchen to process hazelnuts for their company, Nuts For Jesus. Outside of these limited options, value-added processing of small-scale local food is unavailable in the county. Pressing for oils, cheese-making, canning, and making granola bars, marinades and jams are but a few of the value-added processing opportunities that could be explored with products grown in Linn County.

There is a great need in the county for both USDA and state-certified animal processing facilities. State-certified facilities are licensed to process meat which can then be sold by the farmer as a whole, half or quarter animal. There are at least 6 state certified facilities throughout Linn County. Three of these operate as a mobile slaughterhouse, featuring on-farm processing. A producer who owns or uses a state-certified facility can't sell meat by smaller cuts. On the other hand, processing meat in a USDA-certified facility allows any producer to sell their meat in individual cuts, maximizing the money the farmer can earn for their product. There are two USDA-certified processing facilities in the area. Chickens can be pro-

5. See Southern Willamette Valley Bean and Grain Project insert.

6. Cold storage = 35 degrees F and 10% humidity.



# SWEET HOME FARMS



Mike Polen and Carla Green of Sweet Home Farms made the major career shift from urban professional to down-home ranchers after learning about Joel Salatin's intensive grazing management from the book, the Omnivore's Dilemma. They raise cattle, sheep, goats, chickens and pigs using intensive grazing of only a few days on small paddocks, allowing for long recovery periods. This system helps build organic matter, increase plant diversity and allows the grazing grasses and legumes to sufficiently re-grow. They also utilize the leader-follower system grazing the sheep after the cattle and chickens after the sheep. The chickens spread manure and eat fly larvae, acting as parasite control. In the winter, the cows are fed hay in the barn to protect the fields. Their manure is stacked with multiple layers of straw, which help to create compost. In the spring they introduce "pig-r-ators" who root through and turn the compost. Management such as this finds answers working with as opposed to against natural systems.

For processing, Sweet Home Farms uses a local mobile-butcher, Scio Poultry Processing and also the USDA certified Mohawk Valley Meats. While they feel incredibly lucky to be surrounded by quality meat processing, at times the local processing capacity is insufficient. Like many other ranchers, they are sometimes forced to wait 2 months or more for on farm slaughter. The increased planning, extra feed, and difficulty in keeping livestock for longer than anticipated are just some of the problems they face due to inadequate meat processing facilities. As their mission is to raise and process their animals locally, they are forced to put up with these challenges, while other farmers raising livestock prefer to sell their animals live to be processed in Colorado, only to be shipped back to Oregon.

It is no secret that raising livestock with ecologically mindful grazing and processing at small-scale butchers results in high-quality but also high-priced meat. "We have a really hard time finding local buyers," explains Mike, "and are forced to sell to the Portland area where people can afford to pay a premium price." Yet naturally they would prefer to sell more of their products to Linn County residents.



# PERSEPHONE FARM



In 1985, Persephone Farm became the first certified organic farm in Linn County. Since then, farmers Jeff Falen and Elanor O'Brien have been at the forefront of sustainable and innovative farm practices. Starting with just five organic vegetable crops, they now grow 48 crops and specialize in cold season crops. They recently installed solar panels that provide 85% of their energy, including powering their electric tractor. They hope to install more solar plans to account for the final 15% of their power needs. Falen and O'Brien use existing biological systems to manage pests, a system known as integrated pest management (IPM), to reduce the need for off-farm pesticide inputs. Growing seasonally, without the use of greenhouses (except for germination) or other means of season extension, means they use minimal plastics. Out of the 23 cultivatable acres, they farm only 14 each year, leaving the remainder in cover crops or pasture mix to sit fallow. Persephone Farm donates extra produce and seconds to nearby food pantries and gleaning organizations. All of these practices contribute to their life goal "To cooperate with the land and life around us rather than treat it simply as a resource to be exploited."

While the opportunities for farm-direct marketing abound today, Persephone Farm relied primarily on wholesaling when they began farming. While wholesaling provides benefits such as less time and energy spent marketing and more time spent farming, there are many downsides, such as lower prices and unreasonable volume expectations for smaller-scale growers. "We didn't start earning a living wage until we started direct-marketing," Elanor said. They sell at farmers' markets, restaurants (primarily in Portland) and to Organically Grown, a wholesale distributor. Elanor estimates only one-tenth of one percent of their produce is sold in Linn County for several reasons: the absence of vegetables in mainstream American diets, rural residents who have their own gardens, local consumers unwilling to pay the prices they need to grow food sustainably and pay their workers a living wage, and unfamiliarity with eating seasonally. Elanor explains, "We have no problem selling our produce. We just have to drive to where there are more people to do so. Yet the future holds much promise."

Demand in Linn County for food produced by farms like Persephone can be created through community education, organizing the farming community and opportunities to taste local food.



# AGRICULTURE IN LINN COUNTY

cessed at Scio Poultry Processing and pigs and cows can be processed at the Mohawk Valley Meat Processing in Marcola. Even with these options, many meat producers report that demand for slaughtering far outweighs the capabilities of available facilities. Mike Polen of Sweet Home Farms said that in the summer he has to wait up to two months for the mobile slaughterer. The Mohawk facility is often booked at least two weeks in advance. Scio Poultry Processing is only processing two days a week. Due to the high cost of processing poultry in a USDA facility, many growers say they cannot afford to process their birds in a USDA facility and make a profit.

## *Distribution*

Over the last 50 years, with the globalization of our food system, distribution channels – transporting food from farmer to consumer – has evolved to better suit large corporate farms, at the expense of smaller family farms. The majority of food distribution businesses require farmers to supply at high volume with low, wholesale prices in return. The origin and destination of the food is often lost within the ever-complicated industrial food system. For farmers seeking a higher return on their goods, or those interested in supporting a local/regional food system, many national distributors are out of reach.

For the Pacific Northwest region there is Organically Grown Company (OGC). Persephone Farm in Lebanon has long sold through OGC and the Ladybug label. While they still sell wholesale to OGC, Elanor from Persephone Farm ex-

plains, “we didn’t start earning a living wage until we started direct marketing.” Many other, large-scale, organic vegetable farms, such as Spring Hill Organics in Albany, use OGC. For the Willamette Valley there is Emerald Produce in Eugene. Farmers wishing to use the currently available distribution services must accept wholesale prices for their goods and be able to supply a high volume to make pickup worthwhile for the distributor.

The Albany based Grease Lightning Delivery hopes to play a role in local distribution. Using recycled vegetable oil for fuel, owner and operator John Knox offers pick up and delivery throughout Oregon. While not specifically focused on farm delivery, Mr. Knox has attended numerous food events (such as the Albany FEAST, see insert page) advertising his services to farmers.

When faced with the shutdown of Willamette Local Foods (WLF, see Community Food Assets and Resources section) in late September 2011, the WLF farmers discussed the need for a more local distribution service. These farmers enjoyed the access to the Eugene market through a pick-up and drop-off service offered by WLF, which was especially appreciated by farmers with orders too small to pay for the drive to Eugene. Absent WLF, a farmer owned cooperative, with distribution to the larger markets of Eugene, Corvallis, and Salem has been discussed.



# AGRICULTURE IN LINN COUNTY

## Opportunities for Agriculture in Linn County

Farmers - and useable farmland - are the backbone to any food system. For all the challenges that persist for farmers wishing to supply food crops to the local market in Linn County, there are numerous opportunities for growth.

- Incorporating large-scale, non-food crop farms in food systems development.

The middle of Linn County is full of grass seed farms struggling financially. Through programs such as the Southern Willamette Valley Bean and Grain Project, these farmers are offered alternatives. It is important to be sensitive to the fact that many farmers aren't willing to switch away from grass seed and that they shouldn't feel forced to grow food crops.

- Strengthen farmer network

Farmers throughout Linn County expressed a desire to better connected with one another. The many benefits of an increase in communication amongst farmers include for equipment sharing, discussing planting times, organizing work parties, and for identifying funding opportunities (grants, loans, angel investors, etc.). This network can be strengthened through farmer pot-lucks and farmer support projects such as the Southern Willamette Valley Bean and Grain Project.

- Feasibility studies for scale-appropriate processing

Farmers expressed a desire for increased accessibility to scale-appropriate processing. This need is further amplified with the closing of Campagna in the summer of 2011. Three distinct needs were identified: fruits and vegetables, meat and secondary producers (for micro-enterprise development). The next step would be for a feasibility study of smaller scale processing facilities.

- Feasibility study of local food aggregator/distribution system

Distribution of food from the farm to the customer is a major concern for the smaller growers in Linn County. These farmers don't have the volume to survive selling at wholesale prices. Determining the feasibility of a more localized distribution model, such as a farmers' cooperative, could be investigated.

- Increased support for new/young farmers

Many new/young farmers are landing in Linn County (at least 3 in the last 3 years). Numerous financial hurdles exist for these farmers, such as finding scale appropriate equipment. A database of available equipment, an assessment of equipment needs and a micro-lending program would help to identify specific needs.

- Strengthen connection between farmer and product

Marketing farm products is a concern for many direct-market farmers in Linn County. One potential remedy would be to design and implement a marketing campaign identifying Linn County produced foods. Accompanying pictures of the farm and farmer with their product should be increased and promoted throughout the county.



# COMMUNITY FOOD EFFORTS



Albany YMCA Community Garden

In the last five years, a multitude of community food systems efforts throughout Linn County have begun - from farmers' markets to community gardens to farm to school programs to community food systems organizations - to keep up with the rising demand for local food, supporting local farmers, interest in building community, and encouraging healthier lifestyles. Partnerships between universities, public health organizations, school districts, non-profits, farmers and more continue to organize around food issues. Regional leaders, such as Ten Rivers Food Web, have set the pace with food literacy campaigns in both Benton and Linn County. Local organizations like Calapooia Food Alliance create the programmatic pieces necessary to get local food to their community. And more efforts are started every day.

Several survey respondents admit to either not knowing where their food comes from, or simply not knowing how to access local food. While the latter implies a demand for local food, the suspension of a Linn County based online farmers' market due to lack of financial support, tests this implication. As the more rural farmers' markets find growth stagnating, one begins to question advertising, marketing, or rather size-appropriateness.

Yet the interest from restaurants, retail outlets, and institutions who are now demanding - and supplying - food from Linn County farmers emphasizes the true potential for a community food system in Linn County. Further collaboration and community food organizing play a key role in realizing this potential.





# TEN RIVERS FOOD WEB

Ten Rivers Food Web (TRFW) was founded in 2006 to help build a sustainable local food system in Oregon's mid-Willamette region. Their vision is a regional foodshed that is resilient in the face of ecological and economic pressures. They are working to create a thriving agricultural and social landscape where at least 30% of the food consumed in our tri-county region is locally grown, processed and distributed. To make this vision a reality, they work with communities across Linn, Benton, and Lincoln counties in an effort to build a socially, environmentally, and economically sustainable food system which provides healthy food for all.

TRFW's programs focus on three priority areas: (1) improve low-income access to healthy food, (2) improve food literacy through community education programs, and (3) create economic opportunities for small farmers and agricultural entrepreneurs. In 2011, TRFW launched the That's My Farmer SNAP Incentive Program (see insert) to combat food insecurity and support small farms. For the past several years, TRFW has organized local food cooking contests, dinners, food fairs, summer farm tours and a series of public discussions on a variety of themes from neighborhood produce swaps to institutional purchasing with the annual Chef's Show Off - a local food themed "Iron Chef" style competition - as the Food Literacy committee's biggest effort. TRFW has also been working to increase opportunities for small farmers, young farmers and to increase the amount of staple crops grown in the Willamette Valley such as with the Southern Willamette Valley Bean and Grain Project (see insert).

TRFW's accomplishments include the foundation of the Oregon State University Emergency Food Pantry in 2009. Responsibility for the pantry has now transferred to the university, and it is being used as a model for campuses across the country. Also, the Local Foods Directory, hosted on the TRFW website, was one of the earliest resources to connect farmers and consumers in our region.



# COMMUNITY FOOD EFFORTS

## Demand for Local Food

The Willamette Valley and the Ten Rivers foodshed are home to a wide range of food producers working to supply the local market. Throughout the county, farmers take advantage of the moderate climate, rich river-bottom soil, and the growing demand for local products. Fresh food including eggs, meat, dairy products and vegetables is available straight from the farm throughout the county.

According to the 2007 USDA Census of Agriculture, the number of farms selling food products directly to customers in Linn County increased from 425 in 2002, to 469 in 2007. The total value of these products skyrocketed from \$938,000 in 2002 to \$2,397,000 in 2007. Ten Rivers Food Web's on-line Local Food Directory is one tool to connect consumers with farms nearby. The directory lists 120 farmers, ranchers and other food producers in Linn, Benton and Lincoln counties and allows consumers to search for specific local food products or for farms closest to them.

Consumers and institutional buyers such as hospitals and schools indicate that there is growing demand for local food in Linn County. However, the size and scope of this demand is still unknown. Ten Rivers Food Web conducted a consumer survey in May 2011 at the Grocery Outlet in Albany. Over 50% of respondents indicated that they purchased fresh fruits and vegetables produced in Linn County.<sup>xiii</sup> While this number may represent just one apple once a year, it demonstrates that Albany respondents are familiar with the concept of local food. Many respondents commented on the importance of buying locally-produced food for both the local economic stimulus and environmental benefits. Of those respondents who don't purchase locally-produced food, the majority (55%) explained that they didn't know where to buy local food.

As demand for local food grows in cities like Corvallis, Eugene and Portland, farms outside of Albany, Lebanon, Sweet Home and Brownsville will be the source of these foods. Regional and national grocery store chains dominate the retail market in Linn County, not natural food stores, farmers' markets, or farm stands. While these stores are increasing their offerings of local food, accessing these stores is often impossible for smaller-scale local growers. One local farmer found that in order to sell to a big box store, they'd have to pay around \$30,000 for shelf space.

As mentioned in the previous section, Linn County is home to many small to medium size farms producing a diverse array of quality food products. In fact, many are revered outside the county. Sweet Home Farms has a buying club in Portland. Sweetwell Farm in Scio has a dedicated group of customers from Eugene who come weekly to pick up milk. Nature's Fountain Farm in Albany supplies a Portland area school with cherry tomatoes. Many also successfully sell their goods at both the smaller farmers' markets throughout Linn County and larger farmers' markets in Corvallis, Salem, Eugene and Portland. A few restaurateurs are offering local products to meet consumer demands with still more verbally committed to supporting Linn County growers. All the above shows the viability and potential for a local food system to support farmers and feed consumers, but there is tremendous room for growth.

## *Farmers' Markets*

"At once ancient but now relatively new," describes Rebecca Landis, Corvallis-Albany Farmers' Market Manager and President of the Oregon Farmers Market Association, farmers' markets bring the food system full circle, uniting rural farmers with urban consumers and fostering community.<sup>xiv</sup> For the consumer, farmers' markets provide an opportunity to meet face to face with farmers, discuss farming practices, learn about new foods and support multiple farmers. Access to a wide range of consumers, direct marketing to avoid middlemen, and the social benefit of connecting with those you feed makes farmers' markets an important marketing strategy, especially for smaller producers. Farmers' markets are invaluable for strengthening local economies, promoting other local businesses located near the market site, and providing access to fresh, healthy food in areas where access is limited.

As of 2010, there were over 6,000 farmers' markets in the United States, more than triple the number that existed in 1990.<sup>xv</sup> The Oregon Farmers Markets Association, established in 1987, has 127 member markets and provides technical support to operating markets, as well as communities or individuals interested in starting a farmers' market. Three of the four Linn County farmers' markets (Brownsville, Lebanon and Sweet Home) opened since 2007. The Albany Farmers' Market is the longest running open-air farmers' market in the state, serving customers since 1978.<sup>xvi</sup> Thanks to these markets, Linn County residents have access fresh, local food from April through November.

# COMMUNITY FOOD EFFORTS

The Albany Farmers' Market is classified as a mid-sized market, averaging 24 vendors each week. The Lebanon and Brownsville markets are small markets, averaging between 10-15 vendors a week. The Sweet Home Farmers' Market is a very small market, with fewer than 10 vendors on average. Small markets benefit small farms because they don't have to compete with larger, more established farms that tend to serve larger markets. However, smaller markets often have trouble attracting customers. The Brownsville, Lebanon and Sweet Home farmers' markets find themselves in a Catch-22: without more vendors they can't attract customers and without more customers they don't draw new vendors.

However, Albany and Corvallis Farmers' Markets Manager Rebecca Landis notes, "bigger is not always better. While it is true that some growers push to sell at [the] Corvallis [Farmers' Market] under that misapprehension, other beginning growers realize that they have a better chance of quickly achieving customer recognition, and making a splash, in Albany."

The Lebanon Farmers' Market is the only non-Saturday market in the county, serving customers in downtown Lebanon Thursday evenings from 3pm to 7pm. Since its opening in 2009, the market has garnered community support and averages 15 vendors a week.

Linn County farmers' markets make a strong effort to welcome low-income customers. All the markets promote the use of federal Women Infant and Children (WIC) and Senior

Farmers' Market Nutrition Program vouchers. The Albany, Brownsville and Sweet Home markets all accept Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits and Lebanon plans to offer the service beginning in the 2012 season. In 2010, customers spent \$4,176 in federal SNAP dollars at the Albany market alone, a 440% increase in spending from 2008.<sup>xvii</sup>

In 2011, Ten Rivers Food Web partnered with farmers' markets in Linn, Benton and Lincoln counties to stretch federal food dollars spent at farmers' markets through the That's My Farmer SNAP Incentive Program. When SNAP clients spend at least \$6 of their food benefits, they receive a \$6 bonus to use at the market. If customers shop at the market each week, they can receive \$24 extra dollars a month to spend on fresh food. This program provides farmers with access to federal food dollars that they otherwise would not have since most do not have an EBT machine. During the 2011 season, the program brought \$3,600 to Linn County markets, plus the \$3,600 match SNAP customers spent with local farmers.

Barriers still exist, however, in making farmers' markets accessible to low-income consumers. In Albany, the lack of bus service on Saturdays makes it difficult for those without a car to attend the market. In Lebanon, Sweet Home and Brownsville, there is no public transportation available. Perceptions about the price of food at markets may inhibit shoppers as well.







# SWEET HOME FARMERS' MARKET

Jan Neilson, owner of Fraga Farm Goat Cheese and manager of the Sweet Home Farmers' Market, found inspiration to start the Sweet Home Farmers' Market after hearing Philomath farmer Harry MacCormack speak about the importance of community food security. "I heard Harry speak... and thought I could make a difference in my community by starting a farmers' market in Sweet Home," she said. In 2007, she started the market with the help of a handful of area farmers and food producers. The market's mission is "To support local farmers and their Sweet Home community, and to give consumers access to locally grown ingredients." On Saturdays from 10a.m. to 2p.m., from May through October, the Sweet Home Farmers' Market offers local growers an opportunity to sell their goods and community residents the opportunity to purchase them.

The market has 10 to 12 farmers, appropriate for this small town. Unfortunately, most local produce growers prefer to sell in markets in bigger towns. Since produce draws customers the market often has trouble attracting new customers and vendors.

Sweet Home faces many of the challenges typical in rural Oregon logging towns, including high poverty and unemployment. While farmers' markets are often thought to be only for those with high incomes, the Sweet Home Farmers' Market Board of Directors has worked hard to attract customers of all income levels. In late 2009, they began accepting federal Women, Infants and Children (WIC) and Senior Farm Direct Nutrition coupons and, soon thereafter, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. In the summer of 2011, Sweet Home became one of five area farmers' markets partnering with Ten Rivers Food Web to offer the That's My Farmer SNAP Incentive Program (see insert). Nielson hopes this program will provide low-income residents better access to fresh, high-quality local food, and bring in new customers to help the market grow.





Food Education Agriculture Solutions Together (FEAST) organizing events are designed to help communities organize to improve their local food systems. Sharon Thornberry, community food systems manager for the Oregon Food Bank, facilitates the events, which engage and educate people about food systems, determine what communities desire, and create reasonable and concrete action plans. The events include a presentation by a panel of local experts (from nutrition services directors to farmers and mayors), and small group sessions to identify priorities and cement action plans.

In 2009 and 2010, Oregon Food Bank hosted FEAST events in Lebanon and Albany, building momentum for a more resilient community food system in Linn County. After the Lebanon FEAST, the Sweet Home School District increased their local food purchasing from five nearby farms. They also learned that they could donate leftover food from their cafeterias (that had not been served) to the Sweet Home Manna dinner (see insert). This allowed Manna to add another meal per week.

The Albany FEAST fostered a similar relationship between the Albany School District and Fish of Albany. There, too, the Mid-Willamette Family YMCA Garden Coordinator connected with Fish of Albany to offer produce donations. Karen Morrison, Albany FEAST participant, found significant support for starting a neighborhood gardening program. Both organizing events have had lasting impacts on the food systems in their respective communities.

The events also created the potential for Ten Rivers Food Web to develop chapter groups serving Linn County. The East Linn County Chapter represents Lebanon and Sweet Home and began organizing Food Literacy events in 2011. There is significant interest in Albany to do the same.



# COMMUNITY FOOD EFFORTS

## *Retail Outlets*

There are very few retail outlets that carry food produced in Linn or surrounding counties. While big box stores advertise products as local, their definition of local can include the entire United States. Many consumers surveyed confessed to “having no idea where my food comes from.”<sup>xviii</sup> In Corvallis or Eugene, local products are commonly labeled by state of origin but there is little such marketing in Linn County stores. Many Albany area residents report that they drive to Corvallis to shop for the local foods they desire.

Periwinkle Provisions in Sweet Home is one store in Linn County working to provide locally produced food to residents. While the store predominately sells nutrition supplements, they also have bulk, organic food and for a while were the host site for a local farm’s CSA. “We are trying to create a stronger community in Sweet Home” explains Brandi Hawkins, owner of Periwinkle Provisions, “and we think we can do that by supporting local farmers and promoting seasonal eating.” Most of their bulk products are beans and grains, and after hearing of the success of the Southern Willamette Valley Bean and Grain Project, are looking into buying local beans and grains. However, Brandi was quick to explain that the consumer demand of local products in Sweet Home is not very great. “We do carry a number of local products but cost and timing are definitely issues.”

Other stores, such as Vinny’s in Lebanon and New Life Nutrition in Albany are beginning to offer local food – especially local flour – and are interested in expanding their supply. Similar concerns, such as the uncertainty of the market for local food, persist.

In Albany and Lebanon, the majority of grocery stores are concentrated in one area, as is the case in most suburban landscapes. This requires many residents to travel far distances to reach these stores, expending considerable amount of money on gas or dealing with the hassle of carting groceries home on the bus. One respondent from the 2008 Albany Community Survey explained, “Albany needs grocery stores in the SW region. Ever since (old) Safeway was shut down the only option is to deal with the high traffic area near the mall. North Albany is taken care of; it’s time to deal with SW Albany.”<sup>xix</sup>

## *Restaurants*

A number of restaurants in Linn County have indicated they are interested in sourcing locally- produced food. In Albany Sybaris, First Burger and Calapooia Brewing Company are all buying from local farms and educating customers about where menu items come from. These restaurants feature Painted Hills Natural Beef, Afton Field Farms’ chickens, and Springhill Farm’s organic produce. Other restaurants, including Mamma’s in Lebanon and Spoleto’s in Sweet Home, have expressed interest in supporting local growers as well.

While the number of restaurants throughout the county is quite small compared to larger metropolitan areas, these restaurants represent a huge potential for local growers. While price persists as a barrier for both restaurateurs and farmers, there exists the potential for relationship building between these two sides. A local food connection event hosted in Lane County helped large-scale buyers and sellers come together for relationship building, however this wasn’t as effective for smaller scale farmers and buyers. A smaller, perhaps more informal food connection event in Linn County might go a long way to act upon this potential.

## *Institutional Purchasing*

Many schools and hospitals are interested in purchasing local food. The problem lies not in desire, but rather with logistics. One big hurdle restricting local food purchasing within large institutions is the concern for food safety. Nutrition services directors must insure that the food they serve is safe. A national organization called the Food Alliance certifies farms based on an evaluation of their food handling practices. However, when an institution links directly with a farmer, the link between food and institution is much stronger and clearer. In a more direct relationship, farmers and institutions create strong relationships, which allow both sides to better understand each other’s needs. Farmers can show the care with which they handle food safety, and institutions can express the need for such strict food safety rules and regulations.

We’re trying to create a stronger community in Sweet Home...and we think we can do that by supporting local farmers and promoting seasonal eating.

- Brandi Hawkins, Owner  
Periwinkle Provisions

# COMMUNITY FOOD EFFORTS

The Samaritan Lebanon Community Hospital is one of the largest institutional food purchasers in the county. Serving nearly 300 employees, their purchases can affect the local food market considerably. The hospital currently buys bison meat from Rainshadow El Rancho in Scio and blueberries from Springbank Farm in Lebanon. They expressed concern that local farmers can reliably fill orders as a reason that limits their local food purchasing. Unpredictable weather can compromise farmers' abilities to fill large orders, whereas a wholesaler like Sysco or Food Services of America buys food from multiple sources so they can guarantee schools and hospitals that their orders will be filled throughout the year.

The Albany School District is also interested in local sourcing, though the direct to farmer route appears too complicated. As is the case with hospitals, school districts are dealing with a population at risk to food borne illnesses. The school district's purchases through their current distributors are guaranteed safe by a third party certifier. On the other hand, unless a farm is third-party certified, the school is unwilling to take on more of the risk. Though as an alternative to the direct-farm route, the school has the ability to choose based on locality amongst a variety of suppliers of the same product at competitive prices. In this case, the most local product is chosen.

## Community Supporting Food

### *Growing Our Own*

Another important agricultural asset, Linn County has many residents who grow food or raise animals on a small-scale to supplement their families' diets. This predominantly rural county has a long tradition of self-sufficiency. Near Mill City, over 50% of respondents surveyed identified home gardens as a source of their food. However, more and more, the rural parts of Linn County are turning into suburban type settings, with increased population density and smaller acreage. Along with the growing trend towards urbanization and less emphasis on self-sufficiency, fewer rural residents are growing their own food, regardless of whether or not they have the space to. Less than 10% of those surveyed in Albany indicated that they grow their own food.<sup>xx</sup> It's apparent that there is an untapped source of local food, right in people's own backyards.

Linn County residents interested in transforming their yards into gardens can get assistance from Homestead Organic Gardens, based in Brownsville. They offer do-it-yourself garden kits, garden coaching and full-service garden management for beginning gardeners. These services allow for a variety of options for those interested in turning their backyards into sources of food. Further outreach of this service and any similar services is necessary.

Neighborhood garden projects are a great way to link home gardeners and those interested in seeing their backyards turn into food producing spaces. A neighborhood garden project works by linking neighbors who have space for a garden but no time, with neighbors who have time but no space. Not only will more neighborhood land be used for producing food, but it also helps to create strong communities by building trust and relationships between neighbors. Currently in Linn County there are no such neighborhood organizations, although there is an interest and momentum towards one such organization in Albany.

Besides gardening, there is growing interest among Linn County residents in raising bees and livestock. The City of Albany allows residents to keep 2 chickens on small properties within city limits. Residents can raise horses, cows, sheep and goats if they have at least half an acre. Pigs are not allowed in city limits.

In Lebanon, raising farm animals is not allowed within city limits unless a resident receives signatures of approval from all neighbors within a 300-foot radius. Only three such permits have been issued.<sup>xxi</sup> A Lebanon high school student who participated in a cooking demonstration class commented, "we used to raise chickens when we lived outside of town, and I loved having fresh eggs. But, now that we live in town, we can't have chickens and I miss those eggs."

Sweet Home municipal codes regarding livestock are friendlier provided resident have acreage, but most do not. Horses require 1.5 acres, a cow or pig requires 1 acre, goats and sheep require a ½ acre and up to 24 rabbits or fowl are allowed on ½ an acre.



# CALAPOOIA FOOD ALLIANCE



In Brownsville, community food efforts find strength in a local non-profit dedicated to facilitating and promoting “Healthy, local, sustainable food production and consumption.” In 2005, after a discussion on local food sustainability, community members decided to organize and create the change they wished to see. They formed the Calapooia Food Alliance (CFA) which runs the Brownsville Farmers’ Market and the Brownsville Community Garden. Thanks to the CFA, Brownsville residents can access healthful, local foods year-round.

At the Brownsville Farmers’ Market, residents can find George Weppeler’s salad greens, carrots from Sunset Lane Farm, tomatoes from Open Oak Farm, eggs from numerous Brownsville residents, along with an array of fruits and vegetables grown within 10 miles of the market. The Brownsville Community Garden offers residents 14 individual plots plus a demonstration plot.

CFA is also committed to ensuring that all income levels have access to healthful, local food. The farmers’ market accepts federal Women, Infants and Children (WIC) and Senior Farm Direct Nutrition coupons and SNAP benefits and participates in the That’s My Farmer SNAP Incentive Program (see insert). The CFA Community Garden donates produce to the Free Fresh Produce program at the Sharing Hands Food Pantry.

While CFA accomplishments to date are many, the group’s goal is to proactively impact the future food system of their community by involving children. They began a Central Linn Teaching Garden in early 2011 to “Help children learn about the natural world and the origins of foods, help them select a wider variety of food, develop and improve social skills, improve retention and observation skills, and foster a respect for the natural environment.” Plans for the garden include cold-frames, worm-bins and garden integrated curriculum. If past success is any indication, the future looks bright in Brownsville.

# COMMUNITY FOOD EFFORTS

## *Community Garden Projects*

Community gardens provide a place for people interested in growing food who either lack the space at home or want to be involved in their community. There are also more broadly defined community gardens run by non-profit organizations and worked by community volunteers who offer the produce to food pantries or free-meal sites. Over the last 10 years, popularity of community gardens has soared, especially in urban areas. Albany is home to most of Linn County's community gardens, with three gardens serving the city in 2011, however that's not to say that rural gardens in rural communities aren't also thriving.

The Willamette Community Garden was started in 2010, as a community-wide partnership of the City of Albany Parks and Recreation, Public Works, Community Development departments and many volunteers. The garden is located downtown in a predominantly low-income neighborhood. It has 55 raised bed plots available for rent, and scholarships are available. Six plots are designated for people with limited mobility. Through, Plant a Row for the Hungry (PAR), the Willamette Community Garden encourages its gardeners to donate a portion of their produce to a local food pantry and/or a free meal site. OSU Extension Master Gardeners present gardening workshops at the Willamette Community garden throughout the year.

The Albany Helping Hands Garden is located on Highway 20 just east of I-5. The organization relies on volunteers and also hires people staying at the shelter to work in the garden and sell produce at an on-site farm stand. Produce that doesn't sell is used for meals at the shelter.

The Mid-Willamette YMCA Community Garden is Albany's newest, opening in 2011. Their goal is to provide produce to volunteers who help at the garden, along with area food pantries through the PAR program. Their 12,000-sq. ft. garden space represents huge potential for increasing low-income access to local food.

The Brownsville Community Garden is a cooperative effort involving the City of Brownsville, the Central Linn School District, OSU Extension and the Calapooia Food Alliance (CFA). The garden contains 14 plots available for lease by community members, an educational plot and a plot used for

the CFA's 'Free Fresh Produce' program. CFA volunteers grow produce for donation to Sharing Hands, the food pantry serving over 300 families throughout the Brownsville area. This rural community garden has leased all available plots since it opened in 2007.

Garden of Eatin' is a community garden hosted by Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Lebanon. Started in 2005, it was used by just four families until the church received a grant from the Oregon Synod Endowment Board in 2010 and began a garden expansion. Ten raised beds were added early in 2011 and the irrigation system was expanded. Robin Whitlock, outreach coordinator for the garden, said the church hopes to expand the garden further to satisfy the increasing demand for plots.

Mill City Gardens was started in 2008 with ten plots available for lease. This community garden is sponsored by The North Santiam Canyon Economic Development Corporation (NSCEDC). Six new plots were added in 2009. In one of the most isolated communities in Linn County, participants in the Mill City Gardens on the North Santiam River say that "in no other garden do bean stalks and their cultivators have such a spectacular view."

In Albany, Brownsville and Lebanon, OSU Extension Master Gardeners are at the center of community gardening activity. Throughout Linn County, they offer advice, technical support and resources to anyone considering a community garden.

While community gardens provide unique opportunities for local residents, as well as food to needy families, their viability relies on several factors. Community garden volunteers and activists say the success of a garden often depends on having a "garden champion," someone who manages the garden, markets it and ensures that fees cover costs. Strong partnerships with city governments also help gardens succeed by providing access to land and water.

There is much room for growth in community gardens in Linn County. The Halsey United Methodist Church is interested and has space for one, but lacks a "garden champion."



# COMMUNITY FOOD EFFORTS

## *Community Supported Agriculture*

In general, the risks involved in farming – from unpredictable weather, pests and risk of disease – fall on farmer’s shoulders. They make the capital investments, in addition to labor and time spent tending crops with little certainty they will see the rewards come harvest time. In order to ease the burden on farmers, many are offering Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs to customers interested in supporting their farm. CSA programs allow consumers to share the risk of farming by purchasing a share of the harvest at the beginning of the season. In a boom year, the customer shares the bounty of a successful farm. During bad years, they make due with a smaller supply of vegetables. Either way, this model provides farmers the financial support upfront to cover costs throughout the growing season and guarantees them a market for their produce.

CSA customers generally receive a weekly share that contains around 10 items that vary during the course of the season. For most families, a large share provides all of the vegetables they need to last through the week. For individuals, some farms offer small shares or allow customers to split a share with friends.

For many small to mid-sized farms, the CSA model is ideal. With careful planning and experience, farmers can work exclusively on their farms instead of leaving to sell at farmers’ markets or make deliveries to restaurants, grocery stores, or other buyers. They also know exactly how much to pick each week to meet their clients’ demands. Customers also benefit from the opportunity to try new crops. Open Oak Farm enjoys offering their CSA members unfamiliar items such as burdock root, celeriac and rye berries.

According to the USDA Census of Agriculture, 16 farms in Linn County marketed products through the CSA model in 2007. In the spring of 2011, 14 farms were serving customers in Linn and Benton Counties.<sup>xvii</sup>

## *School Food Efforts*

Schools offer one of the most promising venues for growth in community food efforts. Teaching and demonstration gardens, salad bars, healthy choice snacks, and locally sourced cafeteria ingredients are a few of the ways school districts are instilling life-long healthy eating habits and encouraging chil-

dren to consider where their food comes from. Farm to school programs are linking students with farmers, incorporating hands on learning, and getting kids to eat vegetables. As a somewhat unintended consequence, many of these programs have led to improvements in their parents’ eating habits and interests in gardening. There is huge potential for shaping the next generation with a passion and understanding of the importance of good food.

Planting Seeds of Change, in Lebanon, is the largest and most successful Farm to School program in Linn County, with 9 teaching gardens in both Lebanon and Sweet Home – along with a 2 acre production garden. Through integrated curriculum, students learn about math and science while digging through the garden. Teachers have recognized marked improvements in focus, attitude and social interactions. As one of the founders, Pam Lessley, Nutrition Services Director for the Lebanon School District plays an integral part in PSOC by purchasing the produce harvested from the school gardens.

Many other Linn County school districts are actively engaged in local food efforts. The Sweet Home School District runs four school gardens through the Planting Seeds of Change program and has also recently made a commitment to feature only locally sourced and locally processed blueberry jam as the major fruit spread option. The Albany School District has 2 teaching/learning gardens. They have salad bars in each of their cafeterias and source fruits and vegetables from local farmers. In Halsey, with help from the Brownsville based Calapooia Food Alliance, the Central Linn Elementary School is incorporating a demonstration garden into the curriculum. The plan is to include raised beds, a worm bin and a mural featuring students’ artwork.

Another exciting program, not currently offered by any Linn County school district, however featuring Linn County farmers, involves field trips to farms. Midway Farms, in Albany, hosts such field trips for Corvallis area schools. Children learn about farm animals and best practices for raising animals, where food comes from, and hopefully change any previous misperceptions or assumptions about farmers and farm work.

Critical to the success of any school garden program is a true commitment from teachers, school superintendents, commu-

# PLANTING SEEDS OF CHANGE



Planting Seeds of Change (PSOC) is the Lebanon based Farm to School effort whose mission is “To improve the health of students and their families through organic gardening instruction, thus, establishing life-long healthy eating habits.” Pam Lessley, nutrition services director for the Lebanon School District, said she always struggled with the fact that her students were not eating the salads she offered. “If kids were given a hands-on approach to growing they would be more likely to eat fresh fruits and vegetables,” she said.

In 2008, PSOC began modestly with one garden at Seven Oaks Elementary. By fall, they realized their impact was far from modest. Besides learning basic gardening skills, students also absorbed math and science concepts taught in the garden. In just 90 days, participants’ math scores increased by over 10 points. But, it wasn’t just classroom scores and garden education that impressed PSOC president Sheryl Casteen. “Kids just need to be outside,” she said. “After working in the garden we noticed improvements in teamwork, decision-making, and self-confidence. When you have one student comment, ‘I see that I really am worth something and that there are people that care about me improving,’ it’s evident that PSOC is working.”

And are the kids eating healthier? “The problem isn’t getting them to eat the food, it’s getting them to wash it first!” Sheryl exclaimed. Whether its cucumbers, tomatoes, lettuce or even radishes the kids are literally eating it up, discovering, and more importantly, enjoying foods to their parents’ surprise. Now, when students see a salad, they don’t automatically say “yuck.” Because of their experiences in the school garden, they can talk about what lettuce seed looks like, how to plant cucumbers, and how delicious tomatoes are right off the vine.

The program has expanded to five gardens in Lebanon and four in Sweet Home, with plans for more. They’ve also started a 2-acre production garden and orchard at Cascades Elementary School in Lebanon. The school district plans to purchase produce from the garden to supply the cafeteria.



# COMMUNITY FOOD EFFORTS

nity volunteers (primarily Master Gardeners) and nutrition services directors. Many community volunteers working with school gardens agreed that without participation from teachers, sustainability of any garden program is compromised. As many teachers are already over-booked, adding on a new program, such as a garden, is low on the list of priorities. However, several organizations nationwide – not to mention PSOC – have offered teaching garden curricula, eliminating that aspect of extra work for the teachers.

## *Public Health Initiatives*

Public Health organizations and programs play an important role in shaping the environmental and policy level priorities for community health. Incorporating a priority for fresh, local food fits well within the mission of hospitals and county health agencies. Health related organizations can include more broad county-wide policies, such as tobacco prevention, to more on the ground, site specific policies, such as eliminating un-healthy food vending machines from schools. In Linn County, Samaritan Health Services and Linn County Health Department have both identified food as a priority for improving community health.

At the Samaritan Lebanon Community Hospital (SLCH), Samaritan Health Services and the Office of Rural Health co-sponsor the Community Health Improvement Partnership (CHIP) serving east Linn County. The CHIP program supports Linn County's Healthy Active Oregon Partnership to improve health and community vitality. Nancy Kirks, Linn County CHIP coordinator describes CHIP as such:

The CHIP process works by engaging the community to identify health disparities. Specifically the community identified the lack of prevention programs (along with transportation, teen health, health education, mental health, and affordable health) as a priority during the community assessment phase. Childhood obesity is a trending issue in East Linn. It has been reported by childhood obesity experts that the lack of access to fruits and veggies and food insecurity can be contributors. CHIP supports the school teaching gardens and other food efforts to build a stronger food development system.

Their community food efforts include Planting Seeds of Change (see insert) and the Local Pick of the Month.

The Local Pick of the Month program is an Oregon-wide program sponsored in part by the Oregon Department of Education. Each month, OSU Extension Master Gardeners and community health programs distribute an informational flier highlighting a seasonal food to schools and non-profits such as Boys & Girls Clubs. Nutritional information, recipes and a short agricultural history are featured in the promotion. The Pick of the Month encourages healthy eating and promotes local farmers by directing residents to local grocery stores or fruit stands.

In 2010, the Linn County Health Department initiated the Linn County Healthy Communities Coalition to create a three-year community action plan to reduce chronic diseases linked to physical inactivity, poor nutrition, and tobacco use. The coalition conducted a community assessment of environmental and policy based health measures, and specified four priority areas: tobacco free outdoor areas, school wellness, health care referral pathways, and work site wellness. The coalition aims to create Wellness Councils in each school district and to implement School Wellness Policies by 2014. As a central part of this effort, the coalition will promote healthy eating behavior in all aspects of the school environment. The plan to implement policies to limit teachers' use of food as a reward for classroom behavior or academic success, serve healthy food and beverages in the school cafeterias, and build school gardens.

## **Rural Grocery Store Surveys**

The Center for Rural Affairs, an organization advocating for rural businesses and communities based in Nebraska, released two reports documenting just how vital local grocery stores are to rural areas. These stores serve as "community hubs of social and economic activity." Rising gas prices further isolate rural residents from cities with major grocery stores, so small, family-owned grocery stores are becoming more crucial to ensure access to food in outlying communities. While Linn County's rural communities are not as isolated as those in eastern Oregon, some are up to 20 miles away from the nearest grocery store. For many people with limited transportation options including the elderly and low-income residents living without a personal vehicle, rural stores may be their only option for access to food.

# COMMUNITY FOOD EFFORTS

In 2010, seven Linn County rural grocery store managers participated in the Rural Grocery Store Owner Survey developed by Kansas State University's Center for Civic Engagement. The survey gathered first-hand accounts from rural grocery store owners about the challenges they face. The results showed that the majority of rural grocers struggle to make ends meet and operate with extremely slim profit margins. Experimenting with new products, adding services, or marketing their stores are prohibitively expensive additional expenditures. Therefore, owners find themselves stuck in an endless cycle of merely scraping by.

As more rural communities become “bedroom communities” with residents commuting to nearby cities for shopping and jobs, rural grocery stores often reduce services and become more like convenience stores, rarely carrying produce or only offering staples like dairy products and bread. Because they lack basic healthy food options, many stores cannot support federal benefit programs like the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), but some rely on them heavily to meet their communities' food needs. One store owner recounted a time when his/her store was evaluated for compliance with federal regulations for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). A plainclothes agent purchased an ineligible food item with SNAP benefits, then fined the store owner \$600 for non-compliance. The owner told the agent to remove his SNAP certification, though without it, he can no longer accept WIC benefits.<sup>xxv</sup> While the storeowner agreed that it is important that SNAP benefits are used appropriately, he felt it wasn't worth the risk of incurring another fine.

The manager of Mill City Market, which is in one of the most isolated parts of the county, said:

“Without SNAP or WIC benefits we wouldn't be able to make it. We are located in an area of high unemployment and the majority of our customers rely on these benefits. We also have lots of elderly folks who can't access food because of transportation issues. Considering we are over 10 miles away from the nearest grocery store, our small community needs us.”

The Shedd Market and Deli has been operating at its present location since 1940. Shedd is a small unincorporated community of farmers, and is 6 miles away from the Halsey

grocery store, and 12 miles to Albany or the nearest major grocery store. Due to their inability to meet minimum order requirements from suppliers, Shedd Market owners Julie and Leon Bain said that they are forced to purchase food and other products for their store at retail prices at the WinCo store in Albany. “It's more expensive to buy from the distributor,” explained Julie Bain, “so we make the trip to Albany. In order to get a decent price from our distributors, we need to buy at least a pallet. But to that I ask, ‘Where do we put it?’” Even though some customers have requested fresh produce, they carry very little, and worry about the short shelf life and the unfortunate reality that if it doesn't sell, they “eat it.”

While many of the rural grocery stores owners we surveyed said that stocking local products was not feasible for their store – because of perceived lack of demand or high cost for local products – the Bains have gone out of their way to feature local products. They feature Greenwillow Grains flour, which is locally milled from wheat grown just north of them in Tangent, for example. “We understand the importance of keeping things local,” Leon Bain said. “Even though we can't do much and are limited by our size, we still want to support our local economy.” The Bains also sold Alpine Sourdough bread from Corvallis for a while, however slow sales made delivery uneconomical.





# COMMUNITY FOOD EFFORTS

One of the major issues facing rural grocery stores in Linn County is having food delivered to their store. Because they're not on the primary distribution routes, rural Linn County grocery stores have difficulty arranging deliveries. Four of seven stores queried for this assessment said that they can't meet minimum order requirements for delivery. Those same storeowners said that suppliers' pricing is a barrier for them compared to chain stores that order much larger quantities. Several owners echoed the Bain's experience, reporting that they drive to Albany, Lebanon or Junction City to stock their stores with products purchased from major retailers. Due to their small orders – and the increase in gas prices – buying from these stores ends up being cheaper than buying through their distributor, although still squeezing their already slim margins.

Rural grocery stores that are members of Unified Grocers, a grocers' co-op, are able to make small, cost-effective orders by purchasing together in bulk. Unified Grocers offer financial services, marketing support (including Spanish language materials), retail technology and more.

Major challenges identified by the rural store owners surveyed for this assessment were: taxes, availability of satisfactory labor, debt and/or high payments, high inventory costs/low sales, high operational costs, narrow profit margins, and minimum order requirements from vendors.

Six of the seven grocers surveyed identified collaboration among rural grocery stores as important to their success, allowing them to share concerns, ideas, advertising, marketing, and to meet minimum purchase quotas from distributors. Two stores near Sweet Home "share customers" by referring customers on items not in stock.

Store owners identified 'quality of food' and 'customer service' as their most important services, followed by business hours, availability of food (variety, brand choices), price of items offered and ability to accept SNAP and WIC benefits in that order. Two store owners said their ability to accept SNAP and WIC was by far the most important service they offer their community. "It's the reason we are still in business," explained the manager of Mill City Market.

## Challenges Facing Rural Grocery Store Owners

\*Number represents number of stores identifying that as a challenge

Availability of satisfactory labor:	3
Competition with large chain grocery stores	2
Debt and/or high payments	3
Government regulations	1
High inventory costs/low turnover	3
High operations costs (utilities, building, lease, repairs/maintenance, etc.	3

Shortage of working capital	2
Lack of community support	0
Low sales volume	2
Narrow profit margins	3
Required minimum buying requirements from vendors	3
Shoplifting, bad checks/internal theft/unpaid accounts	3
Taxes	4

# COMMUNITY FOOD EFFORTS

## Opportunities for Community Food Efforts

Availability of local food is crucial to the success of any community food system. In Linn County, there are numerous farmers interested in supplying the local market, however the demand or available retail outlets for local food are lacking. According to consumer survey data, interviews and listening in at community meetings, there is potential and excitement for growth in this area.

- Increase Food Literacy

Food literacy is defined as understanding where your food comes from, why this is important and where to buy local food. The importance of community based food systems is a relatively new concept in Linn County. While neighboring cities, such as Corvallis, have numerous organizations promoting local food literacy, very few efforts have taken place in Linn County. Sponsoring of community meals featuring locally sourced ingredients, panel discussions on agriculture, food and food systems, and informational booths at farmers' market and other community events will help increase food literacy.

- Improve TRFW Local Food Directory

Few residents in Linn County are aware of the TRFW local food directory. Of those that are aware, there are concerns with functionality and lack of a printed copy. A tri-fold was one suggestion. Determining the costs of a printed copy along with research of other online versions is necessary.

- Increase visibility of local food

A significant number of Linn County residents admit to not knowing where their food comes from. An increase in the visibility of local food, through county-wide marketing, in-store displays, and in-store samples would increase visibility and identification of local food.

- Economic analysis of local food (and potential) in Linn County

To accurately determine the market for local food in Linn County, a county wide economic analysis should be completed.

- Assist Institutional Buyers

There is interest from institutional buyers to purchase from local farmers, however connecting with farmers, understanding policies and procedures, and working through standard distribution models are barriers. Support for institutional buyers from a third party, such as a non-profit, would increase the amount of local food offered in institutions.

- Better support of rural grocery stores

Many rural grocery stores in Linn County are struggling financially, but also in offering healthy, fresh and/or local options. A partnership between a nonprofit organization and the grocery stores to offer local produce stands would help to improve the quality of food available at these stores, while also providing local food to rural residents. A feasibility study for local produce stands is needed to determine viability.



# BARRIERS TO ACCESSING FOOD



Milton Farley, Fair Share Gleaners

Community food systems must enable all members, regardless of socio-economic status, ethnic background or location, to have access to fresh, healthy food throughout the year. A complex set of factors affect people's ability to get the food they need.

In Linn County, poverty, unemployment (emphasized by the decrease in the logging and grass seed industries), distances between communities, and under-funded schools are some of the contributing factors affecting hunger and food security. Poverty impacts access to food by forcing people to choose between fixed bills such as rent, utilities, childcare, medical care and discretionary spending such as with food. Less time is available for preparing and cooking food. Budgeting for food – both time and money – is one area where cuts can be made, often sacrificing fresh, healthy food for quick fix unhealthy alternatives

While the overwhelming majority of survey respondents, interviewees and members of community organizations responded that food is accessible in Linn County (in one form or another), many confessed to having an unclear definition of what exactly access means. 31% of consumer survey respondents indicated that food was not affordable in Linn County, with many commenting that they are worried about the steadily rising food prices.<sup>xvii</sup> Aside from cost, the type of food that is accessible is also important to consider. Numerous community members responded that healthy and also local food was too expensive, indicating that the freshest, most nutritious food is not accessible. And high numbers of students receiving free or reduced price lunches indicates that youth face difficulties in adequately accessing food.

However there are several programs available in Linn County to assist residents in securing an adequate diet. Federal assistance is available through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), administered locally on Oregon Trail cards; the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program; the Farm Direct Nutrition Program for WIC clients and senior citizens; USDA's After School Meals and Snacks; Free or Reduced Priced lunches and The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP). The Linn County emergency food system consists of 14 emergency food pantries, five free meal sites and a robust gleaning program serving a significant percentage of the Linn County population. For youth, backpack programs and targeted outreach are potential solutions.

# BARRIERS TO ACCESSING FOOD

## Emergency Food System

### *Federal Assistance*

Indicators such as poverty, unemployment, housing costs and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) usage highlight the gaps in community food systems that result in hunger and food insecurity. Hunger can be defined as the acute physical reaction to lack of food. Food insecurity addresses the more long-term or chronic effects of not only the lack of food today, but also knowing where your food will come from in the future.

A high number of Linn County residents experience hunger and food insecurity. Linn County's poverty rate was 15% in 2011, indicating that over 15,000 residents are living at or below 100% of the federal poverty guidelines.<sup>xxvii</sup> The unemployment rate in 2011 was above average for the state at 12%. In 2010, nearly 40% of renters were unable to afford Fair Market Rate apartments<sup>7</sup>. According to Feeding America's Meal Gap study, Linn County is one of the most food-insecure counties in Oregon at 19.2% or 21,770 individuals, exceeding both national and state ratings.<sup>xxviii</sup> According to the USDA Food Desert Locator, three census tracts in Linn County qualify as Food Deserts<sup>8</sup>, two in Lebanon and one in Albany. Nearly 1 in 5 Linn County residents use SNAP benefits.<sup>xxix</sup> Linn-Benton Food Share, the regional food bank, distributed nearly 5,000,000 pounds of food to Linn and Benton County residents in need in 2010.

SNAP benefits are distributed through the Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS), which has offices in Albany, Lebanon and Sweet Home. In 2009, 23,294 Linn County residents participated in SNAP, bringing over \$33 million federal dollars into the local economy. This number reflects 84% of the residents eligible to participate in the program.<sup>xxx</sup> If participation rates matched need, an additional \$3 million would be available for food purchase in the county. On average, consumers receive \$107 per month in SNAP benefits. The service is intended to supplement consumers' food budgets, and free up money to cover other basic expenses

like rent and utilities. Given that the price of a meal in Linn County is estimated to be \$2.34, which equates to \$217.62 per month. The average SNAP benefits will cover only half of a consumer's monthly food costs.

The WIC program, also available through county DHS offices, helped 6,323 women access healthy food for themselves and their children.<sup>xxxi</sup> WIC offers low-income mothers vouchers for certain foods identified as essential for mothers' and children's health. In 2010, this program brought over \$2 million to Linn County, all of which was spent on healthful food. It is also estimated that 49% of pregnant women in the county utilized WIC higher than the state average of 46%.<sup>xxxii</sup>

The Oregon Department of Agriculture's Farm Direct Nutrition Program (FDNP) supports senior citizens and WIC-eligible families. Clients receive coupons redeemable for fresh produce from local farms, usually at farmers' markets. In 2009, \$48,640 in federal FDNP assistance supported Linn County farmers.<sup>xxxiii</sup> Besides making fresh, healthful food available to seniors and WIC participants, this program also encourages low-income consumers to eat locally grown food.

### *Food Pantries and Free Meal Sites*

The regional food bank system, Linn Benton Food Share (LBFS), manages a network of 74 agencies which include food pantries, free-meal sites, emergency shelters, child and senior care centers and gleaning groups, ensuring that "everybody eats." LBFS coordinates food purchasing, procurement and distribution so that member agencies can focus their time serving community members in need. In Linn County, LBFS provides technical, resource and operational support to 14 emergency food pantries, 5 free-meal sites, and 9 gleaning groups.

Between summer 2009 and summer 2011, LBFS distributed nearly five million pounds of food to their member agencies. During that period, local food pantries distributed 42,366 emergency food boxes to 145,997 individuals and 261,118 meals were served at free-meal sites in Linn and Benton counties.

7. Fair Market Rent for Linn County is \$776. In order to afford this level of rent and utilities, without paying more than 30% of income, a household must earn \$2,588 monthly and \$31,060 annually.

8. The Healthy Food Financing Initiative (HFFI) Working Group defines a food desert as a low-income census tract where a substantial number or share of residents has low access to a supermarket or large grocery store. To qualify as low-income, census tracts must meet the Treasury Department's New Markets Tax Credit (NMTC) program eligibility criteria. Furthermore, to qualify as a food desert tract, at least 33 percent of the tract's population or a minimum of 500 people in the tract must have low access to a supermarket or large grocery store.





# THAT'S MY FARMER SNAP INCENTIVE

In Linn County, 20% of the population is eligible for SNAP (formerly food stamps). While SNAP and other federal food assistance programs help to supplement food purchases for low-income individuals and families, they often fall short of meeting total food needs. Many also complain that SNAP clients use benefits to choose unhealthy options instead of the healthy choice because of lower prices. Furthermore, SNAP clients interested in supporting local farmers with their food dollars find it hard due to the need for an EBT (Electronic Benefit Transfer) machine to redeem benefits. The Ten Rivers Food Web's That's My Farmer SNAP incentive program is designed to fix these problems.

The program works as such: when a SNAP client visits a participating farmers' market and redeems at least \$6 of SNAP benefits, they will receive a \$6 match. These \$12 dollars can be used to purchase fresh, local food direct from area farmers' markets. If each market is visited in the month, SNAP clients are eligible for \$24 extra food dollars. So far, over \$4000 has been raised for the program. With the match from SNAP clients, \$8000 will be going direct to farmers from this program.

On June 18th, Ten Rivers Food Web launched the That's My Farmer SNAP Incentive Program in 3 Linn County farmers' markets: Albany, Sweet Home and Brownsville.





## SWEET HOME MANNA DINNER

Sweet Home United Methodist Church hosts a community meal called “Manna” three times a week on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays serving low-income, homeless, fixed-income, and all others looking for good food and company. Sweet Home Emergency Ministries (SHEM) provides much of the food with other donations coming from area grocery stores, private individuals, and local schools. The latter resulted from a connection made at the Lebanon FEAST in February of 2010.

“There is clearly a need in our community to not only feed people physically, but also spiritually,” said Manna volunteer Bob Hartsock. And that’s what the Manna dinner does so well. In September of 2009, they served 289 plates, which is impressive for such a small congregation. By October, 2010, that number increased by nearly four times to 1,006 plates. They’ve also begun to bridge the difficult gap between homeless youth and emergency food services. In the last year, dozens of youth have found the Manna meal and are inviting their friends. That is a relief to Hartsock who said, “There are many more out there we aren’t feeding.”

The numbers show that more of those in need are being fed, but the church is still not satisfied. “Our hope is that those who are eating the meals will take part in the cooking, serving and also gardening,” said church member Rod Fielder. “That way we can fully achieve our goal of creating a “manna” community. Lots of folks know how to do for the poor...few know how to go about doing with the poor,” he said.



# BARRIERS TO ACCESSING FOOD

Emergency food boxes and free-meal sites are a critical fall-back option for seniors, disabled persons, single parents and the unemployed. An increasing number of working individuals and families find themselves in need of food assistance. The Oregon Center for Public Policy estimates that 64% of families with at least one parent working part-time are living in poverty.<sup>xxxiv</sup> An Albany resident responding to the Grocery Outlet Consumer Survey said that even as a working parent, she's forced to turn to the emergency food box because her minimum-wage job and SNAP benefits just aren't enough.

Although emergency food boxes are intended to help people only in emergency situations, many Linn County residents rely on them consistently throughout the year as a steady source of food. Most food banks limit their clientele to 12 food boxes during the year. Some pantries restrict individuals to one box per month, but others allow recipients to take as needed until the food pantry runs out. A volunteer at the Sweet Home pantry was forced to turn away one client because it was his third visit in two weeks. "It's unfortunate," she said, "but some people take advantage of our generosity."

Emergency food pantries are run in one of two ways. Most common is for pantry volunteers to pack food boxes behind closed doors then distribute to waiting clients. In the other

"shopping-style," a pantry volunteer accompanies the client who selects food, as in a grocery store. Pantry directors and volunteers utilizing the first method feel it is more functional and practical and eliminates problems with "difficult" clients. However, many pantry recipients praise the "shopping-style" because they can choose their own food. Several said they feel more involved in the process and less like they are receiving a handout. According to staff, it also helps to build community by providing one-on-one interaction between volunteers and clients.

High rent and frequent change of location were concerns for at least one emergency food pantry. Clients also complained about not knowing where the food pantry was. In the more isolated parts of the county (Mill City/Lyons and Halsey) people needing emergency food assistance are often located miles away from the nearest pantry. In Mill City, gleaners commented that some folks in the far reaches of the county can't afford to drive into town to receive assistance.

## *Gleaning*

Gleaning is the tradition of farmers allowing others to gather excess food left after a harvest. The tradition dates back to Biblical times. Under the Holiness and Deuteronomic Codes, farmers were required to leave sections of their field un-har-



Cleaner "re-pack" at Linn Benton Food Share

# BARRIERS TO ACCESSING FOOD

vested for the poor. Today, farmers often ask for gleaners' services to gather up their remaining produce. Gleaners also distribute frozen food donations and glean research plots at Oregon State University, harvesting food that would otherwise be wasted.

Linn Benton Food Share's gleaning coordinator oversees 14 gleaning groups, each of which is a registered 501(c)3, with appropriate insurance for their members. Each group is governed by a committee and has a gleaning coordinator who acts as the groups' director. Monthly, the gleaning coordinators from throughout Linn and Benton Counties, meet to offer technical support, grant opportunities and to coordinate gleanings throughout the county. Twice a month, the gleaners meet at the LBFS warehouse in Tangent for repack days. Volunteers from the gleaning groups take pallets full of frozen fruits and vegetables and repack them into family size portions. The gleaners take home half of the food to distribute to their members, while the other half stays with LBFS to be distributed to emergency food pantries.

All gleaners are required to work a certain number of hours each month to receive food assistance. Their commitments range from administrative tasks, stocking shelves, and distributing food to the actual crop gleaning in fields and orchards. Elderly and people with physical disabilities who cannot actively participate in gleanings are adopted by other members of the group and provided with portions of each glean.

## *Las Comidas Latinas: Needs Assessment for Nutrition Education Programming*

In 2010, Oregon State University Extension Service conducted a needs assessment for nutrition education programming in the Latino community. The assessment was conducted through invitations to "Las Comidas Latinas" dinners, one-on-one interviews in Spanish, and two community forums held in Albany and Halsey. The community forums featured women, all of whom were born in Mexico.

Of those surveyed in Linn County, the majority (63%) identified as having low/very low food security FS. Low FS includes reports of reduced quality, variety or desirability of diet and Very Low FS is defined as reports of multiple indications of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake. Factors influencing food security included county of residence, in-

come, monthly food spending, and distance traveled to grocery store. Linn County saw a higher percentage of food insecurity and food insecure households traveled greater distances than food secure households. Another interesting statistic showed that 45% of food insecure households have not accessed emergency food boxes.

In Halsey, the discussion focused on income for women and child nutrition. There was concern with the lack of fresh school food. One woman explained, "the schools think they're giving healthful meals, but I see they offer pizza every day" ("las escuelas se suponen que den comidas saludables pero veo que diario ofrecen pizza") while another complained "the school contributes to what [children] eat or don't eat" because of short lunch periods ("la escuela contribuye a lo que si comen y lo que no comen"). There was also a complaint about the long period between lunch and going home and how schools "don't allow [children] to bring food on the bus" ("no permiten que traigan comida en el bus"). Solutions included better communication with schools about policies, expressing concerns and visits to schools during lunch.

In Albany, the focus was on child nutrition and food assistance. Again, respondents identified the lack of fresh foods in schools as a major concern. They were also concerned about discrimination and lack of funding for school food service. Solutions included giving families fresh fruit and vegetables; offering opportunities to participate in school kitchens for personal consumption; increased public transportation; more variety, traditional foods and fresh options; eliminating chocolate milk; and more communication between parents and children. Participants said they don't make use of federal food assistance programs because they didn't know about them, were afraid of discrimination, and because of the criteria for eligibility. One solution suggested was more outreach in Spanish.<sup>xxxv</sup>

"The schools think they are giving healthy meals, but I see they offer pizza every day"  
- Halsey focus group participant





## DOWN TO EARTH SWEET HOME YOUTH GARDEN

Producing for the Future is a research project sponsored by Oregon State University and funded by a grant from the National Institutes of Health, which supports youth garden sites in both Corvallis and Sweet Home. Utilizing the community based participatory research model, Professor Leslie Richards is investigating the “transitional period” in young adults from full-time schooling to full-time employment. Garden coordinator and OSU graduate student Nadege Dubuisson explains that one of the goals is to teach youth about nutrition and how to grow healthy food.

With guidance from adult mentors, 11 youth volunteers designed, constructed and currently maintain the 2400 ft<sup>2</sup> “Down to Earth: Sweet Home Community Youth Garden” at the Sweet Home United Methodist Church (SHUMC). Throughout the process, youth volunteers were given the opportunity to choose what seeds to grow, how they will sell the produce and what they will use their profits for. Throughout the summer of 2011, the youth have sold their produce at an on-site produce stand, at the Sweet Home Farmers’ Market with proceeds going back into the garden. They have also donated to the SHUMC Manna Dinner. The youth are learning about marketing, decision-making, research, and nutrition and putting these microenterprise skills into practice.

The project will evaluate various health outcomes through the collection of BMIs, positive youth development surveys, self-esteem surveys, depression surveys, diet records, and exercise logs. We are currently on the second wave of collection so have not yet begun the analysis stage.

So far the garden is proving to be quite the success. Community support, participant enthusiasm and a great partnership with the SHUMC indicate a bright future for the garden and the youth participants.

# BARRIERS TO ACCESSING FOOD

## Youth Poverty, Obesity and Hunger

Nutrition and dietary habits play a critical role in children's development; poor nutrition in childhood can have long-term health implications. According to research from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's efforts to Prevent Childhood Obesity, children in the United States are not eating enough fruits, vegetables, whole grains and low-fat dairy products. This trend is causing a childhood obesity crisis, which disproportionately affects low-income youth.<sup>xxxvi</sup> In Linn County, over 25% of all children 18 years old and younger are obese, 32.5% are living in poverty, and nearly 1,000 children were homeless in 2010.<sup>xxxvii, xxxviii</sup>

### *Addressing Hunger at School*

Many children in Linn County rely on school food as their primary source of nutrition each day. A number of federal programs are designed to help children and youth access adequate food. The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP) provide free or reduced-price meals to students from low-income households. To qualify for reduced-price lunches, families must be at or below 185%<sup>9</sup> of the federal poverty guideline. To receive free lunches, families must be at or below 130% of the poverty guideline<sup>10</sup>. In 2010 nearly 50% of Linn County students were eligible for free or reduced-priced lunches.<sup>xxxix</sup> This means that half the children in county were living in households with a high risk for food insecurity or hunger. In some schools, the percentage is even higher: 86% at Sunrise Elementary in Albany, 81% at Green Acres in Lebanon, and 76% at Crawfordsville Elementary in Sweet Home<sup>11</sup>. On average 89% of eligible students received a free or reduced lunch each day.

The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) provides free meals to children throughout the summer months in neighborhoods where 50% or more of the students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches. The 40 summer meal sites in Linn County served over 60,000 meals in 2010, yet only 25% of eligible children used the program because of transportation or other issues.<sup>xl</sup> The Greater Albany Public School District and DHS implemented a pilot project in the summer of 2011 to assist low-income families that are unable to access

the SFSP. DHS randomly selected families and gave them an additional \$60 in SNAP food benefits per eligible child to stretch their food dollars during summer months.

In another example of low-income food access impacting children, in 2000, Central Linn School District in Halsey dropped one day from their school week, due to budgetary constraints. Switching to a four-day week saves the school district with teachers salaries and saves on transportation costs in a district that covers 155 square miles of rural farmland. The changes brought challenges for households where both parents are working and low-income households that depend on free or reduced-price school lunches to feed their children during the week. Considering almost 40% of Central Linn Elementary students receive free lunches, this is a real concern.

Thankfully, in the 2010-11 school year, the school district became a site for the Community Before and After School Child Care Program (CAP). CAP is a non-profit based in several Albany schools, with support from United Way. At Central Linn, CAP is available before school starting at 6:45am and after school until 6pm Monday-Thursday and all day Friday. There is a registration fee (\$35 per child, \$50 per family) and the program cost is based on a sliding scale. Even though the program cost is adjusted to account for discrepancies in income, the program is still cost prohibitive to some low-income families. Due to low parent participation, the CAP program will not run through the summer but will resume next school year.

### *Food for the Weekend*

A recent development in children's nutritional services in the county are "backpack programs". Usually in partnership with a local food pantry, children from low-income families receive a backpack full of non-perishable food each Friday, to provide them food for weekend meals. The food provided is intended for the children and is therefore geared towards tastes and ease in cooking. Some programs offer food for all the meals in the weekend, while others only supply one or two meals. As of 2011 there were Backpack Programs in Sweet Home, Jefferson and Halsey.

9. For a household of four, this would equal an annual income of \$40,793.

10. For a household of four, this would equal an annual income of \$28,665.

11. Crawfordsville Elementary School closed in 2011.



# BARRIERS TO ACCESSING FOOD

KidsFoodPak, the Sweet Home Backpack Program, started in December 2009. That month organizers sent home six backpacks. By the end of the school year, the program distributed 126 backpacks per week. Community support for this program has been strong, with donations of money, food, and volunteer time to ensure that Sweet Home children don't go hungry.

Halsey United Methodist Church (HUMC) and Sharing Hands, the Brownsville food pantry run a Backpack Program called SnackPack, serving Central Linn Elementary School. On average, they send home 60 backpacks each week. Rev. Kathy Raines, pastor of the Halsey United Methodist Church, explains that the church strives to make the backpacks "as healthy as possible" but unsurprisingly run in to challenges when relying on donations. Thanks to Sharing Hands, and food from Linn Benton Food Share, costs per child are much lower, only around \$1.00 per bag. Theresa Wilhelm, Grants and Donation Coordinator for Central Linn School District explains, "The quick success of the SnackPack program is an indication that at least some of the 54% of Central Linn students in the free and reduced price lunch program are going hungry on days they are not in school. The extent of the need and are ability to meet it are, as yet, unknown."

Dan Easedale, a volunteer with the Extra Helpings Backpack Program in Jefferson, commented:

"Teachers were initially worried that students would feel ashamed of taking home a bag [of food]; however the kids responded in exactly the opposite way. The kids exhibited feelings of pride, a sense of worth, and liked the idea of helping out their family. Parents are also supportive of the program along with many community members who volunteer and donate to the program."

However, not all community members see Backpack Programs as a viable remedy. There are concerns about the food being sent home, which includes soda, Gatorade, pudding, and macaroni and cheese. Teachers are concerned about the stigma associated with the backpacks and associated peer pressure. Program costs can be expensive – upwards of \$450 per child per year. Low-income parents relying on food assistance often have feelings of low self-esteem or hopelessness. When their children bring food home from school, someone other than the parent is handling the parent's responsibility.

This unfortunate dynamic can cause tension in an already tense household.

The Greater Albany Public School District is the largest school district in the county, with 4,473 students eligible for free and reduced price meals, yet there is no backpack program to serve these students on the weekends. Many community members and school staff recognize the great need in the community, however no organization or group of people has offered to step up and take on such a project.

## *Homeless Youth*

Homeless youth face added challenges in acquiring food assistance. Those brave enough to even approach food pantries – especially in rural communities where it is very likely that the pantry volunteers know the youth and/or their parents – face an unfortunate legal hurdle in receiving food assistance. Annette Hobbs, Executive Director of Fish of Albany explained, "If we see someone who is obviously 13 or 14, we ask them to come back with a parent. However, if they say they are on their own—homeless—we won't turn them away. We tend to err on the side of feeding."

However, a volunteer at a different food pantry said they are often forced to turn children away if they are under 18 and without a legal guardian. "We can't give kids food boxes without an adult. If they come and ask, I tell them to come back with their parents," she said.

The Manna dinner program in Sweet Home has made a particular effort to ensure their free meal is welcoming, for example choosing to call it a community meal rather than a soup kitchen. Manna volunteer Bob Hartsock said homeless youth have started to attend the meals, a positive sign in his mind. "We know they are out there, and they are hungry," he said. "We just want them to know that they can come in and have a meal and no one is going to give them a hard time. It has been a lot harder [to reach homeless youth] than I expected."

"We know they [youth] are out there, and they are hungry. We just want them to know that they can come in and have a meal and no one is going to give them a hard time."

- Bob Hartsock,  
Manna Volunteer

# BARRIERS TO ACCESSING FOOD

## Opportunities for Barriers to Accessing Food

- Determine feasibility of switching emergency pantry sites to “shopping-style”

Food pantry clients of “shopping-style” emergency pantry sites praised the ability to choose their own food. Pantry staff of this style commented on the connection made between staff and clients. However many pantries worried about switching to shopping style. Therefore, a feasibility study of switching pantries to this style is necessary.

- Work with Latino community to increase diversity in food system work

Aside from the Latino Community Food Assessment and a recent Latino FEAST in Corvallis, there has been little effort at including the Latino voice in food systems work. Finding new ways of including this aspect of community is important to the success of our community food system.

- Increase outreach to SNAP-eligible clients about That’s My Farmer

That’s My Farmer – SNAP Incentive offers a great opportunity to increase access to fresh, healthy and local food to low-income. However, in areas of high SNAP eligibility (Albany, Sweet Home, and Brownsville) the funds dedicated to this program are not being redeemed as much as in Corvallis. Further marketing and outreach is necessary to reach eligible clients.

- Improve distribution of food assistance in rural Linn County

The Central Linn area (Halsey, Shedd) and Mill City/Lyons area were identified as places where emergency food resources were difficult to access. Further research is needed to determine how to remedy the distances between pantry or gleaning organization and the more isolated clients.

- Promote improved access to emergency food for youth

Albany was identified as needing a “backpack program.” Local community organizations interested in supporting efforts to increase access to food for youth should be connected with organizations running backpack programs. Free meal site volunteers recognized difficulty in reaching out to youth. Suggestions for better outreach would be useful. Finally, a study of the effect of a 4-day school week on parents of students at the Central Linn School District would explain the severity of the problem.



Extra Helpings Backpack Program, Jefferson



# METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

The Linn County Community Food Assessment utilizes a mixed method approach of both qualitative and quantitative measures. Quantitative data includes primary data in the form of two surveys along with many other secondary sources. However, qualitative data gathered from informal conversations, both individual and in group settings, form the basis for this assessment. By constantly engaging community members in the discussion of food systems, agriculture, food security, health and social justice – with a focus on the system as a whole – it was the authors goal to present as accurate an assessment of the Linn County community food system direct from community members.

A consumer survey and rural grocery store owner survey were completed for this report. The consumer survey was administered on May 7, 2011 at the Albany Grocery Outlet. Ten Rivers Food Web volunteers were stationed at both the entrance and exit of the store and asked customers to voluntarily complete a one-page consumer survey (see Appendix XXX). In total 51 responses were collected in three hours. The survey was designed to determine level of interest in local food amongst a general public sampling.

The second survey completed for this assessment was a Rural Grocery Store Owner Survey, developed by Kansas State University's Center for Engagement and Community Development. The intention of this survey is to provide quantifiable data regarding the perspective of rural grocery store owners. Communities with populations under 2000 were the focus, although not all stores were surveyed. In some instances owners declined and in others the store owner was not present. In total seven out of 10 stores completed the survey. All but one survey (Crawfordsville Market) was administered by the author with the owner. This method allowed for elaboration and commentary from the store owner.

Additional sources of data were collected from various print and online sources. Agriculture census data was provided by the U.S.D.A. 2007 Census of Agriculture. Demographic information was sourced from U.S. Census Bureau, Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon, Indicators Northwest, Oregon Department of Education, and Children First for Oregon.

Due to the limited understanding of the existing food system in Linn County, this report offers the first step in understanding the highly complex set of interactions which bring food from the farm to our tables. The intent of this report is to identify the many assets and needs of the community food system in Linn County, but is undoubtedly limited in its depth and scope. It is the author's hope that community members reading this will feel empowered to add and amend as necessary. This is a working document and should be treated as such. Continued efforts to identify our assets, needs and potential solutions will better inform actions to improve our community food system.

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# APPENDIX A

## Linn County Consumer Survey

Community that you live in: \_\_\_\_\_

Sex: ☐ Male ☐ Female

How old are you? ☐ Under 25 ☐ Between 25-54 ☐ Over 55

Is food available in your community?

☐ Yes ☐ No      Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

Is food affordable in your community?

☐ Yes ☐ No      Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

Where do you primarily get your food from?

☐ Grocery Store ☐ Farmers' Market ☐ Convenience Store/Gas Station ☐ Food Pantry  
☐ Natural/Specialty Store ☐ Grow your own ☐ Outside Linn County ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

How far do you go to get your main source of food?

☐ 0-5 miles ☐ 6-10 miles ☐ 11-25 miles ☐ 26+ miles

What factors, if any, affect your ability to get the food you need? (Check all that apply)

☐ High fuel/heating costs ☐ Cost of food ☐ Transportation ☐ Lack of Time ☐ High rent  
☐ Availability of quality/variety of food ☐ Childcare costs ☐ Medical costs ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Are you eligible for government food assistance?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ I don't know

If you are eligible, which government food assistance program do you (or your children) use?

☐ SNAP (Food Stamps) ☐ WIC ☐ Meals on Wheels ☐ Free or reduced school lunch/breakfast  
☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_ ☐ None

Do you buy any food that is produced within Linn County? (Check all that apply)

☐ Fruit ☐ Vegetables ☐ Milk ☐ Poultry ☐ Meat ☐ Eggs ☐ No, I don't

If not, what is the main reason you don't purchase local food?

☐ Not available ☐ Too expensive ☐ Don't know where to get it ☐ Not food I like

Would you like to learn more about how to cook or how to shop on a budget?

☐ Yes ☐ Maybe ☐ No

Do you participate in a community garden in your area? If yes, where?

☐ Yes, where? \_\_\_\_\_ ☐ No

Your survey will remain confidential.

Thank you for your time, your opinion is greatly appreciated.



# APPENDIX B

## Linn County Consumer Survey Results

\*A total of 51 consumers self-reported for this survey

Community that you live in: Albany, Jefferson, Lebanon, Sweet Home, Scio, Adair Village, Stayton, Linn Co., Lane Co.

Sex: 31.4% Male 68.6% Female      How old are you? 5.9% Under 25 58.8% Between 25-54 31.4% Over 55

Is food available in your community?

100% Yes 0% No

Comments: "It's gotten bad at the pantry...lucky to get meat", "sparsely"

Is food affordable in your community?

68.6% Yes 31.4% No

Comments: "Prices way to high – have to shop at several stores", "Prices have increased lately on ALL my groceries", "depends on where purchased", "sometimes", "seems to [be] getting higher", "shop at grocery outlet", "taxes are too high!", "keeps going up though", "in some places", "barely", "mostly", "some allergy related food isn't – gluten free"

Where do you primarily get your food from?

96.1% Grocery Store 15.7% Farmers' Market 5.9% Convenience Store/Gas Station 0% Food Pantry

3.9% Natural/Specialty Store 9.8% Grow your own 2.0% Outside Linn County

0% Other: \_\_\_\_\_

How far do you go to get your main source of food?

72.6% 0-5 miles 19.6% 6-10 miles 7.8% 11-25 miles 0% 26+ miles

What factors, if any, affect your ability to get the food you need? (Check all that apply)

45.1% High fuel/heating costs 62.8% Cost of food 15.7% Transportation 23.5% Lack of Time

11.8% High rent 17.7% Availability of quality/variety of food 0% Childcare costs

15.7% Medical costs 0% Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Are you eligible for government food assistance?

35.3% Yes 56.9% No 7.8% I don't know

If you are eligible, which government food assistance program do you (or your children) use?

29.4% SNAP (Food Stamps) 5.9% WIC 0% Meals on Wheels 7.8% Free or reduced school lunch/breakfast

0% Other: \_\_\_\_\_ 13.7% None

Do you buy any food that is produced within Linn County? (Check all that apply)

51.0% Fruit 51.0% Vegetables 17.7% Milk 13.7% Poultry 19.6% Meat 41.2% Eggs

41.2% No, I don't

Comments: "I would like to!", "Don't know", "Don't know", "more in summer", "I don't know where my food comes from", "I would purchase more if it was available"

If not, what is the main reason you don't purchase local food?

7.8% Not available 17.7% Too expensive 25.5% Don't know where to get it 2.0% Not food I like

Would you like to learn more about how to cook or how to shop on a budget?

25.5% Yes 13.7% Maybe 60.8% No

Do you participate in a community garden in your area? If yes, where?

9.8% Yes, where? HP 88.2% No

Your survey will remain confidential.

Thank you for your time, your opinion is greatly appreciated.

# APPENDIX C



## **Rural Grocery Store Owner Survey** **Oregon Food Bank** **Rural Community Food Systems Assessment Project**

Name of store: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact person for store: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Would you like to be added to a listserv for rural grocery store owners and advocates?

\_\_\_\_\_ yes      \_\_\_\_\_ no

1. What major products and services does your store offer? *Check all that apply.*

- |                             |   |
|-----------------------------|---|
| _____ ATM Bank              | _____ Hunting/fishing/camping supplies        |
| _____ SNAP /Food Stamps*    | _____ WIC**                                   |
| _____ Books/cards/gifts     | _____ Institutional supply (school, hospital) |
| _____ Café/restaurant       | _____ Pharmacy                                |
| _____ Catering              | _____ Photo development                       |
| _____ Delicatessen          | _____ Pre-packaged snacks                     |
| _____ Fuel                  | _____ Self-serve snacks/drinks                |
| _____ Groceries             | _____ Video rental                            |
| _____ Other (specify) _____ |   |

\* *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program*

\*\* *Women, Infants and Children Program*

2. Who is/are your primary grocery supplier(s)?

\_\_\_\_\_

3. What products do your secondary suppliers supply?

\_\_\_\_\_

4. Do minimum (purchasing/ordering) buying requirements create a problem for your grocery store?

\_\_\_\_\_ yes      \_\_\_\_\_ no

If yes, how?

5. If minimum buying requirements are a problem, what solutions might you suggest?



# APPENDIX C

## Rural Grocery Store Owner Survey – Oregon Food Bank Rural Community Food Systems Assessment Project

6. As an independent grocer, do you feel you are getting fair pricing from your suppliers compared to chain stores?

\_\_\_\_ yes      \_\_\_\_ no

Comments:

7. Have you had problems getting products delivered because of your location?

\_\_\_\_ yes      \_\_\_\_ no

Comments:

8. Do you sell locally-produced food in your store?

\_\_\_\_ yes      \_\_\_\_ no

If yes, what products?

9. Which of the following are major challenges for your store? *Check all that apply.*

____ Availability of satisfactory labor	____ Lack of community support
____ Competition with large chain grocery stores	____ Low sales volume
____ Debt and/or high payments	____ Narrow profit margins
____ Government regulations	____ Required minimum buying requirements from vendors
____ High inventory costs/low turnover	____ Shoplifting/bad checks/internal theft/unpaid accounts
____ Shortage of working capital	____ Taxes
____ High operations costs (utilities, building lease, repairs/maintenance, etc.	____ Other (specify) _____

10. Do you collaborate with other small independently owned stores?

\_\_\_\_ yes      \_\_\_\_ no

If yes, for which purposes? *Check all that apply.*

\_\_\_\_ Cooperative advertising/marketing  
\_\_\_\_ Grocery distribution purposes  
\_\_\_\_ Sharing concerns and/or ideas  
\_\_\_\_ To achieve minimum buying requirements  
\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

If no, would you be interested in doing this?

\_\_\_\_ yes      \_\_\_\_ no

# APPENDIX C

## Rural Grocery Store Owner Survey – Oregon Food Bank Rural Community Food Systems Assessment Project

Why or why not?

11. Do you feel that a statewide alliance of small, independently owned grocery store owners may have value?

\_\_\_\_\_ yes          \_\_\_\_\_ no

If yes, how could it help?

12. What marketing strategies have you used in your grocery stores that have been effective in drawing in customers?

Advertising

Newspapers \_\_\_\_\_

Radio \_\_\_\_\_

TV \_\_\_\_\_

Flyers/inserts \_\_\_\_\_

Facebook \_\_\_\_\_

Internet/WWW \_\_\_\_\_

Promotions \_\_\_\_\_

Word of mouth \_\_\_\_\_

OTHER: Please identify: \_\_\_\_\_



# APPENDIX C

## Rural Grocery Store Owner Survey – Oregon Food Bank Rural Community Food Systems Assessment Project

When running a grocery store, how important is it to you to offer each of the following? Rate the importance of each by circling the number that best fits your response.

	<u>Not Very Important</u>				<u>Very Important</u>
1. Quality of food .....	1	2	3	4	5
Comments:					
2. Availability of food (variety, brand choices)	1	2	3	4	5
Comments:					
3. Prices of items offered .....	1	2	3	4	5
Comments:					
4. Customer service .....	1	2	3	4	5
Comments:					
5. Business hours .....	1	2	3	4	5
Comments:					
6. Buying locally .....	1	2	3	4	5
Comments:					
7. SNAP/ Food Stamps/WIC .....	1	2	3	4	5
Comments:					

Which of the above do you feel is the most significant for you and your store?

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# APPENDIX C

## Rural Grocery Store Owner Survey – Oregon Food Bank Rural Community Food Systems Assessment Project

How does your store do at providing the following to customers? Rate your store by circling the number that best fits your response.

	<u>Not Very</u> <u>Well</u>				<u>Very</u> <u>Well</u>
1. Quality of food .....	1	2	3	4	5
Comments:					
2. Availability of food (variety, brand choices)	1	2	3	4	5
Comments:					
3. Prices of items offered .....	1	2	3	4	5
Comments:					
4. Customer service .....	1	2	3	4	5
Comments:					
5. Business hours .....	1	2	3	4	5
Comments:					
6. Buying locally. ....	1	2	3	4	5
Comments:					
7. Accepting Food Stamps/SNAP and WIC. ....	1	2	3	4	5
Comments:					

Which of the above do you feel is the most significant for you and your store?

How do you assess the buying needs of your customer?

Is your stocking of products responsive to customer requests?

**What other concerns or comments do you have?**



# APPENDIX C

## Rural Grocery Store Owner Survey – Oregon Food Bank Rural Community Food Systems Assessment Project

### Tell us about your store:

How long have you been in the grocery business as an owner? \_\_\_\_\_

How long has there been a grocery store at your current location? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have more than one location? \_\_\_\_\_ How many? \_\_\_\_\_

What are your hours of operation?

Mon	_____	to	_____
Tues	_____	to	_____
Wed	_____	to	_____
Thur	_____	to	_____
Fri	_____	to	_____
Sat	_____	to	_____
Sun	_____	to	_____

Are you open on the major holidays (Christmas, New Years, Thanksgiving, etc.)? \_\_\_\_\_

Are there other grocery outlets in your community?

\_\_\_\_\_ a 'quick shop'  
\_\_\_\_\_ another full service grocery

How far is it to the nearest discount grocery (Wal-Mart, etc?) \_\_\_\_\_

How many employees do you have, not counting yourself?

\_\_\_\_\_ full-time (40 hrs/week minimum)      \_\_\_\_\_ part-time (less than 40hrs/week)

What are your average weekly gross sales?

\_\_\_\_\_ Less than \$5,000  
\_\_\_\_\_ Between \$5,000 and \$10,000  
\_\_\_\_\_ Between \$10,000 and \$20,000  
\_\_\_\_\_ Greater than \$20,000

This survey was developed by Kansas State University Center for Civic Engagement and is being used with their permission. We thank them for their support of this project. *For more information, please contact Sharon Thornberry, Community Resource Developer, Oregon Food Bank at 800-777-7427 ext. 228, or [sthornberry@oregonfoodbank.org](mailto:sthornberry@oregonfoodbank.org).*



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# ADDENDUM

## Purpose

Much has happened in the year since the completion of the Linn County Community Food Assessment (CFA) in July, 2011. This addendum provides an update on efforts and activities resulting from that assessment, as well as updates on efforts related to community projects to strengthen local food systems.

## Introduction

The Linn County CFA described our community food system, identifying for the first time the diverse and creative food and agriculture activities being implemented by a variety of organizations and individuals. The assessment revealed that most of the work is being done in isolation. If they are to create an effective local food system, they need to organize, collaborate and improve communication. The presence of a community food organizer to research, connect and facilitate networking activities in Linn County enabled several collaborations.

FEAST (Food Education Agricultural Solutions Together) events in East Linn County and Albany led to the creation of community foods groups. These groups are taking the action plans they created to make changes in their communities. CFA results also guided food organizing activities for the county this year.

Food literacy was identified as a major focal point. While Corvallis and Eugene have had numerous local food events and forums to address hunger in recent years, few have been organized in Linn County. The lack of awareness and education concerning local foods is a key barrier to its increased consumption.

Food security and hunger were also identified as key targets. An organizing effort in Albany between a restaurant owner and a local food pantry led to the creation of a “backpack program” that offers low-income students food for the weekend. Ten Rivers Food Web’s (TRFW) That’s My Farmer SNAP Incentive Program proved a \$6 match of SNAP (Oregon Trail Card) benefits at four farmers’ markets in Linn County as an effective way to improve diets and support local farmers.

The Benton County Health Department and Oregon Food Bank are assessing ways to include Linn County’s Latino population in community food systems efforts .

In 2011, Western University of Health Sciences opened a new College of Osteopathic Medicine of the Pacific-Northwest (COMP-Northwest) opened its doors in Lebanon and admitted the first cohort of 107 medical students. Though small in number compared to the overall population of Lebanon, the influx of young, civic-minded students will positively affect community food efforts in the town. Several students, all members of the Global Health Group, have organized drop sites for local Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs and are offering cooking demonstrations at the Lebanon Farmers’ Market.

The CFAs conducted in Linn, Benton and Lincoln counties helped Ten Rivers Food Web secure a Meyer Memorial Trust Community Food Systems Implementation Grant in 2011. Just four organizations statewide received this grant. The grant is being used to further recommendations resulting from the CFAs in all three counties.

# ADDENDUM

## Agriculture in Linn County



For the last two seasons, farmers have faced particularly challenging growing conditions characterized by long, cold, and rainy springs. In 2012, dry spells followed by major floods further complicated matters. For farmers transitioning to dry land beans, the shorter time between planting and drying enough for harvest threatened the viability of their crops.

Though demand for local and organic foods is increasing nationwide, small farmers face continued economic hardships. One of the first certified organic farms in Linn County, Nature's Fountain Farm, wasn't able to plant in 2012 due to financial shortcomings. New farms, including those profiled in the CFA, are entering the second phase of farm business development, which means they are trying to earn a profit instead of just breaking even.

Linn County continues to be a hub for beginning and young farmers. In 2011 and 2012 two new direct-market farms were started in the county: Pitchfork & Crow in Lebanon and Oregon Country Farm in Brownsville. While demand for locally grown food is growing in Linn County, most of these new farmers look to bigger markets in Salem, Portland, Corvallis and Eugene. In the future, many hope to reduce their transportation costs by selling more within Linn County.



# ADDENDUM

## **Incorporating Large Scale, Non-Food Crop Farms**

The Southern Willamette Valley Bean and Grain Project, profiled in the Linn County CFA, is an example of effective collaboration amongst farmers. Successes stemming from the project include transitioning over 1,000 acres of land from conventionally-grown grass seed to organically-grown edible beans and grains, plus opening two grain milling operations. This project is important to the local food movement in Linn County.

### *Fall Fill Your Pantry Market*

In 2010, the Southern Willamette Valley Bean & Grain Project and Ten Rivers Food Web hosted the first Fill Your Pantry market at A2R Farms in Benton County. The goal was to encourage customers to fill their pantries for winter with locally grown beans, grains and flour at reduced prices. Selling bulk quantities right after harvest also helped farmers clear storage space and avoid having to sell their products bit by bit at weekly farmers' markets. The market was so successful organizers decided to make it an annual event and help other communities do likewise.

In 2011, Greenwillow Grains and Willamette Seed & Grain hosted the 2nd Annual Fill Your Pantry Market in Shedd. Over 450 people attended the four-hour event, which featured 24 local vendors. Vendors offered storage root crops, garlic, honey, frozen meat, apples, cider, goat cheese, gluten-free crackers, artisan breads and, of course, dried beans and grains.

Low-income families were encouraged to attend the Fill Your Pantry Market and Rebecca Landis of Corvallis-Albany Farmers' Markets provided service to Oregon Trail card users. Linn County gleaners served as volunteers throughout the day in return for donations from many of the vendors.

In 2011, Greenwillow Grains purchased and refurbished the historic Methodist Church in Shedd where the 2011 Fill Your Pantry Market was held. Greenwillow and Willamette Seed & Grain hope to use the building for some of their processing operations, to host meetings, and offer educational and other community events.

## *Spring Bean & Grain Meeting*

Each year, the Southern Willamette Valley Bean and Grain Project holds meetings in the spring and fall. The spring meeting usually focuses on planting times and preparing for the coming year. At the fall meeting plant varieties are assessed.

At the 2012 spring meeting, world-renowned wheat breeder Steve Jones was guest speaker. As director of Washington State University's new Northwestern Washington Research and Extension Center in Mount Vernon, Washington, Jones brought valuable expertise and insights to the group. Speaking briefly in round-table fashion, he said that wheat is grown in northern states all over the country and the world so it shouldn't be difficult to breed types to meet local dietary needs and ensure local food sovereignty and security. Jones discussed perennial wheat, amino acid content of grains, breeding for function and quality, blending grains when milling, and the successes and struggles he and his colleagues have experienced in Washington's Skagit Valley.

The farmers at the event have been discussing, testing and successfully reviving the cultivation of dry beans and grains in this area. But, Jones' words were encouraging to the younger farmers still facing challenges, especially with dry beans.

Jones stressed the importance the Northwestern Washington Research and Extension Center puts on participatory research and breeding done with—not imposed on—growers. Unlike traditional plant breeding programs, where yield and protein levels are the focus, Jones and his team also concentrate on functionality, baking potential and, ultimately, flavor.

A baker himself, Jones seemed proud to describe a Seattle baker's characterization of bread made from Skagit Valley wheat as "spicy with a hint of chocolate" and concluded it was "the best bread I've tasted in 35 years." Such descriptors are exactly what Jones and the farmers he works with strive for.

That enthusiasm has led to another exciting development in Mount Vernon: The Bread Lab. This facility, which opened in 2012, houses high-tech milling, baking, and malting equipment, allowing plant breeders and bakers to work side by side.

# ADDENDUM

Asked if other areas of the country are reviving staple food crops such as beans and grains and the necessary processing infrastructure, Jones mentioned groups in northern California, Vermont, Maine, North Carolina, and Alaska. However, Jones said he thinks the Southern Willamette Valley Bean and Grain Project farmers are ahead of most other areas in figuring out how to grow dry beans.

## Strengthening Farmer Networks

As part of the assessment process, growers, especially young and beginning farmers, emphasized the need for collaboration and networking. The equipment needed to run a diverse farm operation is expensive and often hard to find. The concept of a shared “tool shed” was discussed, but complications such as everyone needing the equipment simultaneously, responsibility for damages, and logistics of transporting equipment limited its feasibility.

Social networking is especially important to young and beginning farmers, many of whom are transplants to Linn County. Informal networks offer support and a chance to share best practices, advice, and ideas. A formal organization, featuring monthly meetings, would not suit this crowd. Instead, seasonal potlucks were organized to bring growers together, tour each others’ farms and create a supportive farm community in Linn County.

## *East Linn Growers Network*

During the CFA interview, Elanor O’Brien of Persephone Farm in Lebanon expressed interest in connecting with more growers in Linn County. Although Persephone Farm has been in Lebanon for over 20 years, Elanor didn’t know many of the new farmers in her area. She hosted the first east Linn County growers’ potluck at Persephone Farm in the fall of 2011.

Elanor and her partner, Jeff Falen, gave their guests a tour of their farm and showed off their favorite pieces of equipment. Matt and Cyndee of Matt-Cyn Farms in Albany were especially interested in Persephone’s pedal-assisted picking machine. Brad, a recent transplant from Multnomah County interested in raising goats, joined other young farmers including Andrew and Sarah from Open Oak Farm and Marco and Kay from Sunset Lane Farm. Jeff and Carrie of Pitchfork and Crow, one of the newer farms in Linn County, were former interns at Persephone Farm.

A potluck dinner is a quintessential way of creating community, especially among farmers. During dinner, the farmers shared stories, analyzed soil tests, compared equipment needs and planned future get-togethers. It was the beginning of the informal east Linn County growers’ network.



# OREGON COUNTRY FARM

Oregon Country Farm is not a new farm. Rod and Sarah Fielder bought and moved onto the 15 acres east of Brownsville in the early 1970s. However, a pair of young farm partners makes the farm feel as if in its first year.

A few years ago Rod's heart stopped. This incident understandably "scared the heck" out of the Fielders. It was immediately clear to the octogenarians that they would need help meeting the demands of their hazelnut and apple orchards and grapes. So, they started looking for young farmers to partner with them.

As Rod explains, we "let the universe know [they were looking for young farmers], and the universe takes care of us." Through an improbable series of interactions they found their partners when their daughter in San Francisco, bumped into a friend at a grocery store in Half Moon Bay, who's daughter happened to be looking to farm. Serah Mead and Gabriel Woytek, both in their mid-20s, immediately packed their bags and headed to Brownsville, eager to begin anew.

Each fall, the Fielders sold their entire hazelnut harvest to a wholesaler. However, Serah and Gabriel plan to save some of the harvest to create value-added products like nut butters and roasted seasoned hazelnuts. They've also expanded the vegetable garden and sell produce at the Brownsville Farmers' Market. Eventually they'd like to open up a farm stand where they'll sell fresh produce, dilly beans, sauerkraut, jams and jellies. Rod jokingly laments that Serah and Gabriel were brought here so Rod and Sarah would have less work, but with all their ideas and energy it's turned out to be the opposite!

That's good news for Oregon Country Farm. This partnership means the farm will not only continue functioning, but is poised to be a real asset to the local food system. Since 1974, the median age for farmers in the United States has risen each agricultural census, to the current median age of 57. The number of principle owners under the age of 34 has dropped by 20% since 1984. Land prices and the capital needed to start a farm make it nearly impossible for beginning farmers to get a start. Many who grew up on farms now choose off-farm careers. Successful partnerships, such as that on Oregon Country Farm between youthful farmers and aging landowners, would change the future of farming.



# ADDENDUM

In the spring of 2012, Open Oak Farm hosted the second east Linn County growers network potluck. Although weather and darkness prohibited a farm tour, this was not the first visit to the farm for most attending. Farmers brought dishes featuring their own winter vegetables, small-scale grains, and farm-raised meat. Conversations ranged from pricing of produce to the viability of the Linn County farmers' markets in Lebanon, Sweet Home and Brownsville. The farmers discussed coordinating sales to avoid over-saturating farmers' markets within the county.

## Scale Appropriate Food Processing

Processing has long been a concern of community food system advocates in the area. The once prolific food-processing infrastructure that made Linn County the hub of the Willamette Valley is mostly gone. The lack of scale-appropriate processing is seen as a limiting factor to the development of local and regional food systems. Ideally, there would be facilities available to smaller farmers and secondary micro-entrepreneurial food businesses.

### *Food Business Incubator Plan*

In 2010, the Willamette Food Processing Consortium was formed as a partnership among Oregon Cascades West Council of Governments, Albany-Millersburg Economic Development Corporation, Linn Benton Community College's Small Business Development Center, and the Business Enterprise Center. Their goal is to facilitate the development and growth of food processing businesses in the Linn-Benton area. In 2011, they completed a needs assessment for food businesses in the two counties which resulted in the Incubator Implementation Plan.

The consortium chose to focus on food businesses as an economic development opportunity for many reasons: the area's rich history of diversified agriculture; the potential for improving conditions in economically-distressed Linn County; the shift towards regional food processing due to high transportation costs; growth in viniculture, specialty foods, and direct marketing; the opportunity to capture food dollars that currently leak out of the region; the presence of major food processors (e.g. Oregon Freeze Dry and National Frozen Foods); and unstable market conditions in the grass seed

industry which have forced farmers to consider alternative crops.

The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy of the Cascades West Economic Development District identified lack of start-up space, cost of equipment, and limited technical expertise as barriers to new businesses. The Incubator Implementation Plan considers all that is required for emerging small food processing businesses to succeed in the Linn-Benton area.

The group identified the need for an incubator facility in the Linn-Benton area specializing in food processing. They consider Albany the ideal location for such a facility because of transportation connections and an existing food processing support base, such as Oregon Freeze Dry, National Frozen Foods and SnoTemp. They expect that there will be enough customers and entrepreneurs to support a food processing incubation program by 2015-2017. However, they recommend developing the facility soon, as establishment of such facilities typically requires two to three years. Since a self-supporting incubation program is highly unlikely, they conclude that the incubator must be part of a broader program or have alternative funding streams (memberships, co-pack services, or its own product line). The full potential of the incubator plan would be realized five to eight years after its doors open. Additional funding would be needed to sustain operation and management.

Components in an ideal incubator facility would include: shared use food processing space with multiple processing areas and a storefront. Small business owners would also need business and technical training, resources for product and process quality assurance. An estimated minimum requirement for the facility is 10,000 square feet for food production space, plus 3,000 square feet for a storefront.

The key objectives of the incubator facility would be to increase the success and growth rate of new businesses by helping food entrepreneurs create business plans and train them in capital acquisition, market research, and quality control and efficiency. The group aims to add value to agricultural products grown in the Willamette Valley and spin the businesses off to privately-held spaces in Linn or Benton counties.

# ADDENDUM

Currently, the Willamette Food Processing Consortium is looking for an organization to take the lead on their Incubator Implementation Plan and to garner support from public officials.

## *Meat Processing*

Several direct market ranchers interviewed for the Linn County CFA said that the current processing capacity is far below their needs. Ranchers often have to wait up to two months to get their animals slaughtered, which means longer feeding at considerable expense and delayed fulfillment of contracts or orders.

Reed Anderson, fifth-generation owner of Anderson Ranches Lamb in Brownsville, sees the situation differently. His ranch is one of the biggest suppliers of farm-direct lamb in the state. He says if you want to talk about processing, you first have to look at production. A major facility would require 500 lambs a week and, Anderson says, there isn't such volume in the Willamette Valley. For seven months of the year, existing capacity is adequate. The problem lies more in seasonal processing needs.

Currently, major processing facilities are in Greeley, Colorado and Dixon, California, both centrally located to process year-round.

In the Willamette Valley, there are three smaller USDA facilities within two hours' drive of most ranchers - in Mohawk, Angel and Canby. These facilities are overwhelmed from time to time, but, rather than build a larger facility, a better option would be to increase the capacity of current processors.

Most people don't realize that the majority of lambs raised in the Willamette Valley are not owned by local ranchers. Grazing sheep play a vital role for grass seed farmers by prohibiting grass from going to seed prematurely. Anderson says this makes the Willamette Valley the cheapest place to feed lambs, because of the large grass seed industry here. Rather than raise sheep themselves, landowners lease their fields to lamb producers. The processors in Colorado and California own many of the lambs raised in the Willamette Valley. That explains why so many lambs are shipped out of state to be processed.

Another concern is that the demand for meat is declining. According to Anderson, current meat production is lower than in the 1950s. Anderson attributes this to worldwide oversupply and consumer health concerns. A willingness to pay more for meat would allow growers to produce less but get the same return. It would also diminish the environmental stress caused by raising many animals in a small space.







## ANDERSON RANCHES LAMB

If you see local lamb for sale in a Linn or Benton county grocery store, there's a good chance it came from Anderson Ranches Lamb in Brownsville. Following strict certified handling guidelines, Anderson raises lambs fed only grass. His lambs are never given grains, hormones or antibiotics. While the majority of lambs raised in the Willamette Valley are transported to California or Colorado to be processed, Anderson prefers Mohawk Valley Meat, a USDA-certified facility which is only 30-minutes' drive from his ranch in Springfield. This way, he can support another local business while ensuring the health, safety and well being of his animals.

Anderson's original marketing strategy focused solely on restaurants, but recently he has added online and grocery store sales. This allows him to focus on production, breeding and product quality. While his product is available locally, he also sells nationally. Seattle, Las Vegas and Orlando are his biggest markets and bring him the higher price he requires for the quality he produces. Anderson says the chefs he sells to say the best lamb in the world is produced in the Willamette Valley.

As a member of the Oregon Sheep Growers Association, Anderson and other sheep growers have long entertained the idea of adding processing infrastructure to the area. While Anderson agrees that there are times when he's thought a new facility would be useful, in his opinion, the better alternative would be expanding upon existing facilities. There are also a surprising number of sheep fed locally but not owned locally. Anderson says the Willamette Valley is both "the cheapest place to feed sheep" and is recognized by chefs he sells to as "producing the best lamb in the world." Perhaps Willamette Valley consumers can start demanding more local lamb. Either way, Anderson says he will stick with his local processor and continue raising high quality and humanely raised meat.



# ADDENDUM

## Supporting Beginning Farmers

New and young farmers taking root in Linn County have special needs. Ten Rivers Food Web invites new farmers to take part in community events intended to bring farmers and consumers together for panel discussions, movies, tastings and food celebrations. Oregon State University Extension's Small Farms Program hosts a six-part Growing Farms Workshop focused on farmers with less than five years of experience in starting a new farm or transitioning to a new specialty. Topics cover strategic planning, operations, farm finance, marketing strategies, production and managing liability. These courses are usually offered once a year and will eventually be available online.

## Strengthening Markets for Local Food

During the Linn County CFA, producers and community food advocates recognized the need to distinguish their products from those within the conventional food system claiming to be local or natural. A branding campaign similar to that for the Local 6 Connection in Corvallis was discussed.

While a branding campaign would be useful in Linn County, it would also be costly. As an alternative, Ten Rivers Food Web staff members are preparing outreach materials describing the regional food system and why and how to purchase products from local producers. The hope is that increased education about local farmers, ranchers and fishermen will expand their consumer base.

## Farm Direct Bill (HB 2336)

*Commentary by Rebecca Landis, President of the Oregon Farmers Market Assoc.*

During the Linn County CFA, producers and community food advocates recognized the need to distinguish their products from those within the conventional food system claiming to be local or natural. A branding campaign similar to that for the Local 6 Connection in Corvallis was discussed.

While a branding campaign would be useful in Linn County, it would also be costly. As an alternative, Ten Rivers Food Web staff members are preparing outreach materials describ-

ing the regional food system and why and how to purchase products from local producers. The hope is that increased education about local farmers, ranchers and fishermen will expand their consumer base.

### *Farmers' Markets = Not Food Establishments*

Passage of the Farm Direct Bill ensures that farmers' markets and other retail spaces (such as a church bazaars or Community Supported Agriculture drop sites) where farm-direct marketing occurs are not required to be licensed as food establishments. It clearly defines which products require a license and which do not. Most farmers will choose to be inspected for licensing, which broadens their marketing opportunities.

The bill includes provisions that ease regulation for certain low-risk food processing such as jams and pickles. The exempt canned goods all must meet federal standards for acidity, including batch-by-batch testing. No low-acid foods are permitted to be sold without a license. The bill does not exempt more higher-risk products, such as meat and dairy, from licensing requirements.

### *Limited Exemption for Producer Processed*

Eased regulation in the bill does not apply to restaurant or institutional sales, and certain processed products (things in bottles, jars and aseptic packages) are limited to \$20,000 in sales per year. Once farmers decide to cross those lines, they must obtain a license or hire a co-processor, such as Sweet Creek in Elmira.

What does this legislation mean for small farms?

Farmers who produce more berries than they can sell fresh can experiment by producing small amounts of preserves before committing too many resources. Cabbage growers might experiment by transforming it into sauerkraut or kimchi. Other things that farmers will be allowed to try next season include drying their own fruits, vegetables and herbs and drying and cracking nuts. Farmers who once composted leftover fresh herbs after each farmers' market can now put them in a food dryer to sell as dried herbs.

# ADDENDUM

Oregon's old definition of processing is so inclusive that farmers' children cracking and selling walnuts from a single tree would be turned away from the farmers' market unless the nuts were cracked in a licensed facility. Occasionally ODA inspectors would question whether curing garlic or potatoes should require a license. Drying farm produce as a part of post-harvest handling is now clearly legal, so these items will no longer be questioned.

The Farm Direct Bill expands on a policy dating from the 1970s in which ODA granted a licensing waiver for beekeepers with 20 or fewer hives. Regardless of the number of hives, honey with no added ingredients will no longer require a processing license if it is direct marketed or consigned subject to the bill's limitations. (Apiary registration is still required for five or more colonies.) Eggs, previously exempt from licensing if sold directly to consumers, still cannot be consigned unless the producer has an egg handler license. Both honey and eggs fall under the new labeling requirements, including a version of the no-inspection disclaimer.

Grains and legumes can be dried and processed in a number of ways without a license, which will encourage existing efforts to increase small-scale production. These provisions include whole, hulled, crushed or ground grains, legumes and seeds, plus parched or roasted grains – if of a type customarily cooked before consumption. The fact that these foods are generally cooked was key to this policy change, as was the fact that activities like threshing were not considered processing if they are done with a combine in the field rather than in a home kitchen.

## *Consignment Distinguished from Resale*

The bill defines consignment as selling for another agricultural producer in the same or adjoining county without representing the products as your own. Consigned products must be clearly labeled with the name and address of the grower, who retains full responsibility up to the point of purchase. Consignment is limited to a shorter list of products than non-consignment farm direct sales.

## *Conclusion*

Christy Anderson Brekken, an Oregon State University graduate student in agricultural economics, expects that food sold under these exemptions will constitute a very small portion of food sold and consumed in Oregon. But, she notes, "the exemptions will make a big difference to the farm-direct businesses in our state and help them to grow into more diverse, stable and profitable businesses, in addition to providing a greater variety of farm-direct foods to consumers year-round."

# ADDENDUM

## Community Food Efforts



The Linn County CFA laid out the basis for community food efforts in the county. People in Linn County and surrounding areas were astounded to learn about the many successful community food efforts happening in places they'd never expect. For example, Planting Seeds of Change has grown exponentially as they expand school gardens throughout Lebanon and Sweet Home. Other schools, including Central Linn Elementary in Halsey, have been inspired to start their own gardens as well. The community gardens in both Lebanon and Albany have to turn people away as plots sell out early in the season.

Increasingly, consumers want to know where their food comes from. In Linn County, some have become more proactive in promoting this kind of food literacy by organizing action groups and hosting public events, often in partnership with Ten Rivers Food Web.

Numerous community food events are planned throughout the county, smaller farmers' markets are garnering more community support, and schools and hospitals are increasingly interested in promoting healthy, locally produced food at their facilities.



# ADDENDUM

## Increase Food Literacy

With its focus on community food systems development, Ten Rivers Food Web (TRFW) plays an integral role in the food movement in the region. A non-profit organization with multiple partnerships, successful community programs, and a wealth of food systems development experience among current and previous board members, advisors and staff, TRFW is in a unique position to create large-scale change in the regional food system.

Since its inception, the majority of TRFW's work has been focused in and around Corvallis, primarily because it started as a volunteer-run organization with most board members living in the Corvallis area. Since 2010, that has changed, thanks in part to a partnership with Oregon Food Bank and the University of Oregon's RARE/AmeriCorps program. In 2010 these organizations hired two AmeriCorps staff members who completed Community Food Assessments for Linn and Lincoln counties. Their community organizing work expanded TRFW's reach into more rural areas of Linn and Lincoln counties.

The Linn County CFA indicated that increased food literacy in Linn county would strengthen food systems work there. FEAST (Food Education Agricultural Solutions Together), the community foods organizing event facilitated by the Oregon Food Bank, helped connect efforts throughout the county.

### *TRFW-East Linn*

Oregon Food Bank's Lebanon FEAST, held in February of 2010, was the first FEAST in Linn County. Ten months later, participants reconvened to discuss how to move forward on projects they identified. With the help of Ten Rivers Food Web's Linn County Community Food Organizer, the group began meeting monthly to discuss school gardens, promoting farmers' markets and how to better support Linn County growers. Ten Rivers Food Web invited this group (composed of volunteers from Lebanon and Sweet Home) to become the first TRFW Chapter. The group saw this as a mutually beneficial relationship and became known as the Ten Rivers Food Web East Linn County Chapter (TRFW-EL).

This was a major step forward for several reasons. First, it provided the small group support from a registered 501(c)3 non-profit organization, which allows them to seek grant funding and receive donations. Second, it enabled volunteers to work with TRFW staff, board members and advisors with expertise in grant writing, community food systems and hosting public events. Third, the group brought energy and a local perspective to TRFW, expanding the organization's ability to serve a large, tri-county community.

The first TRFW-EL chapter meetings focused on idea sharing and planning, but lacked a clear definition of the group's role. Big ideas like bringing back processors, increasing food production or changing American food culture overnight were too daunting for the nascent group. Through regular meetings, though, the need for community events focused on local food, nutrition and supporting farmers emerged. Food Literacy is a central TRFW program area and seemed a natural fit for this group. When the group learned that the inaugural National Food Day was taking place on October 24, 2011 and organizers encouraged communities to create events in their own towns, they decided to host a food fair in Lebanon.

### *Lebanon Food Day 2011*

Over 200 people attended the 2-hour Food Day event at the Lebanon Public Library in October 2011. The Lebanon food system was brought into focus by those participating: area farmers (The Mushroomery, Sunflower Hill Farm, Fraga Farm Goat Cheese, and Open Oak Farm), Adaptive Seeds, OSU Extension Family and Community Health, OSU Extension Master Gardeners, a physician and nutritionist, the Lebanon Gleaners, a local USDA-certified chicken processor, Planting Seeds of Change, and the Lebanon-based Farm to School program. Besides foods to sample, there was a demonstration of easy-to-prepare healthy meals with unfamiliar, locally grown ingredients.

The event was a huge success. Attendees expressed their appreciation that an event like this was held in their community. Lebanon residents who attended had an opportunity to learn about local farms, home gardening, commu-

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nity gardens, nutrition, gleaning, seasonal home cooking and other food issues.

## *Feeding Ourselves: Panel discussion on local food production in Linn County*

The success of the Food Day event highlighted the need for more in-depth discussions about the local food system. As a next step, the TRFW-EL Chapter partnered with the Linn County League of Women Voters to host a panel discussion titled “Feeding Ourselves: The Whys and Hows of Local Food Production in Linn County.”

About 70 people attended the event, during which four community food experts spoke. First was George Pugh, owner of Pugh Seed Farms, who spoke about the history of agriculture in the Willamette Valley and how grass seed has become such an integral part of commercial agriculture in Linn County. Harry MacCormack, owner of Sunbow Farm and co-founder of Oregon Tilth, has over 40 years of experience in community food systems. He discussed how cheap oil affects food security. Dr. Robyn Dreibelbis took the discussion from farming to health. Nutrition is first on her list of “Five No-Brainer Rules to Health and Wellness.” She is concerned about the effect of marketing on food choices and how highly processed

even some organic foods are. Finally, Clint Lindsey of A2R Farm and Willamette Seed & Grain discussed the economics of local and regional agriculture, especially local bean and grain production.

After presentations, panelists answered questions concerning how to avoid mass-marketed, unhealthy foods; the financial viability of local food farmers; the practical acreage for growing local beans and grains; how grass seed farmers can include food crops in their business; equipment-sharing farm cooperatives; and how many genetically modified (GM) crops are grown in this area. Comments from attendees were overwhelmingly positive. They requested more programs on subjects such as GM crops, school gardens, gardening workshops, transition to organic, and cooking. The TRFW-EL Chapter intends to host another panel discussion, based on these suggestions, in 2013.



Lebanon Food Day 2011



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Feeding Ourselves Panel Discussion

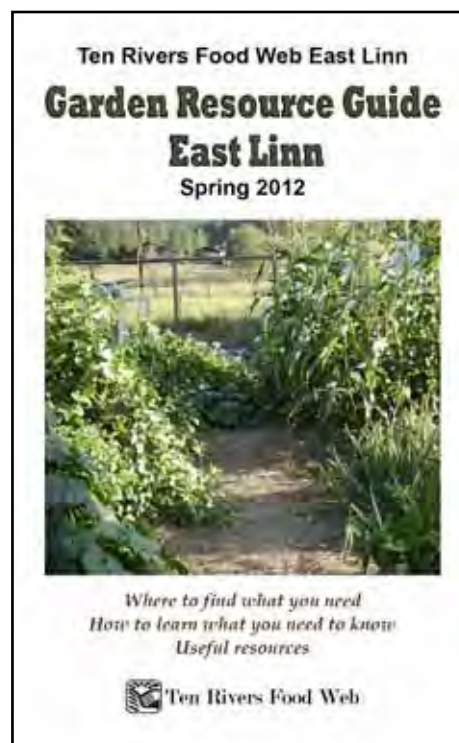
## *East Linn County Garden Resource Guide*

The TRFW-EL Chapter also created the East Linn County Garden Resource Guide in 2012. The guide features resources for home gardeners growing vegetables, fruits, herbs, mushrooms, or raising poultry and other livestock. Emphasis is primarily on Linn and Benton county family businesses and sustainable resources. Where local resources are limited, those in nearby counties, greater Oregon, or beyond are included.

Contents are organized under: Gardening Knowledge (lectures, classes, workshops, online resources, periodicals and books), Community Gardens, Getting What You Need (feed stores, hardware stores, garden centers, soil, amendments, plant starts, farmers' markets, seeds, seed exchanges, herbs, mushrooms, fruit trees and more), Services (soil testing, tractor repairs and sales, and permaculture and sustainable gardening); Sharing the Bounty (where to donate excess produce); Preserving Your Harvest (canning and food storage, and making cheese, beer and wine); Poultry (books, supplies, chicks and processors); Other Stock (butcher/processors) and Beekeeping.

The guide received positive response and demand required a second printing. Three hundred guides were printed and distributed throughout Linn County, thanks to generous donations from local businesses and TRFW-EL Chapter members.

Next year, TRFW-EL plans to include more businesses throughout Linn County to create a county-wide garden resource guide.





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## *Albany Community Foods Group*

In late November of 2011, several attendees from the March 2011 Albany FEAST reconvened to follow up with their action plans to improve the Albany food system. They focused on ensuring local farmers are supported, making locally grown food more available to consumers, and improving food literacy in their community. They decided to meet monthly in order to maintain the momentum started by FEAST, and called themselves the Albany Community Foods Group.

## *Albany Food Film Series*

To achieve the group's many goals, they chose to focus on public events to improve food literacy. Taking cues from the Ten Rivers Food Web Lincoln County Chapter, they decided to host film series focused on food at the Albany Public Library. Local businesses, organizations and individuals generously contributed funds to help cover fees for the public showings. The film series featured *Ingredients*, *FRESH: The Movie*, *The Greenhorns*, and *FoodStamped*. Attendance for the films averaged around 25. After each film, a host led an audience discussion.

The first film, *Ingredients*, "reveals the people behind the movement to bring good food back to the table and health back to our communities" (Optic Nerve Productions) and features several Willamette Valley farmers.

The second film, *FRESH: The Movie*, "celebrates the farmers, thinkers, and business people across America who are re-inventing our food system." (Ana Sofia Joanes) After the screening, Dawn Jensen-Nobile, a professional nutritionist, discussed the differences in nutritional content between local food and those shipped long-distances.

*The Greenhorns* explores the lives of America's young farmers to encourage those considering a career in agriculture. Though no young farmers attended the showing, several audience members became interested in leasing land to young farmers and were excited that young people are interested in farming.

The final film, *FoodStamped*, is an informative and humorous documentary film following a couple as they attempt to eat a healthy, well-balanced diet on a food stamp budget. Rebecca Landis, manager of the Corvallis-Albany Farmers' Market, hosted the discussion. She dispelled myths about food stamp

purchases, such as what people use their food stamps to buy, and said Oregon Trail Card users can purchase vegetable plant starts and seeds with their benefits.

## **Promoting Farmers' Markets**

Farmers' markets in small communities struggle to attract enough farms to bring in customers, and enough customers to attract farms. The Sweet Home Farmers Market benefited from growing community support in 2012. Ten Rivers Food Web helped the market find a key supporter in its site host: Thriftway (see Sweet Home Thriftway insert). Jan Neilson, market manager, also secured a grant from the Sweet Home Economic Development Group. The money was used to create posters and signs for street corners announcing the market, to purchase a propane burner for on-site breakfast burrito sales, and to help pay for musicians who play at the market. All of these initiatives have helped draw customers to the market.

In Lebanon, Ten Rivers Food Web staff and TRFW-EL Chapter members met with members of Partners for Progress to launch the That's My Farmer program in 2012. Nancy Kirks, of Samaritan Health Service's East Linn County Community Health Improvement Partnership (CHIP), applied for funding to purchase supplies to offer services at the farmers' market including bi-monthly cooking demonstrations and The Lemonade Project, a fundraiser designed by Katie McNeil at the Newport Farmers' Market. Volunteers sell lemonade at the market with all proceeds funding That's My Farmer SNAP incentives. The cooking demonstrations are being run by students from the College of Osteopathic Medicine of the Pacific Northwest.

Efforts to better serve low-income individuals at the market (see Barriers to Accessing Food below), added to the survivability of farmers' markets in Lebanon and Sweet Home.

As owners of an independent grocery store, the McDonald Family understands the importance of supporting their community. When customers ask for a special ingredient, or suggest ways to improve the store, the McDonalds must listen and respond if they hope to stay in business. The 2008 downturn in the economy hit Sweet Home hard and took a toll on business. The McDonalds are confident, though, because they know if they support their community, their community will support them.

That is why Thriftway has long been supportive of the Sweet Home Farmers' Market. In fact, the market happens in the Thriftway parking lot and the McDonalds provide electricity. In 2012, they decided to go even further with support. When volunteer Market Manager Jan Neilson commented on the difficulty of hauling market equipment back and forth to her house every week, the McDonalds offered storage space in their warehouse. They also gave the market space at the store entrance to offer samples and point people to the market. Even more generous was manager Chad McDonald's offer of free advertising on the highly-valued front of their weekly mailer, which goes to 8,000 people.

In the first markets of 2012, vendors reported increased sales and interest in the market. While myriad factors contribute to that, Thriftway's generous support was key. This partnership is a great example of the effectiveness of collaboration within community food efforts.

## SWEET HOME THRIFTWAY







## CENTRAL LINN TEACHING GARDEN

In 2011, the Calapooia Food Alliance partnered with Central Linn Elementary School to start a demonstration garden at the school called The Teaching Garden. The purpose was to provide a place where children could learn math, science and other subjects while also learning the basics of gardening and healthy eating. In its first year, the garden featured eight beds with kale, tomatoes, and salad greens.

In 2012, thanks to support from Northwest Youth Corps AmeriCorps member Kathleen Beeson, the garden expanded to include three raised beds, a cold frame, worm bin, gravel pathways, shed, and hay bales planted with peas and potatoes. Mr. Koehnen's second grade class planted garlic in the fall and watched it grow through the winter. The garden also served as inspiration for students writing poetry and creating other art projects. The Central Linn English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) class contributed plant tags in Spanish. Beeson also organized and taught a Friday garden class when students weren't in school (Central Linn runs on a 4-day school week) to help tend the garden by planting, weeding, and watering.

Local businesses and community members have supported the garden: Wilco provided a significant grant; Adaptive Seeds provided seeds and plant starts; J&S Supply provided hog fences for bean trellis; Samurai Garden Supply donated supplies including greenhouse plastic; and a local mill owner donated the raised beds, cold frame and worm bin. Volunteers from Halsey and Brownsville helped at several work parties and will take care of the garden through the summer. Several teachers plan to use the garden in the 2012-13 school year.



# ADDENDUM

## Improve Local Food Directory

A major community resource on Ten Rivers Food Web's website is the Local Food Directory, an interactive resource for consumers to find local farmers, ranchers, fishers and other food producers in Linn, Benton and Lincoln counties. The directory is undergoing a major update in the summer of 2012.

The Local Food Directory was initiated by volunteers who scoured every known resource and farmers' market to identify growers in the area. Since then, it has been updated by the growers themselves, decreasing the work required to maintain the directory and offering growers flexibility in seasonal listings. As a result, each listing is slightly different in the amount of information offered.

The Google Map function shows a farm's exact location if an address is included. However, some choose not to share their home address, thus limiting information in comparison to others and giving the impression the map isn't functioning correctly.

There is consumer interest in a printed version of the Directory, or a similar local food guide. Willamette Farm and Food Coalition produces a guide in Lane County, which features some growers in Linn and Benton counties. However, the high cost of printing, the need for frequent updates, and paper waste are concerns.

## Assist Institutional Buyers

The Linn County Community Food Assessment (CFA) process identified several institutional purchasers, such as school districts, hospitals, universities, interested in sourcing more food from local producers. However, several logistical challenges prohibit such purchases. Most institutions use large-scale food distributors like Food Services of America, Sysco, Sedexo, because they offer low prices and access to a wide-range of products through one account. These distributors require contracts and mandate that a certain percentage of customers' total purchases come from them. This limits institutional purchasers' ability to source directly from local producers.

The wholesale model of selling to large-scale distributors does not make economic sense for most local farms, especially small-scale, highly-diversified ones, because it's difficult for small farms to supply the large quantities distributors require, especially at the wholesale price. While most of these farmers choose to sell direct through farmers' markets or Community Supported Agriculture programs (CSAs), some would like the security of a large contract from a school or hospital in their area.

To facilitate more local purchases from institutions, Ten Rivers Food Web is exploring the potential for a regional facility to aggregate products from numerous small farmers. Aggre-

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gating would eliminate an increase in delivery traffic, which institutions such as Oregon State University want to avoid. In this model, farmers can offer the amount and price that best suits them economically and institutions receive diverse products from one account, as with larger distributors. Ten Rivers Food Web is working with Oregon State University to design a system to benefit institutional purchasers while expanding markets for local food producers.

## Supporting Rural Grocery Stores

As part of the Community Food Assessment process, Ten Rivers Food Web (TRFW) conducted a survey of rural grocery store owners in Linn and Lincoln counties. These, along with a survey completed by the Benton County Health Department, identified many challenges and potential opportunities for rural grocery stores.

Nearly all store owners said stocking fresh produce is a challenge. Since many rural stores are the only shopping option for some residents, customers may lack access to fresh produce. Store owners are concerned about the short shelf life of fresh produce and apparent lack of demand. This can result in a Catch-22: if stores don't offer fresh produce, consumers will not expect or demand it. The Linn and Benton County Health Departments are identifying one store in each county to pilot a project to increase the availability of healthy foods.

In 2013, as part of a Healthy Communities grant from the State of Oregon, the health departments will evaluate the survey data. They then plan to present the information to store owners and their communities, increase media coverage of rural grocery store issues, and research and advocate for local policies benefiting rural grocery store owners and consumers.

## Conclusion

The future of community food efforts in Linn County is bright. The TRFW-EL Chapter offered a popular Winter Garden Planning Workshop in Lebanon in the summer of 2012 and is planning more food literacy events including a Food Preservation Fair and the second annual Lebanon Food Day Food Fair in the fall. Continued assessment of institutional purchaser needs will bring farmers closer to a new market and increase access to locally-produced foods. The county health department will focus on how to better support rural grocery stores and increase access to healthy foods in rural communities.

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## Barriers to Accessing Food



Lebanon Farmers' Market That's My Farmer SNAP Incentive

Despite a bounty of food and community programs focused on it, many people in Linn County still have a hard time accessing enough food. The Linn County CFA includes statistics indicating a high need for federal nutrition services and illustrates how young people and seniors face special hurdles. Profiles of successful programs show how a community can pull together to help those in need with respect.

Over the last year, community groups have organized to address opportunities identified in the assessment. Oregon Food Bank, the Benton County Health Department, and other organizations are working to increase opportunities for Latino community members to participate in community food systems projects. A Spanish language tour of the Albany Farmers' Market will be offered in the summer of 2012. The That's My Farmer SNAP Incentive Program has expanded to the Lebanon Farmers' Market, and students at one Albany school took food home for the weekends. Ten Rivers Food Web is working with farmers' markets and physicians to develop an innovative preventative medicine program focused on fresh fruits and vegetables.



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## Engaging with Latino Community

In 2011, the Benton County Health Department and Oregon Food Bank hosted a Spanish FEAST in Corvallis. While many interested in connecting with the Latino community showed up, few Latino community members came. This prompted a reevaluation of how food organizations can work to connect with and meet the needs of Latino community members. Oregon Food Bank, OSU Extension, and the Benton County Health Department are assessing this issue with the goal to develop a program for community foods organizing that better serves the needs of the Latino community.

## Increased SNAP Outreach

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, formerly known as food stamps and distributed in Oregon through the Oregon Trail Card, come from a major federal nutrition services program for low-income individuals and families. Throughout Oregon and nationally, many SNAP-eligible individuals do not utilize the program. In 2010, 84% of Linn County SNAP-eligible individuals received SNAP benefits, making it one of the most effective counties in Oregon. Still, an extra three million dollars would enter the county if all SNAP benefits were redeemed. This untapped economic resource could greatly benefit food security efforts in Linn County. Improved outreach to SNAP-eligible individuals and expansion of the That's My Farmer SNAP Incentive Program were seen as key opportunities for low-income citizens to increase access to food, according to the CFA process.

### *That's My Farmer SNAP Incentive Update*

In 2011, Ten Rivers Food Web, in partnership with farmers' markets throughout Linn, Benton and Lincoln counties, launched the That's My Farmer SNAP Incentive Program. This program aims to improve low-income people's access to fresh food by offering a \$6 match of SNAP benefits spent at farmers' markets. A dinner featuring Albany chef Matt Bennett in April of 2011 supported the program in Albany, Brownsville, and Sweet Home throughout the farmers' market season.

In the program's first year in Albany, the number of SNAP transactions increased by 86% over 2010 levels with a total value of SNAP purchases increasing by 50%. In Sweet Home, transactions increased by 160% from 2010, while total value of SNAP purchases decreased by 11%. In Brownsville, there was no baseline data for the number of SNAP transactions. However, value of SNAP purchases decreased by 14% after implementation of the incentive program. In both Sweet Home and Brownsville, the decrease in SNAP purchases may be attributed to the fact that since the program only matches \$6, many customers reduced their spending to the minimum required for a match. In total, the That's My Farmer program matched \$2,502 SNAP dollars in Linn County in the 2011 summer season.

To expand the program in 2012, Ten Rivers Food Web brought on AmeriCorps VISTA volunteer Katy Giombolini to serve as the That's My Farmer Outreach Coordinator. Her job was to expand outreach of the program, recruit new farmers' markets as partners, provide nutrition education, and to encourage SNAP-eligible people to sign up for their benefits.

Ten Rivers Food Web and Partners for Progress began efforts to bring the That's My Farmer SNAP Incentive Program to the Lebanon Farmers' Market in the fall of 2011. The Lebanon Farmers' Market did not accept SNAP benefits in previous years. Since 20% of the people in Linn County use SNAP benefits, this meant farmers were missing out on potential customers. With support from several community partners, the program began operating there in 2012.

Giombolini and Chef Bennett organized a Sea to Table dinner in February of 2012 featuring sustainable Oregon seafood. The dinner raised over \$5,000 to fund incentives in Albany, Brownsville, Lebanon and Sweet Home.

Based on preliminary data for the first half of the 2012 season at the Albany Farmers' Market, transactions are way up from 77 transactions totalling \$1,285 by this date in 2011 to 167 transactions with a value of \$2,536.

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The That's My Farmer Outreach Coordinator organized several farmers' market shopping tours for low-income consumers, seniors, and Latino families to bring new customers to the markets and demonstrate ways to buy nutritious food on a budget. She has also worked to increase senior participation in SNAP by partnering with the Oregon Cascades West Council of Governments Senior and Disability Services Department through the Healthy Aging Coalition. They've identified senior nutrition and food security as a priority.

## **Improve Distribution of Food Assistance in Rural Linn County**

The central Linn County communities of Halsey and Shedd were identified as communities with limited access to emergency food resources. The area's gleaning group, Central Valley Harvesters, had no fixed location, making storage and distribution of gleaned food a challenge.

### *Revival of Central Valley Harvesters*

Chris Queener became coordinator for the Central Valley Harvesters in 2012. Fellow gleaner Pattie Looper, who has experience working with the Harrisburg Gleaners, is helping rescue the Central Valley Gleaners from a period of debt, uncertainty and inactivity. The group's first goal is to secure a location for food distribution. They've identified Brownsville as a central location. Other goals include developing a functional record keeping system, providing more healthy food options, sharing information on storing gleaned food, providing reimbursement for volunteers who drive to gleans, and developing a budget. To accomplish these goals they've solicited support from several community organizations.

So far the Brownsville Community Foundation has enabled the Harvesters to keep their bill payment to Linn Benton Food Share current and provide funding for members who can't afford their dues. Calapooia Food Alliance gave funds to help reimburse members who drive to gleans. In return, the Harvesters will help at the Brownsville Community Garden and distribute excess produce to their members. While this support helps, the Harvesters still have difficulty paying basic bills and rely heavily on donations from individuals.

## **Promote Improved Access to Emergency food for Youth**

Childhood hunger is a real concern in Linn County. High unemployment, poverty, and food insecurity rates mean a lack of access to healthful food by many. Stories from school administrators reveal heartbreaking details of students who show up hungry and tell school nurses they didn't get enough to eat over the weekend. The need for food on weekends and during school breaks has led communities to provide backpacks of food sent home with students. Programs in Halsey, Jefferson and Sweet Home were detailed in the Linn County CFA. However, no school in Linn County's biggest school district, Albany 8J, was offered a backpack program. School district staff noted a serious need for such a program in schools throughout Albany.

# SNACKS FOR PACKS



When Janel Bennett, co-owner of Sybaris restaurant, learned about the severity of child hunger in her community, she decided to act. A meeting was set up with Bennett, TRFW, and Annette Hobbs of FISH of Albany (one of the Albany food banks) to discuss the problem. To address it, they created the Albany Snacks for Packs program.

Bennett received funding for backpacks from a generous restaurant patron. Hobbs leveraged her volunteers and knowledge of food procurement. TRFW staff researched other backpack programs, best practices, and how to start a program. Thus, resources and networks were pooled to create an efficient and effective community food program.

In the spring of 2012, FISH of Albany started distributing Snacks for Packs to students at Waverly Elementary School. In the beginning, six students received anywhere from 6-8 snacks for the weekend. By the end of the school year, that number increased to 23 students. School counselors selected students according to need and whether they were receiving free or reduced-priced lunches. At Central Elementary School, 19 students received Snacks for Packs over spring break.

In the fall of 2012, FISH hopes to expand the program to include every elementary school in Albany, and eventually all middle schools and high schools. They've already received three small grants from Selmet, Albany Rotary Club and Fred Meyer to fund the expansion to grade schools.



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## *That's My Farmer Prescription Program*

Dr. Kyle Homertgen, an Osteopathic family practitioner at the Albany HeartSpring Wellness Center, spends most of his time talking about food as preventative medicine. He makes sure his patients know the farms nearest their homes so they can buy the freshest and healthiest local food. Dr. Homertgen shared his interest in the local food movement and how food can be a tool for individual and public health during the March 2011 FEAST in Albany.

Later that year, when Dr. Homertgen saw a New York Times article describing a program in Boston where doctors prescribe fruits and vegetables to their patients, he asked TRFW staff to help start a similar program in Linn County.

Ten Rivers Food Web is designing a program to provide patients who are at risk for diet-related diseases prescriptions for fruits and vegetables from their doctors. The prescriptions, redeemable at local farmers' markets, will amount to \$1 per day per person, throughout the farmers' market season. Doctors will track changes in health indicators, such as Body Mass Index (BMI), blood-glucose levels, and waist circumference. Participants will track qualitative measures, such as how they feel physically with diet changes, if they feel better connected to their community by shopping at the farmers' market, what it means to know where their food comes from, and challenges they face preparing unfamiliar foods.

TRFW hopes to expand nutrition education and cooking classes to Linn County using the Share Our Strength Cooking Matters curriculum to ensure participants success prepar-

ing health meals, understand the nutritional values of foods and how to prepare unfamiliar ones. They will also increase their farmers' market shopping tours to teach participants how to shop wisely on a limited budget. TRFW staff continue to fine-tune the program, recruit new doctors and clinics, and are seeking funding for the project through health organizations or sponsors.

## **Conclusion**

Although community efforts such as the That's My Farmer SNAP Incentive program and backpack programs are starting or expanding throughout the county, there is still great need. The success of the That's My Farmer SNAP Incentive is contingent on market attendance by low-income people and sustainable funding. As the program expands, so too must fundraising efforts.

As reported in the Linn County CFA, concerns accompany backpack programs, such as the nutritional value of the food provided, the effect on family dynamics and the stigma attached to being singled out for help at school. However, it is clear that by providing food for the weekends, fewer children go hungry when school is out of session.

Many barriers to accessing food have been identified. However, constant attention and engagement with those involved will ensure community efforts are adequate and appropriate. Greater collaboration and networking among groups fighting hunger and food insecurity will foster partnerships and programs and thus maintain the momentum of current activities.