

2014 Benton County Community Food Assessment

Ten Rivers Food Web

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Introduction

Benton County has an active food community with a long history. There are many initiatives and opportunities to continue farm and industry growth and increase access to healthy food. The following is a Community Food Assessment (CFA) completed in the summer of 2014 that largely expands on the CFA conducted by Ten Rivers Food Web in 2011. The CFAs are modeled after the Oregon Food Bank county food assessment guidelines.

Food System

The Food System refers to the variety of steps in which food gets “from farm to fork” . It is a network comprised of all of the ways food is produced, processed, stored, distributed, marketed, and sold, It also includes methods of waste management and recycling. This system determines the availability, quality, cost, and environmental impact of food in a community.

According to the University of California’s Sustainable Agriculture and Research Program,

“a sustainable community food system is a collaborative network that integrates sustainable food production, processing, distribution, consumption and waste management in order to enhance the environmental, economic and social health of a particular place. Farmers, consumers and communities partner to create a more locally based, self-reliant food economy” (UC Sustainable Agriculture and Research and Education Program).

Due to the direct link between the quality of food consumed in a community and the health of that community, Community Food Assessments are performed around the United States in order to assess the quality of local food systems.

Community Food Assessment

A Community Food Assessment is a participatory process of assessing the assets, strengths, challenges, weaknesses, and opportunities that exist within a local food system. The Benton County Community Food Assessment aims to inspire and spur creative community actions that will fill current gaps within the food system that prevent every person and family from achieving food security through the assessment process and sharing results with the community. Food security is the state in which “all people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations FAO, 2008).

In 2006, Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO) completed a Community Food Assessment entitled *From Our Own Soil: A Community Food Assessment, Benton*

County, Oregon, and Its Foodshed. This report focused on the areas surrounding Corvallis, and examined the successes and challenges of small growers, detailed the barriers to food access for low-income Benton County residents, and made recommendations on how communities of faith can contribute to food security and broaden their response to hunger to include supporting local family farms. The questions that guided their research were two issues that are of great concern to the citizens of Benton County:

What successes and challenges do Benton County small growers experience?

What are the barriers to food access for low-income residents of Benton County?

Ten Rivers Food Web

Ten Rivers Food Web (TRFW) is a non-profit organization that provides strategic leadership to build a robust and resilient food system in the Mid-Willamette Valley. TRFW envisions a foodshed that is hearty in the face of ecological and economic pressures, with at least 30% of the food consumed in Linn, Benton, and Lincoln counties being locally grown, processed, and distributed. TRFW's mission is "Ten Rivers Food Web builds stronger communities in Linn, Benton, and Lincoln counties by nourishing a local food system to ensure healthy food for all".

The organization evolved as a grassroots effort, first emerging as the Food System Coalition in early 2004. The Coalition was started by community members concerned about the status of the local food system who connected at a community forum on hunger that took place at the Corvallis Odd Fellowship Hall. They organized the Benton County Food Summit in December 2004, gathering approximately 100 people who met to talk about local food security and lay the foundation for forming a food security council. The organization gained non-profit status in 2006 and chose the name Ten Rivers Food Web to better describe the broad area of the foodshed, a three-county area encompassing ten major rivers (Alsea, Yaquina, Siletz, Long Tom, Marys, Luckiamute, Willamette, North and South Santiam, Yachats, and Calapooia) that are seen from Mary's Peak, from the coast to the Cascades. Since then, TRFW has facilitated connections within this tri-county area and collaborated with a myriad of community partners to plan events that heighten awareness and create connections between food producers and consumers. They developed a database of over 250 farms to further facilitate these connections, hosted a wide variety of food literacy events and food fairs, including the Chefs' Show Off. TRFW adopted the That's My Farmer program from Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon to further support low-income access to healthy, affordable local food.

Benton County

Benton County is located in the Mid-Willamette Valley, which sits between the Cascades and the Coast Range in Oregon. Originally inhabited by the Klickitat Indians, who rented the area from the Calapooia Indians for use as a hunting ground, Benton County was established by American settlers in 1847 (Knezevich, 1979). Benton County currently encompasses 679 square miles and is the third smallest of the 36 counties in Oregon. Its eastern border is the Willamette River and its western border is in the Coast Range Mountains. Approximately one-half of this land is forested, while another one-third is agricultural. Benton County is home to Oregon State University (OSU), which was deemed the State Agricultural College in 1868. OSU continues to be a huge resource for the Benton County food system, the State of Oregon, and the nation.

While residents still face some of the health problems that are epidemic in the United States today, overall Benton County ranks number one in health outcomes in the state of Oregon (County Health Rankings, 2011). In 2008, 23.6% of Benton County adults were classified as obese, which is 11.3% lower than the national average, and 6.9% of adults were diagnosed with diabetes, which is 1.5% lower than the national average (CDC).

Agriculture and Food Production

Agricultural History

Benton County has a rich agricultural and food processing history, demonstrating the vast potential that its land holds for feeding residents.

“In the mid to late 1800s, the economy of rural Benton County was supported by grain, cattle, lumber and orchard products, many of which were stored, processed, traded or sold in Corvallis markets” (Gallagher, 1993, p. 39).

Encouraged by the Gold Rush, wheat was a dominant crop in the area, with “[four] grain warehouses on the Willamette River in Corvallis, which were used mainly for storing and shipping wheat” (Gallagher, 1993, p.39). Corvallis was a major port, with steamboats lining up along the river to ship wheat and other agricultural products around the state of Oregon and as far away as California, Hawaii, and China (Fagan, 1885). In the late 1800s, two flour mills in Corvallis each ground between 100 and 130 barrels of flour per day, with considerable amounts going to foreign markets (Phinney, 1942). Fruit orchards were also abundant in Benton County, with apples and plums being very important crops. Several fruit drying companies, including a company focused exclusively on prunes, opened in Corvallis in the late 1800s, along with a cider factory (City of Corvallis, 2014).

However, while wheat yields diminished by 1890 and the Willamette Valley lost its prominence as a major wheat producing area to eastern Oregon, Corvallis remained a principle flour milling city until the turn of the century (Dicken & Dicken, 1979). Benton County farmers began to diversify, turning their attention to forage and specialty crops such as fruits, vegetables, flax, and hops (Dicken & Dicken, 1979, p.117). Some of the largest hop yards in the Willamette Valley grew up around Corvallis in the early part of the 1900s (Blue Ribbon County: Corvallis and Benton County, Oregon, 1912, p.31).

Dairy also took on greater importance as wheat yields declined. Farmers had to bring their cream to Albany before the Corvallis Creamery was established in 1897(Corvallis Gazette, 1897). By 1910, dairying was the largest local agricultural industry. The Corvallis Creamery produced 2,800,000 pounds of butter and ice cream in 1911, which was consumed by residents of the Pacific Northwest (Blue Ribbon County: Corvallis and Benton County, Oregon, 1912, p.13). Dairy continued to flourish in the 1930s, with four dairies operating in Corvallis (Gallagher, 1993, p. 198).

In addition, poultry breeding was a huge industry during the first half of the twentieth century. By 1930, Corvallis was the largest shipper of baby chicks in the State of Oregon (Corvallis Chamber of Commerce, 1930, p.3).

Around the time of World War II, many small farms located in the Coast Range foothills were converted to timber production. Between 1959 and 1964, the number of farms in Benton County decreased from 845 to 808, while the average farm size increased from 229 acres to 242 acres. During this period, a major shift occurred from owner-operated farms to lessee-operated farms, and part-time farming increased. By 1975, half of Benton County cropland was farmed under rental agreements (Knezevich, 1975).

Processing

In 1919 a vegetable cannery opened on current day 9th Street in Corvallis, providing processing facilities for local fruit and vegetable growers. A large produce warehouse was built in 1922. Canning was an important industry during the 1920s and 1930s and food processing continued to be a major industry in Benton County until the 1970s. The cannery passed through numerous owners over the years, and several other supporting businesses grew up around it, including a chicken processing plant, a cold storage warehouse, a frozen food distributor, a fruit preservation company, and a locally owned grocery store. (City of Corvallis, 2014)

Highlights

Women Farmers

OSU Extension hosts the Willamette Women's Farm Network (WWFN) to educate and support women farmers. This network provides workshops on issues ranging from tractor driving and safety to soil test interpretation. The WWFN is a community of women from the central and southern Willamette Valley of Oregon who, through exchanging knowledge and discussing farm and ranch-related issues, hope to increase the self-sufficiency of women by promoting responsibility, profitability, and conservation of the land. In Benton County the number of women farmers who were principle farm operators has slightly decreased from 228 in 2007 to 216 in 2012. However, the total number of acreage on farms with a principle female operator has increase from 9,846 in 2007 to 13,828. (Ag Census 2012)

Income Diversification

It can be difficult to compete with large scale industrial farming in the market and to procure affordable land which causes many farmers to rely heavily on off-farm jobs in order to survive. Subsequently, there is less time for on-farm work, marketing their business, and networking to break into new markets. In order to build sustainable businesses, many Benton County farms have found ways to diversify their income streams.

- Agritourism is one method of on-farm income diversification that has been successful in Benton County. For example, Leaping Lamb Farm Stay in Alsea hosts people from all over the world and the Thyme Garden in Alsea hosts a festival every Mother's Day. Midway Farms in North Albany also participates in agritourism by hosting summer camps for children, which teach them about where their food comes from.
- Gathering Together Farm in Philomath added a restaurant to their farm stand, which not only allows them to add value to their produce, but also brings more customers to the farm stand.
- Other Benton County farmers teach on-farm workshops for both hobbyists and professionals. Topics can range from gardening to seed production to beekeeping.

Vegetable Seed Growers

Benton County is home to a number of specialty seed producers, including several large organic seed growers. These companies are important to area farmers because the plants grown from these seeds are known to thrive in climate conditions specific to the region. Buying seeds that were grown locally can help farmers produce a more reliable crop, because the plants grown from these seeds are already acclimated to the local area. Wild Garden Seeds, which leases land from Gathering Together Farm is working towards developing a local organic seed network.

“Gathering Together Farm and Wild Garden Seed are working with farmers, researchers, and other seed companies to co-create an organic seed system that provides quality seed, varietal diversity, and superior genetics” (Gathering Together Farm, 2014).

Strong Farmer Networking

Granges, a venue that was traditionally used to build community amongst farmers and rural citizens, are being revived throughout Oregon. According to the 2010 Ag Census, the majority of farmers in the U.S. are over 55 years of age. In Oregon, the movement to encourage the younger population to pursue farming is being led by Marys River Grange in Philomath, which was taken over by young farmers in the fall of 2009 when the hall was at risk of being sold due to low membership. The average member age has since been lowered from 65 to 35. Marys River Grange members are organizing young farmer mixers to provide opportunities for mutual support and coordination amongst the young small farmer community. There is a need for the continued rebuilding of connections, networks, and support systems that traditionally made rural communities strong, particularly because many of these new and young farmers did not grow up on farms or in farming communities. (Marys River Grange, 2014)

Areas for Advancement

Changing Climate

Weather is always a challenge that farmers must face, but increasing unpredictability of the climate in Benton County is presenting a number of new challenges for farmers. Increased rain early in the season can delay planting. Plants wilt in greenhouses while farmers wait for an opportunity to plant them. Cooler summers are also increasingly difficult for vintners and hazelnut growers. Seed growers have trouble with harvesting and drying their crops, if early fall rains dampen fields. Long-season and late-harvested crops are especially difficult because they will not ripen if the season is too cool or if rain increases too early in the fall. Rather than drying, bean plants will re-sprout, preventing combine harvesting and forcing some farmers to undertake the labor-intensive process of harvesting acres of beans by hand.

Capital

Farmers are having difficulty raising capital to buy their own land and purchase more farm equipment or infrastructure (buildings, fencing, power sources, water, etc...). Farming is seen as high risk, which results in difficulty getting farm loans, particularly small loans for infrastructure. Typically, banks consider farm loans only on a very large scale, which leaves small-scale farmers with fewer loan options. Additionally, in order to sell crops in certain markets, such as schools and other institutions, farms are often required to have insurance including general liability insurance. However, small and mid-sized farmers often have trouble finding insurance companies that are willing to

cover them. Sixty percent of Benton County farmers reported a net loss in 2012 (USDA Census, 2012). New farmers, in particular, have difficulty coming up with capital to build infrastructure that is required to start a business.

As fuel prices rise, production costs for many farmers increase, particularly medium- and large- scale farms that rely on machines for tilling, planting, and harvesting. This puts a further strain on already limited capital. Some Benton County farmers have converted their tractors to run on electricity or have expressed a desire to convert their farm equipment to bio-diesel when the capital becomes available.

Land Acquisition

Land acquisition is another challenge faced by farmers. High land values in Benton County can make the cost of buying a farm prohibitive for many new farmers; as a result many farmers lease land. However, the cost to rent farmland in Benton County is below average for the State of Oregon.

Certification

USDA Organic Certification provides documentation that a farm has complied with the federal regulations that allows them to sell, label, and market farm products as organic. Farms that are going through the three-year transition process for organic certification face serious financial challenges. During the transition process, farmers purchase new infrastructure and utilizing the labor and soil amendments required to grow crops in accordance with certified-organic practices, they are only able to sell those crops at conventional prices. Buyers and consumers do not understand that these transitional crops have qualities similar to organic crops, and that they may warrant a higher price. It can be difficult to convince consumers that they should pay a higher premium for these products. Educating consumers is challenging, but farmers' markets provide opportunities for farmers to directly interact with consumers and teach them about the value of their product.

PROFILE: Oregon Tilth

Oregon Tilth is a nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing and encouraging biologically sound and socially equitable agriculture through education, research, advocacy, and certification. Oregon Tilth emerged from Regional Tilth in the early 1980's and has since developed and published the *Standards and Guidelines for Oregon Tilth Certified Organically Grown*. Oregon Tilth is one of the largest certifiers in the country and nearly half of the certified operators are farmers and the other half processors, giving Oregon Tilth a diverse perspective on the entire supply chain, from seed to table and farm to fork.

“Nearly 30 years after its inception, Oregon Tilth publishes the quarterly magazine *In Good Tilth*, co-sponsors the Organicology conference, collaborates with university researchers on sustainable agriculture, supports member chapters, and delivers educational programs linking urban and rural people in the support of a sustainable-and sustaining-course for agriculture and the planet. Oregon Tilth looks forward to continuing to contribute to our collective journey toward sustainability, as we all continue to be defined and refined in the coming years.” (Oregon Tilth, 2014)

Policies and Regulations

The federal Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) was passed by Congress in 2011.

<http://www.fda.gov/Food/GuidanceRegulation/FSMA/>

FSMA contains regulations intended to protect consumers against food borne illnesses. FSMA was passed with the Tester-Hagen Amendment; this amendment helps to protect small farms from having to comply with extraneous regulation. However, the new regulations may impact mid-size farms that are just over the threshold, as these farms will be burdened by the increased regulatory oversight FSMA requires. (U.S. Food and Drug Administration, 2014)

Internships and Labor

According to the Economic Research Service, 21- 25% of all Benton County farmers in 2007 qualified as beginning farmers. Young and beginning farmers often devote a lot of time to off-farm jobs and/or live very frugally. Many of these farmers did not grow up on farms so they must acquire skills through education, internships, and apprenticeships. The OSU Extension Small Farms Program has identified new and beginning farmer education as a top program priority and Rogue Farm Corps promotes the training and mentoring of the next generation of farmers.

“Rogue Farm Corps (RFC) was founded in 2003 by a community of Southern Oregon farmers that recognized the need for beginning farmer training and shared a commitment to mentoring the next generation. In 2006, RFC received a federal grant to develop an innovative curriculum that is the basis of our FarmsNext program. RFC is the only organization in Oregon with a structured, entry-level education and training program for beginning farmers. In 2012, RFC began collaborating with a group of farmers and farm advocates in the Southern Willamette Valley who were interested in creating a farm internship program in their community. Together, we launched the Southern Willamette Chapter of RFC, which will host its first on-farm internships in the 2014 growing season.” (Rogue Farm Core, 2014)

Post-Harvest Handling and Processing Infrastructure

Processing

Grains

As farmers transition to growing new grain, seed, and legume crops, they often lack the equipment needed to harvest or clean their crops. In Benton County’s damp climate,

drying seeds, beans, and grains can be challenging. Grass seed farms dry their product on the field before harvesting. However, this does not work for many other seed, bean, and grain crops. Small farms often have difficulty finding enough space to spread out the product, especially in an area with adequate air circulation and heat needed to dry the product.

The Southern Willamette Valley Bean and Grain Project “is a step by step strategy to rebuild the local food system by increasing the quantity and diversity of the food crops that are grown in the Willamette Valley. The Bean and Grain Project also seeks to evaluate deficiencies in the food system infrastructure, build buyer/seller relationships for locally grown food, and compile information on organic and sustainable agricultural practices specific to this region. As the name of the project states, central to the task is stimulating the cultivation and local marketing of organically grown staple crops like beans and grains to provide a foundation for year-round food resources in the Willamette Valley. Go to Bean and Grain Project Report One to read the first chapter in the story of this work.” (Bean and Grain Project 2104)

Meat Processing

There are currently no processing facilities in Benton County. The county is not large enough in population, land size, or production output to accommodate a large processing industry. Farmers utilize processing facilities in nearby areas including Linn County, Portland, Salem, and Newport. There are some exemptions for poultry, for example, poultry producers who sell directly from the farm to the customer do not have to provide a poultry processing building (Oregon.gov). It is more productive to focus processing in the region rather than the county. Both producers and processors need to have a seat at the table in order to best meet their needs and the needs of their communities. (Gwin, 2014)

PROFILE: National Niche Meat Processor Assistance Network

Lauren Gwin, Co-Director of OSU Center for Community Food Systems and Small Farms, co-founded and coordinates the National Niche Meat Processor Assistance Network, which works to expand small-scale meat processing through enabling small- and mid-scale meat processing facilities to increase or acquire better equipment, capacity, and inspection status. The National Niche Meat Processor Assistance Network does this through developing and distributing resources for meat processors and creating a network of support.

Dairy Processing

With a generous \$860,000 endowment from Paul G. and Sandra A. Arbuthnot, the OSU licensed dairy plant has been remodeled and opened in 2011 as the Arbuthnot Dairy

Center. The endowment funds a faculty member to develop education and outreach programs for OSU students and small dairy food processors in Oregon, and allows the Center to provide students with internships. There is a focus on sustainability, on-farm value-added products, and family farms. The Center provides outreach programs that target Oregon's small dairy processors and artisan dairy manufacturers, and also includes larger dairy processors. Academic classes are restricted to food science and dairy option students because of the popularity of cheese classes, but Extension Service classes will also be offered.

On-farm Processing

Oregon's Farm Direct Bill, a huge victory for Oregon's small farmers, became effective on January 1, 2012. This bill provides regulatory exemptions for farmers who are processing small amounts of value-added products (products whose value has been increased by special manufacturing, processing or marketing) for direct sale to consumers. Provided the farmer has grown the primary ingredient, the farmer can participate in low-risk processing; sales must only be made directly from the farmer to the consumer, and must be less than \$20,000 per year. These exemptions provide regulatory certainty for farmers who are processing small batches of pickles; jams, preserves and syrups; dried fruits, vegetables, and herbs; cured potatoes and garlic; and dried, cracked nuts.

The bill also allows local grain, legume and seed producers to hull, crush, grind, and roast their products, as long as the products are customarily cooked before consumption. This helps buckwheat growers whose products are more likely to be bought by consumers when ground into flour or roasted to make kasha.

PROFILE: Oregon Mobile Poultry Processing

"Oregon Mobile Poultry Processing, owned by Rachel Prickett of Provenance Farm and Brian Schack of Schack Farm, is based in Philomath and is the first licensed mobile poultry slaughter business in the state. OMPP comes to customers' farms and does the processing for them, for a per-head cost. Because OMPP is state licensed and operates under the federal 20,000 bird/year exemption, farmers can sell birds at farmers' markets, in CSAs, and to restaurants and retail outlets within Oregon." (Oregon State University Extension, 2014)

Storage

Large grass seed farms have invested in expensive infrastructure designed for growing grass seed, and while some of this can be used in the transition to growing grains, storage needs are very different. Storage is a key component for these farms due to the level of distributor expectations. In order for crops to remain food grade, storage

must keep grains free of pests and protect it from moisture. An entire bushel of grain can be ruined if it gets the slightest bit damp, destroying the farmer's profits and making the crop then only suitable for use as animal feed. Despite a desire to keep their crops within the Willamette Valley, some farms are forced to sell to markets in Portland because they do not have proper long-term storage.

Community Access and Assets

Local farmers, fishermen, small processors, and food entrepreneurs produce a wide variety of raw and value-added food products that are available in a variety of local markets. Consumers can access these local foods in many venues - from farmer's markets to retail stores, from CSAs to online purchasing, from restaurants to farm stands—all of which make eating locally increasingly more convenient.

Demand for Local Foods

It has been estimated that only seven percent of the food consumed in Benton County is produced locally. However, there is not a reliable method of estimating the amount of local food that is being consumed. Farmers have previously identified a lack of demand for their products as a challenge, stating that “most people do not know the value of buying locally,” and “many people have little understanding of the difficulties and costs faced by local farmers” (EMO, 2006). However, after conducting consumer surveys and holding numerous conversations with Benton county residents and meetings with retail and institutional buyers, it is apparent that there is significant demand for local food and the demand is increasing. In the past ten years, Benton County farm-direct sales to consumers have increased dramatically, ahead of increases in surrounding counties.

Between 1997 and 2002, farm-direct sales in Benton County increased by more than 300%. This means there were \$27.13 per capita of farm direct sales in 2007 (United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service, 2014).

Year	Number of Farms	Sales
1997	138	\$443,000
2002	180	\$1,889,00
2007	195	\$2,202,000

In August 2014, 31 participants completed a local food perceptions survey at Corvallis' Grocery Outlet. According to the survey, 87% of shoppers purchase food that is labeled as local or locally produced. The most common answer (39%) for what area the participant considered food could be produced in to be local was a 100-mile radius of their home. The next most common answer (26%) was within the Pacific Northwest region of the United States. Sixty five percent of survey participants indicated that there

would purchase more locally produced foods if they were labeled as local. Participants also indicated that they perceive locally produced foods as being more expensive (84%), but 68% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that when locally produced foods cost a little more, they are worth the extra cost. Eighty four percent of participants agreed or strongly agreed that locally produced foods are fresher, 90% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that buying locally produced foods greatly contributes to the local economy, and 87% agreed or strongly agreed that buying locally produced foods supports local farmers.

According to OSU researchers Garry Stephenson and Larry Lev, the key to increasing markets for local products is to make them more available and convenient for consumers. “Local farm products are not being sold in many of the places that people are used to accessing food. This ‘lack of access’ is a greater barrier to many consumers than price.” Their late 1990s study found that consumers in Corvallis and Albany were interested in supporting local agriculture, but the inconvenience required to buy local products was a deterrent. (Stephenson, G.O., Lev, L., Brewer, L., 2007). However, since this study was completed, options for local food purchasing have increased, at least in Corvallis. While this increase in convenience has helped to increase local food purchasing, price is still a barrier. In 2006, 62% of Corvallis congregational members believed locally grown food to be more expensive (EMO, 2006). This indicates that while local food is becoming increasingly available in Benton County, there is still a perception that locally produced food is more expensive than conventional food that one can buy at supermarkets.

The Corvallis Sustainability Coalition Food Action Team partnered with the First Alternative Natural Foods Co-Op in 2009 to use Local 6 as the definition of local for their local food marketing campaign. Food defined as local is produced or grown within a 100 mile radius of Corvallis, including Benton, Lane, Lincoln, Linn, Marion, and Polk counties. The focus of the Corvallis Local 6 Connection is on educating the public about the benefits of and ways to access local food, while also promoting connections between producers, buyers, and eaters. Much of their efforts have been focused on a citywide marketing campaign to promote restaurants that source locally.

At the Corvallis Sustainability Coalition’s annual Town Hall Meeting in March 2011, more than 350 people voted on a sustainability initiative for the coming year; the creation of a “Buy Local First” campaign won by a landslide. At the 2014 Town Hall Meeting, the “Eat 40% Local” campaign received more votes than two other campaign challenge ideas. This demonstrates that the Corvallis community is supportive of local businesses and that community members understand the value of building a local

economy. The Corvallis Sustainability Coalition is currently working with the Corvallis Independent Business Alliance (CIBA) to develop and launch the campaign.

The League of Women Voters of Corvallis conducted a study on local food in 2009 and, in 2010, adopted the position that is supportive of local food. The League will encourage and advocate for policy that is favorable for the production of local food and the ability for all people to access that food, as well as help to educate about local food issues.

The City of Corvallis local government has become increasingly supportive of policies that support production and consumption of locally produced foods. In an effort to strengthen access to and availability of locally produced food and community gardens via policy, ordinance, and land development code changes, the Corvallis City Council added a Local Food Initiative to its 2011-2012 goals.

Retail Outlets

Supermarkets

Supermarkets are the venue from which most residents buy food. In Benton County, supermarkets are concentrated in Corvallis. Some of these chain grocery stores, like many throughout the nation, have realized the profitability of using “local” as a marketing technique. While they may source some food locally, they either do not clearly define the term “local” or they have a very broad regional or national definition. “Local” foods are generally not clearly marked. These factors may make it more difficult for consumers to support local farmers because it may be confusing and difficult to determine what is truly local.

The Corvallis Market of Choice store, which is part of the Eugene-based grocery chain, has large photographs of farmers whose faces you may recognize from the farmers’ market. Market of Choice created a large display featuring Poole Family Farm Cherries with large signs indicating where these cherries were from. They also often label their produce with brightly colored signs that show which farm the items are from, like Gathering Together Farms and Richey’s Produce. Market of Choice also creates displays that feature other local items such as grains. Employees are also knowledgeable about which products are local and where they were made.

Natural Grocers, a Colorado-based grocery and supplement store that opened in 2013 in Corvallis, provides customers with a large whiteboard indicating where produce items originated from. However, they do not provide the particular farm and they also do not label individual items, therefore customers must read the whiteboard if they are interested in knowing the “locality” of each item. .

Supermarkets can be a difficult market for local small-scale producers to access. Companies often buy and distribute food on a regional basis, which makes it challenging for local growers to sell to their local grocery retailer without first shipping it to a regional distribution center and then back to the retail store, which is expensive and highly fuel inefficient. Food growers and producers who want to supply food for their neighbors and communities have to seek out alternative markets.

Profile: First Alternative Natural Foods Co-Op is a major, year-round source of locally produced food in Benton County. The Co-Op was founded by 100 community members and students in 1970, and has since opened a second location in Corvallis. Some Benton County residents report traveling more than 25 miles in order to shop at the Co-Op (Summit Consumer Survey). They have cultivated reciprocal long-term relationships with local farmers and food producers for years, before “local” became a trend. Food sources include a range of local growers, from major farms to community members who have an over-productive fruit tree. They encourage new vendors and have a vendor guide, which helps to teach very small and beginning growers and processors about the expectations and legalities that are required to work with a retail establishment. It can be a challenge for buyers to work with inexperienced growers and microprocessors. Consistency and timeliness issues require patience and clarity about expectations for the relationship. The number of local vendors the Co-Op sources from has increased from approximately 1200 in 2007, when the Local 6 program first started, to approximately 1500 at present.

The Co-Op clearly labels the source of produce items, which makes it easier to support local farmers, or to make the choice not to purchase apples from Australia, for example. They also have a transparent definition of local, and clearly mark products that fit that definition, lessening the confusion that consumers often face. The Co-Op joined with the Corvallis Sustainability Coalition in 2009 to work on the Local 6 campaign, which defines “local” as Benton County and the five counties that surround it. Since the program started, sales of Local 6 products have increased from 19% to 25% of total store sales. This impressive increase does not take fresh produce into account because it is too difficult to track. Produce sales comprise roughly 16% of the Co-Op’s total sales and range from 25% locally sourced in the middle of winter to as much as 80% at the height of the growing season.

There is a perception that the Co-Op is too expensive for many people. However, they have programs to help to make local food more affordable, such as giving a 5% discount to low income shoppers on each purchase and the production of a monthly “Budget Bites” pamphlet, which feature cost-effective recipes. More extensive outreach

is needed to help inform community members about this issue and to address this barrier and misconception.

Local Food Marketing

For a discussion of Local 6 Marketing, see Section: Restaurants

Collective marketing strategies benefit farmers because they spread the burden of marketing across multiple farmers, who will generally be overwhelmed managing their farm, let alone adding marketing to the mix. Non-profit groups and community organizations play an important role in collective marketing.

Farmers' markets offer a natural venue for consumer education about the value of buying local products. By displaying nutritional information in stands at the market or by discussing it with customers, farmers can help convince consumers to try new foods and improve their nutrition, while also increasing sales. Providing recipes or samples to go along with unusual foods that consumers may not be familiar with can help to educate and change consumer palettes, thus building a stronger customer base.

Other potential collective marketing strategies include labeling food with "Willamette Valley Grown" or creating point of purchase marketing strategies that help to connect consumers with the people who are growing their food. Examples of these marketing strategies include pictures of the farmers on packages or information about local growers and their practices alongside local items on store shelves. Community education, at the point of purchase, is the next step for increasing local food purchasing in traditional supermarket settings.

Restaurants

There are numerous Corvallis restaurants that source food from local farms. Fifteen restaurants and one bed and breakfast currently participate, and can be identified through Local 6 window stickers. They employ collective marketing strategies such as Local Eats Week in the fall, the summertime Buy Local Breakfast Series, and the recently launched passport program, in which consumers receive a discount after acquiring stamps for purchasing locally sourced menu items at each of 12 participating restaurants. The program also prompts restaurant workers to think about food sources and to learn about which menu items are sourced locally.

Residents of Corvallis who have dietary restrictions, such as gluten or dairy allergies, or are vegetarian or vegan, have many options from which to source safe food. Many local restaurants label menu items that do not contain gluten ingredients and have staff that is knowledgeable and willing to work with patrons with dietary concerns. The Student

Sustainability Initiative at Oregon State University developed a Campus Food Map that shows the food options on campus and nearby Monroe Avenue to help students find meals that meet their dietary preferences and needs. (OSU Student Sustainability Initiative, 2014)

Farmers' Markets

Farmers' markets provide a major marketing outlet for many small farmers and local food producers. Benton County farmers' markets are a real asset and help to build a strong sense of community. Unfortunately the markets are concentrated in Corvallis, which makes access difficult for rural residents, particularly those in the southern part of the county.

The Wednesday Corvallis Farmers' Market was established in 1981 and the Saturday market began in 1991. Both markets are held on the downtown waterfront and currently run from 9:00 am until 1:00 pm from mid-April through mid-November. Season-extension techniques used by some of the farms lead to an incredible selection during seven months of the year, and the twice-a-week Corvallis market increases convenience for people who want to support their local farmers. While the morning time frame may be preferable for many community members, it possibly limits the number of working people and students who are able to shop at the farmers' market, particularly on Wednesdays. On any given Saturday, between 5,000 and 5,500 adults come through the market to shop from 50 regular vendors and additional seasonal producers.. The community table allows any community member to sell excess produce. Live music, educational and informational booths, and cooking demonstrations create a pleasant atmosphere that draws diverse members of the community.

The Wren Community Market, formerly known as the Kings Valley Wren Farm and Artisan Rural Market runs from June 5th until September 25th on Sundays from 12:00 pm until 4:00 pm at the Wren Hall. This market started years ago in Kings Valley, but, due to a dwindling customer-base, the market was moved to its current Wren location to be closer to Highway 20. This market primarily showcases local artisans, but does host several food vendors, including a honey vendor, and features live music. While there is only a limited amount of produce until mid-July, there are two or three produce vendors each week, mostly from the Kings Valley area. The Corvallis Indoor Winter Market fills part of the gap outside of the growing season, running Saturdays from mid-January through early April at the Benton County Fairgrounds. Season extension techniques allow many local farmers to provide fresh produce at this market.

These markets only leave a short two-month gap in the farmers' market season in Benton County. In 2010, two new events emerged in an attempt to fill this gap. In late October 2010, the Southern Willamette Valley Bean and Grain Project, along with Ten Rivers Food Web, organized the first Fill Your Pantry Market. This market provided community members with a chance to stock up on staple crops for the winter. Locally grown beans, grains, seeds, root vegetables, honey, and other storage products were available in bulk, as were five gallon buckets to fill. The event drew an unexpectedly high turnout, with many farmers running out of product. This demonstrates the demand for locally produced grains, beans, and seeds in Benton County and indicates that this event filled a niche that had been missing in prior years. Gross sales in 2014 topped \$20,000 USD, more than double the total from 2013.

In December 2010, Ten Rivers Food Web, in partnership with Slow Food Corvallis, organized the first Terra Madre Day Celebration and Local Food Fair at the Marys River Grange in Philomath. This event filled a need for direct-sale farmers to get a boost during the holiday season, while giving consumers a chance to buy farm direct for their holiday gatherings. This event has continued each year, although was cancelled in 2013 due to snow.

Community Supported Agriculture

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) allows consumers to share with farmers some of the risk that is inherent in farming. A consumer buys a share of a farmer's crop at the beginning of the season and receives weekly boxes of food, which will vary in size depending upon the success of various crops. The CSA model helps farmers get the capital they need at the beginning of the growing season. CSA shares are distributed at various pick up sites around Benton County and beyond. Multiple-farm CSA boxes help small farms and gardeners sell their produce without having to expand. By sharing resources, markets, and the time it takes to manage a CSA, farmers are able to maintain and grow their businesses simultaneously.

In 2012, according to the US Census of Agriculture, there were 35 Benton County farms marketing their products through CSAs, significantly higher than the state average of just over ten farms per county. Benton County is tied with two other counties as having the sixth highest number of CSA farms in Oregon.

PROFILE: Rainshine Family Farm

Rainshine Family Farm, which began in 2008, is one farm that provides a CSA for consumers in Benton County. Located in South Town in Corvallis, Rainshine is able to

provide fresh local produce to an area that is often considered a “food desert.” Rainshine even goes so far as to allow customers to swap out items for fruits and vegetables they prefer and strives to provide CSA members with 10% more than the retail value of their CSA membership.

“We started Rainshine Family Farm in 2008 and dove in head first. We did not have other jobs. We started small with about 1/2 an acre and a small CSA. Previously we had gained farming knowledge by spending 2.5 yrs. apprenticing with 3 different farmers. In our first 3 years we lived in North town and farmed in South town. We longed to be closer to our field and end our timely commute. Finally a neighbor’s rental came up and we moved within walking distance to our crops. We steadily grew in size and added more shares to our CSA as well as some local restaurants. We decided to open a farm stand to offer our veggies to passing neighbors. It was a hit. The neighborhood had been waiting for a reason to gather and be merry. We became that reason.” (Rainshine Family Farm, 2014).

In recent years, the CSA model has expanded beyond farm products. For example, Wild Yeast, a Community Supported Bakery, opened in Corvallis in 2013. Wild Yeast employs the CSA model, with customers buying shares upfront and then receiving a weekly share of bakery items, such as handmade breads made with locally grown organic grains, instead of fruits and vegetables.

Farm Stands, On-farm Sales and U-pick

Farm stands can be a more affordable way for consumers to support local farmers, but it may come at the cost of convenience. Many farms also sell value-added products from other farms and local businesses at their farm stands. These partnerships not only help to create markets for their neighbors, it also adds variety to the farm-stand business, which helps draw more consumers. Gathering Together Farms, Sunbow Farms, and Midway Farms offer examples of farm stand variations. Gathering Together Farm includes a restaurant in their farm stand, which serves to further add value to the products that are grown on the farm. Sunbow Farm sends a weekly produce list out to their email list, off of which consumers can place orders and pick up on the farm. Sunbow Farms also offers a delivery service in Corvallis at least one day per week. Midway Farms has a completely gluten-free farm stand.

U-pick, a marketing strategy that allows consumers to pick or harvest their food on participating farms, is used by fruit growers. U-picks are a fun way for consumers to connect with the source of their food, while also allowing farms to gain added value on fruit that may not be up to the perfect standards required for sale to processors or in

retail environments. Some farmers have said that they wish more consumers would visit their farms to buy directly from them. Despite signage advertising on-farm sales, some farmers feel like consumers hesitate to visit farms. This indicates the need for marketing assistance to farmers.

Grow Your Own

Many Benton County residents, in both urban and rural environments, produce much of their own food. Raising chickens and bee colonies in backyards is not uncommon. The prominence of hobby farming and gardening among residents may affect the market for local farmers.

In 2008 the average food garden in the United States was 600 square feet, which would produce an estimated 300 pounds of fresh produce over the course of the growing season, worth approximately \$600 at in-season market price of \$2 per pound. However, the average spent per household on a garden was \$70, yielding a net return of \$530; an average of five hours per week of work was performed in the garden. (National Gardening Association, 2008). Growing one's own food is a potentially successful way to lower food budgets, but low-income families are often limited in their ability to make that initial \$70 investment required at the beginning of the season or to fit in an extra five hours each week to care for a garden if they are working two jobs and caring for small children, for instance. The investment required in obtaining equipment, water, soil implements, and plants and seeds are restrictive for prospective gardeners on a limited income. There is a definite need to provide assistance for low-income people to make the initial investment that is required to grow their own food. The high number of apartments with limited land available for gardening, particularly in Corvallis, also restrict residents who would like to grow their own food. In 2014, Linn-Benton Food Share distributed over 700 tomato plants to low-income elderly and people with disabilities who are members of the gleaning program. The tomato plants were planted in buckets in order to be grown on patios and decks instead of in traditional gardens.

Many resources exist for Benton County gardeners. One such resource, Seed to Supper, a program through the Oregon Food Bank, provides free comprehensive classes about gardening on a budget. In 2014, Seed to Supper classes were held at three locations in Benton County through Ten Rivers Food Web; these classes provided participants with a free gardening resource guide, seeds, and plant starts, as well as class instruction by multiple Master Gardeners who were available to answer any questions. In 2015, the Seed to Supper program will be incorporated into Oregon State University Extension Service's Master Gardeners program.

The Corvallis Garden Resource Guide is another local home-gardening resource. The guide “makes it easy for gardeners to find what they need, including workshops and publications, neighborhood groups, community gardens, seeds and supplies, produce donation opportunities, and backyard poultry resources.” The guide was created by the Corvallis Sustainability Coalition’s Food Action Team for Gardening. This is a huge resource for gardeners who are new to the area or for residents who are new to gardening, and could easily be emulated in other areas.

There are other groups promoting local gardening. For example, the online Corvallis Garden Forum builds community among gardeners by fostering sharing of ideas and supplies. Growing Organic, a chapter of Ten Rivers Food Web, hosts monthly potlucks with speakers on garden subjects in winter and garden tours in summer and a winter fertilizer sale. The sale allows the club, through small grants, to fund community groups, such as Oregon State University’s Organic Grower’s Club.

Neighborhood gardening groups are another way for home gardeners to build community. At least six of these groups have taken root around Corvallis, more strongly in some neighborhoods than others. These groups build community through potlucks, produce swaps, tool and seed sharing, work and food preservation parties, and bulk buying. Neighbors participating in these groups often help to teach each other through skill and information sharing. Some of these groups, such as the Southtown Harvest And Resource Exchange (SHARE), which recently dissolved, communicate and coordinate their efforts through email listservs and social media groups. The Corvallis Sustainability Coalition Food Action Team Garden Group recently began gathering information about how neighborhoods can better share information, labor, and produce, and where groups like this would be most successful in Corvallis.

In 2012, the Corvallis Sustainability Coalition Food Action Team started the Edible Front Yard Garden Tours. The tours allow community members to tour different areas of Corvallis and view many front yard gardens, as well as hear information from the gardeners themselves and ask questions. These garden tours can provide inspiration for local residents to convert their own front yards into food producing gardens, providing them with fresh produce.

Many Benton County food assistance programs take donations of home-grown produce. These donations allow low-income community members to have better access to fresh fruits and vegetables. Oregon State University Master Gardeners have a program called the Plant-A-Row for the Hungry. This program allows community members to plant an extra row in their garden with the intention of donating the produce to local food pantries, or to simply donate excess from an overly productive plant.

Community Gardens

There more than 26 community and school gardens located within Benton County's urban and rural areas. For example, the Corvallis Parks and Recreation Department, in partnership with the Benton County Health Department, created a Community Garden Master Plan for placement of community gardens on city parkland in 2011. Community gardens not only allow individuals to grow fruits and vegetables, but they also act as a gathering place that can facilitate social interaction. Community gardens have many forms, but are usually either a large plot of land that is worked by many volunteers or land that has been separated into individual plots that are each used by one or a few people.

Community gardens in Benton County are cared for of by many different groups, including youth, low-income individuals and families, and Latinos, although not all gardens have a targeted population. Community gardens can also act as a place where produce is grown for the purpose of donating to local area food assistance programs. The Starker Arts Garden for Education (SAGE) in Corvallis is a one-acre plot of city land provides three to four tons of fresh produce to local area agencies and families each year, including the South Corvallis Food Bank and Corvallis Stone Soup. SAGE is tended by volunteers, and provides garden education for adults and children alike through Corvallis Environmental Center programs. The Dunawi Community Garden is located on the same property; here, community members can pay a fee to garden their own plot, either annually or perennially.

Lupe's Community Garden in Philomath provides families with a place to grow fresh fruits and vegetables and also provides fresh produce to the Philomath Food Bank. In 2014, 12 of the 20 available garden plots had been assigned to families in the community. The garden also has an orchard with 27 fruit trees and an area for cooperative growing. In 2013, the garden produced over 1,000 pounds of fresh produce that was donated to the food bank.

Produce for the People, a 12,500 square foot garden located at the Westside Community Garden, serves low-income individuals and organizations in Corvallis. Here, volunteers plan and manage the garden and any extra produce that is not used by the community gardeners is donated to food assistance programs. This garden also acts as a service learning garden to teach individuals about gardening.

The Sharing Gardens, started in 2009, is located in Monroe in Southern Benton County. The original garden was located in Alpine, but when a second garden was opened five miles away in Monroe, efforts were focused on the new garden. The garden is coordinated by Chris Burns and Llyn Peabody. Instead of many separate plots that are rented by individuals, the garden is one large plot, shared by all. All materials and labor are donated. During the summer months, volunteers typically come one to three times per week to help in all aspects of vegetable-farming from planting, through harvest. The food is shared amongst those who have contributed in some way as well as with others who are in need in our community (through food banks and other charities.) No one is ever charged money for the food or seeds that are produced from this garden. The Sharing Gardens also has a strong educational focus: participants learn about organic gardening, saving “heirloom” seeds, pruning and other food-growing skills. Volunteers are encouraged to learn about canning and other food-storage techniques.

Community gardens often face funding problems. While it can be relatively easy to find grant funding for the initial groundbreaking, establishment, and building of a community garden, once established, it can be significantly more challenging to garner funds for garden maintenance, upkeep, and coordination. Rows of beautiful raised beds, a shed full of tools, and water provided by the city do little good without someone, such as a garden manager, who has the time and resources to recruit volunteers, coordinate work parties, and develop educational materials.

Institutional Food Service

Oregon State University

A Campus Food Assessment project was started in the fall of 2013 at Oregon State University. This project aims to determine the amount of “Real Food” that is purchased and served at Oregon State University. Real Food is determined through four criteria: the item contains no ingredients that raise health concerns, and the item is locally based (within 250 miles), is fair, and is humane. Project interns are using Oregon State University Housing and Dining Services inventories from three different months and tracking each item’s correlation with these criteria. If an item raises any health concerns, it is automatically deemed to not be a Real Food. If an item meets at least one of the remaining criteria, it is deemed a Real Food B and if it meets more than one criteria, it is a Real Food A item. In October of 2011, 95% of food inventoried was determined to not be Real Food

*Student Perceptions and Consumption of School Food
Oregon State University*

For a discussion of student food insecurity see Section: Community Food Assistance

According to a 2011 campus food assessment, students prioritize health (66%) and convenience (58.9%) over certified organic (3.5%) or locally grown (2.1%) when making food choices, but price seems to be a barrier for students to access the food items that they desire on campus. Seventy-three percent of students named price as one of the two most important things that they consider when making food choices. If price were not a concern, 75.9% would buy more healthy food, 67.4% would buy more fresh fruits and vegetables, 44% would buy more locally grown foods, and 36.2% would buy more organic foods.

Close to half of respondents reported satisfaction with the fresh fruit and vegetable options on campus; there is a greater level of dissatisfaction expressed in terms of access to local and organic produce. Sixty-three percent of students expressed some level of dissatisfaction with the availability of local fruits and vegetables on campus. The amount of dissatisfaction rises to 67% when asked about organic produce. Despite the level of dissatisfaction with local options, only 22% and 22.7% of students responded that access to local and organic foods needed improvement on campus. This was significantly less than those who would like to see improvement in access to healthy foods (62.4%), quality and freshness of products (62.4%) and more places where you can buy food (36.9%), or, in other words, convenience.

The majority of students did report consuming some locally produced food each day, while 28.4% report consuming no locally produced food at all and 47.5% report not consuming any organic food. Only 6.4% of students surveyed reported consuming the recommended 5-6 servings of fruits and vegetables each day. Survey results, however, suggest that this may be a result of lack of access.

There is some confusion and a lack of transparency in regard to the local and organic food options that are available on campus. More than 46% of students surveyed reported that that they do not know where to access local food on campus.

Benton County School Districts

The Corvallis School District (CSD) Food Service Department services every public school in Benton County. The only exception is Kings Valley Charter School, a public school in the county that has a school lunch program that is independent of Corvallis (although CSD still orders their commodities). The District administration actively

pursues opportunities to include healthy, local, and organic foods in school meals. Local foods are served daily and CSD participates in the Oregon Farm to School Program.

For a discussion of the Free and Reduced Lunch program see Section: Community Food Assistance.

What follows is a summary of challenges to bringing more locally produced and organic food into school meals:

- *Federal Regulations:* Meals must meet nutritional requirements that have been established by the USDA, which can be a challenge on the district's limited budget. Also, before purchasing any item, including those from local farmers, USDA procurement laws require that buyers must call two other suppliers to get quotes before they can accept it. "This is tons of paperwork, but you have to go through the required channels. Laws have to be followed," said Sharon Gibson, CSD Director of Food and Nutrition Services.
- *Volume:* Food service operations as large as CSD require very large quantities of the same item, often on a consistent basis, which may be challenging for local producers to supply. Large food service distributors are less likely than small farmers to be affected by weather-induced crop fluctuations, which allows large food distributors to provide more consistent service to schools.
- *Forging Relationships:* CSD lacks the capacity to use staff time forging connections with individual farms. Small growers often do have the capacity to forge these relationships either. Therefore, without third parties facilitating relationships between the school district and local growers, it is challenging for schools to use locally grown food.

Kings Valley Charter School

Kings Valley Charter School uses their food service staff and certified kitchen to bake bread one day per week, which is sold to the community on Fridays. The funds raised from this program are used to support the purchase of more nutritious and locally produced food products. These funds give their program the ability to obtain large amounts of fresh, local produce during the summer growing season, and preserve it for use in lunches during the school year. When food service workers spend their summers shelling peas and shucking corn, this also creates jobs for people in the Kings Valley community.

Food service decisions reflect community values and not everyone has a common base value of healthy or local food. It is difficult to try to simultaneously please parents who

are pushing for their children's favorite comfort foods and parents who favor health foods in learning institutions. Some general compromises have included serving corn dogs only if they are made with Oregon Country Beef or only serving chocolate milk on Fridays.

Community Education

Education is the key to increasing consumer support of local farmers and consumption of fresh, healthy, local food. There are many exciting programs that are serving to educate Benton County residents; however there is room for expansion.

Farm-to-School

PROFILE: Farm to School Kids often do not want to eat what local growers have available. In response to this, the Corvallis Environmental Center's Edible Corvallis Initiative (ECI) coordinates tasting tables in all nine public elementary schools in the Corvallis school district. In 2011, ECI launched tasting tables at Cheldelin Middle School, and, in partnership with OSU's Student Sustainability Initiative and University Housing and Dining Services, at OSU dining halls. Tasting tables are held in school cafeterias during lunch periods to provide every student with a chance to learn about seasonal local food. Each month one local, farm-fresh fruit or vegetable is featured—the Harvest of the Month. These are typically foods that students have not had much exposure to. The produce is harvested a year in advance and frozen, which can be a challenge because what is served has to be of good quality. Students are also given activity packets about the featured food and the farm at which it was grown, so that teachers can incorporate these lessons into classroom learning. The tastings have been very successful at all locations. In 2013, the tasting tables evolved into a Local Lunch, where produce from local farmers was incorporated into a dish prepared by food service workers at the school and then served at tasting tables. However, in 2014, the Tasting Tables will return to being created by volunteers in the Corvallis school district kitchen, and served by volunteers at the schools.

ECI launched tasting tables in partnership with OSU's Student Sustainability Initiative and University Housing and Dining Services, in the university dining halls. At OSU the tables are accompanied by a poster with the nutritional benefit of the food, the benefits of local purchasing, recipes, and information about the farmer. During the first month of the program at OSU, University Housing and Dining Services (UHDS) Nutritionist Tara Sanders noticed that many college students had never even seen a turnip before. Part of the goal of the program at OSU is creating student awareness of UHDS efforts to purchase local foods. There are hopes to move the program to a permanent location at

the new Cascadia Market, in the form of a food stand that offers free tastings and education in the store.

The Farm-to-School program had been partnering with grocery stores to put signs in the produce section highlighting the Pick-of-the-Month, so that parents would see what their kids were trying at school and hopefully buy it to serve at home. However, the program was not very successful. Now the Corvallis School District works with First Alternative Co-Op to develop promotional information to give out at school, which includes simple recipes. First Alternative Co-Op donates the printing.

Another way to connect children with the source of their food is to take them to a farm. Midway Farms, near Albany, offers farm field trips for Corvallis area school children. The Philomath High School botany class takes bike field trips to Gathering Together Farm. The Starker Arts Garden for Education (SAGE) also hosts farm-to-school field trips where volunteers educate students about plants and growing food. Often this curriculum parallels what the students are learning in the classroom.

School Gardens

School gardens provide an opportunity for students to learn in a hands-on environment about plants, soil, gardening, and food. The Lincoln Elementary School garden provides an example. In 2012, Oregon State University's Linus Pauling Institute partnered with Corvallis High School to build a garden that is maintained by Corvallis High School students at Lincoln Elementary. The goal of the program is to integrate the garden into course work in diverse subjects, to involve students in all aspects of the garden, and to serve the food grown in the school cafeteria. Although school gardens have many benefits, there are also barriers for teachers when it comes to making time for students to in the garden. For example, federal guidelines require that certain curriculum must be covered in order to prepare students for standardized testing. This can restrict the time available for taking students into the garden. Garden education curriculum needs to be created for teachers to use that will support standardized testing requirements, but finding funding for this is difficult. However, there are several sources of garden curriculum that are available nationally.

Securing consistent funding to pay for a school garden coordinator can be a challenge. It is also difficult to find people to tend the garden during the summer months when school is out and the growing season is peaking. Coordination of volunteers to maintain the garden during the summer months requires a lot of time; finding time to maintain a school garden can be difficult for people who are unpaid and have other responsibilities.

Garden Education

The OSU Extension Master Gardener Program is a resource that is available to any local gardener who has horticulture related problem or question. Volunteers are trained through the Extension service and provide gardening information to community members at Master Gardener events and community Farmers' Markets. Community members with gardening issues may also call or come to Extension offices to speak with volunteers.

Seed to Supper, a garden education program created by Oregon Food Bank, focuses on gardening on a budget. (See Section: Community Access and Assets: Grow Your Own)

The Corvallis Environmental Center's Starker Arts Garden for Education (SAGE) hosts To Grow Box, a one-month program for low-income families that focuses both on how to grow food and how to prepare meals with these items. Families visit SAGE for a two-hour time period. The first hour is dedicated to learning how to garden and the second hour is for preparing and eating food from the garden. At the end of each class, participants take home a CSA box full of fresh vegetable for the week. In 2011, 26 people signed up for only 12 slots, demonstrating that demand for the program is far greater than can be met currently. However, due to a lack of funding, the To Grow Box program had to take a hiatus but is being brought back in 2014. The location of SAGE could limit participation of low-income families who do not have a car to transport the produce boxes, so it may be advantageous to offer classes in low-income apartment complexes or other locations that are convenient for this population.

Growing Organic, a chapter of Ten Rivers Food Web, is a group of people who meet during the year to teach and learn about organic gardening and farming. During the summer months, the group meets at local farms and gardens. In the winter months, members continue to learn through presentations and educational events. Anyone is welcome to become a member and meetings are free.

Sunbow Farm offers workshops about aspects of farming and gardening. These usually cost a small workshop fee and cover a variety of topics. Spring and Summer 2014 topics included programs promoting nutrient density, through understanding the biology and chemistry of nutrient dense foods, how to grow these foods on a homestead scale, and how to save the seeds of nutrient dense foods. Most workshops are taught by the owner of Sunbow Farm, Harry MacCormack.

Oregon State University

Oregon State University (OSU) was founded in 1868 as the state's agricultural college and is Oregon's land-grant university. It offers numerous programs related to the production, innovation, processing, and culture of food. Of note are the Food Science Department, whose student population is about four times greater than in 2004, and the Department of Horticulture, which has 100 hectares of research fields, including a ten-hectare vineyard and greenhouse space.

OSU's Student Sustainability Initiative (SSI) is a student-run and student-fee funded organization that represents OSU student interests in sustainability. Food is one of its focus areas, and SSI allocates funds for a paid Food Systems Coordinator intern who plans food-related events, organizes student volunteers, and collaborates with OSU administration. SSI offers monthly cooking classes, with approximately 10-20 OSU students and staff participating.

In order to generate student interest and involvement in food-related issues, the Food Systems coordinator also organizes students through the "Food Group". The nature of the school calendar and matriculation keep the Food Group membership and interest in constant fluctuation. One possible solution may be to offer incentives to students to encourage participation. A second difficulty involves attracting students and generating their interest in local and sustainable foods. Current Food Systems coordinator Katie Gaudin speculated that often students approach the Food Group because they already have interest in food issues. The Food Group and other SSI food activities may not be reaching (and may even at times be alienating) students who are not already interested in food.

OSU Extension Programs

OSU Extension Service celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2011. The program has been offering community information and resources on gardening, small farms, food preservation, food and nutrition, families and youth, and health and wellness since 1911. Through the "Ask the Expert" program, visitors to the OSU Extension Service website can type in any question under an area of expertise, and can then expect to receive an answer from an Extension agent in approximately two days. The Master Gardener and Master Food Preserver programs provide community education for community members interested in those areas.

Cooking Classes/Food Literacy

With the development of supermarkets and convenience stores, Americans have become very removed from knowing where food comes from and how to prepare whole

foods. This is a problem for Benton County farmers because this lack of knowledge cuts down on the amount of fresh local whole foods that are purchased in the area. Examples of such foods are whole grains, like buckwheat, or unusual vegetables like kale or arugula. There is a need for more cooking and food literacy classes and demonstrations, particularly in venues where people obtain food, such as food pantries and grocery stores. Cooking demonstrations frequently happen at First Alternative Co-Op and at farmers' markets, but programs that reach people who do not normally frequent these venues are needed. To fill this gap, OSU's Linus Pauling Institute has developed free Fresh Grown Cooking for Families classes that are held at Community Outreach Inc., Corvallis High School, and the South Corvallis Food Bank. Families are welcome to bring their children and volunteers are available to help. Many food bank clients lack cooking skills and do not know what to do with the food that they are given at the pantry. Clients are often reluctant to take home fresh garden vegetables, not only because they do not know how to prepare them, but they often do not know what they are. The need for cooking demonstrations and classes, as well as food education at food pantries, has been expressed by several pantry coordinators.

Classes on healthy cooking are also taught at the Chintimini Senior Center and by OSU Extension Service. Teaching the public about preparing nutritious whole foods will not only benefit consumer health, but will also benefit the business of local farmers who can grow an abundance of these healthy foods.

Community Food Assistance

Unfortunately, food that is available in Benton County is not accessible to all residents. Barriers to accessing local healthy food include transportation issues, high housing costs, poverty, sickness and disability, and lack of employment. In 2012, 15.8% of the population of Benton County—13,489 people—suffered from food insecurity, or lack of access to enough food for an active, healthy life (USDA, 2014). Of those suffering from food insecurity, 30% are more than 185% above the poverty line, which means they do not qualify for many assistance programs, like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) (Feeding America, 2014). This sector represents an underserved population of working low-income residents who are not assisted by the government, but earn less than is needed to adequately feed themselves and their families while also paying the high cost of living in Benton County.

- *Poverty:* According to the U.S. Census, 21.6% of residents in Benton County fell below the federal poverty line, currently set at \$23,550 for a family of four between 2008 and 2012 (US Census Bureau, 2014). That is an estimated 4,009 individuals living in poverty. More than 25% of female-headed households were

below the poverty line during the 2005-2007 time period, making these households the most likely to be in poverty (US Census Bureau, 2014). Married-couple families are the least likely to be below the poverty line, at 3.7% (Benton County Health Department, 2014).

- *Unemployment:* As of June 2014, Benton County's unemployment rate was the second lowest in the State of Oregon, at 5.3% (Oregon Employment Department, 2014). Out of a civilian workforce of 45,025, an estimated 2,854 Benton County residents were going without a paycheck. This does not include the many residents who are underemployed, meaning they have jobs, but do not make a living wage because their salary is not high enough or they are not able to work enough hour to fully support themselves and their families.
- *Housing Costs:* High housing costs were named as one of the barriers to residents achieving food security and the cost of housing is increasing in Benton County (EMO, 2006). According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, an estimated 66% of renters in Benton County are unable to afford a two-bedroom apartment, which costs approximately \$811 at the Fair Market Rate. A minimum-wage worker in Oregon earns an hourly wage of \$8.95. In order for a minimum-wage worker to afford the fair market price for a two-bedroom apartment, they would need to work 72 hours per week, 52 weeks per year. (National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2013). Approximately 41% of renters and homeowners in Benton County are dealing with a housing cost burden, meaning that they are paying 30% or more of their income on rent or mortgage payments (Communities Reporter, 2013).
- *Homelessness:* In 2013, 111 individuals utilized emergency or transitional sheltered housing in Benton County (Linn, Benton, Lincoln Counties: Regional Homelessness Plan, 2012). The actual number of homeless residents is likely higher, as there are individuals who are homeless but do not utilize sheltered housing.
- *Food Deserts:* There is not a single supermarket in all of Southern Benton County. Economic Research Service data states that there is one food desert in Benton County, which is South Corvallis, but this is misleading. There are other communities in the county that are a great distance from even a small grocery store, such as Summit or Alpine, but do not qualify because they do not meet the government population threshold.

- *Transportation:* Transportation was improved for many Corvallis residents, when the Corvallis Transit System became free to ride anywhere within Corvallis. This allows many low-income individuals and families increased access to grocery stores, food pantries, and meal sites. Residents of Monroe and Adair Village have been enjoying shuttle services to Corvallis. However, funding has run out, leaving them searching for other ways to fund this important service.

Transportation is not only a barrier for rural, elderly, and disabled residents. It can also be a barrier to accessing food for students living on the OSU campus. More than 25% of students reported transportation affects their ability to get the food that they need. The closest grocery store to campus is Safeway, which is about one mile away from campus, but has higher prices than other area grocery stores that are farther away.

Latinos

Latinos make up 6.7% of Benton County's population (US Census, 2012). Access to fresh, healthy, culturally appropriate food is important to Latinos, particularly mothers, and many Latino community members want to become more involved in their community, however there is a reluctance to be too visible. There is a need to develop a safe space, led by respected Latino community members, in which this population can begin to learn about local and sustainable food system issues. Efforts have been made to include this population in community food organizing efforts. However, it became evident at the Latino FEAST held on April 9th, 2011 (which had a low turnout because of a mistranslation indicating the event was a party planning workshop) that this population needs to be specifically addressed. Terms for many of the words commonly used in community food organizing do not exist in Spanish, such as "food system" for example, demonstrating there is a need for an introductory workshop, taught in Spanish by Latinos, to teach interested members of the community about food system and community food organizing language and basics.

Creciendo en Salud is childhood obesity prevention initiative that works to improve the status of health for youth in Benton County at the highest risk of obesity. These children include children living in rural areas, Latino children, and children of seasonal farm workers who are living in rural and semi-rural areas. These children face many barriers that prevent them from accessing programs and services that promote physical exercise. Creciendo en Salud, which consists of a partnership between the Benton County Health Department and the Corvallis Parks and Recreation Department, has worked to address these barriers through "1) Engaging families in public policy leadership and capacity building activities; 2) Delineating roles and strengthening

relationships among local government entities, working on comprehensive city and county planning, public health, and quality of life issues in the community; and 3) Advancing local level strategies that will facilitate adoption of policies that improve the built environment which provide a venue for active living and lifestyle in low-income neighborhoods and rural communities” (Patton-Lopez, DeGhetto, Arevalo, & Lopez-Cevallos, 2013). To date, Creciendo en Salud has been successful in many projects, including developing a City of Corvallis Community Garden Master Plan and securing funding for the renovation of Tunison Park in South Corvallis, which now includes space for a community garden.

Casa Latinos Unidos de Benton County, a non-profit dedicated to Latino/a equality, education, leadership, and capacity building founded in 2009, is another organization that promotes the well-being of Latino families in Benton County. Casa Lations Unidos An affiliated group, Organización de Latinas Unidas, which was established in 2010 to address nutrition and exercise issues, created a salsa garden behind the Corvallis Multicultural Literacy Center in Corvallis in 2011. This space has grown into a gathering center for this group of Latina women.

Seniors

According to Partners for a Hunger Free Oregon, 2.2% of Benton County seniors live in poverty, with only 33% of eligible seniors receiving SNAP benefits (Partners for a Hunger Free Oregon, 2012). While the Oregon Cascades West Council of Governments operates 11 senior meal sites throughout Linn, Benton, and Lincoln counties, there is only one senior meal site in all of Benton County, which is located at the Chintimini Senior Center in Corvallis. This leaves seniors in more isolated areas of the county without a regular meal site. There was a meal site in Philomath, but it closed in 2008, due to lack of attendance. At the Chintimini Senior Center, mid-day meals are served Monday thru Friday; \$3.50 per meal is requested, although people are allowed to pay what they can afford. The center offers diabetic options, however they do not accommodate any other dietary restrictions, which means that seniors with food allergies and intolerances cannot take advantage of this service. The Chintimini Senior Center also operates the Meals on Wheels Program, in which volunteers deliver meals to home-bound seniors who cannot make it to a meal site. They also have frozen meals available for weekends and other days that meals are not distributed.

Youth

The childhood poverty rate in Benton County was approximately 16.37% between 2008 and 2012 (Communities Reporter, 2013). According to the Oregon Department of

Human Services, Benton County youth are achieving better health outcomes than the Oregon state average.

11 th graders in 2005-2006	% at risk for overweight	% overweight	% who consume at least 5 servings of fruits and vegetables per day	% who had breakfast every day	% who drank at least 7 sodas per week
Benton County	10%	8%	22%	46%	22%
Oregon Average	13%	11%	18%	38%	27%

8 th graders in 2005-2006	% at risk of overweight	% overweight	% who consume at least 5 servings of fruits and vegetables per day	% who had breakfast everyday	% who drank at least 7 sodas per week
Benton County	12%	8%	31%	58%	18%
Oregon Average	15%	10%	24%	46%	27%

Source: Oregon Department of Human Services

The Oregon Head Start Pre-Kindergarten program is run through the OSU Child Development Center in Benton County. Here, low income families may enroll their children three to five years of age for free. The goal of the Oregon Head Start program is to prepare children for school readiness, which includes proper nutrition.

Old Mill Center is a nonprofit organization in Corvallis that provides child care and related services to children and families who have been referred by the state and county social service agencies. Many issues are targeted in this program, including child and infant nutrition.

Rural Grocery Stores

A rural town thrives when it has a prosperous grocery store. When the store goes, often the town goes with it, leading to depopulation and economic decline. Rural grocery stores are struggling and closing their door all over the country, and Benton County is no exception. When the town store closes, residents are forced to travel to access food, often leading to hunger and unhealthy eating habits for the residents who remain. This impact is felt the most among people who have difficulty with transportation, particularly low-income and senior populations,.

There is not a single supermarket in all of southern Benton County. In fact, the vast majority of supermarkets are concentrated in the Corvallis area. While there are small rural grocery stores, they most closely resemble convenience stores. Monroe residents, for example, have to either travel to Corvallis or outside of Benton County to Junction City in order to buy fresh produce. Since the grocery store in Alpine closed, the only food in the town that is available for purchase is at the local bar.

The Benton County Health Department performed a rural grocery store assessment in the fall of 2010. Owners of nine stores were surveyed. The purpose of this assessment was to obtain first-hand accounts of the challenges that rural grocery store owners face in an attempt to strengthen their businesses and help increase awareness of the importance of these stores in maintaining vital rural communities. This is an ongoing process and the health department will be working with rural grocery stores to address the issues identified.

Rural Grocery Store Owner Survey

The major challenges identified for store owners are: availability of satisfactory labor, taxes, high operating costs, credit card fees, government regulations, high inventory costs/low turnover, narrow profit margins, required minimum buying requirements from vendors, shortage of working capital, competition with large chain stores, shoplifting/bad checks/internal theft/unpaid accounts, and lack of community support.

Many rural stores have had to go to more of a convenience store model because they are competing with the chain grocery stores in town. Non-food items, such as beer and cigarettes, sometimes keep these stores from going under. Cigarette companies offer cheaper prices to stores that are willing to put a certain amount of advertising signage out front. However, if a storeowner does not want to put up this advertising, they cannot compete for business.

High operating costs and credit card fees are major problems for rural grocery store owners as well. One store owner reported paying \$900 monthly power bill, in addition to insurance and gasoline. It costs a store \$3,000 each year just to have gas pumps, even if they stop selling gas, because of insurance expenses. Credit card fees are nearly \$1000 per month for many of the stores.

Rural store owners also frequently pay higher wholesale prices. Remote locations and small stock cause problems with sourcing products, leading to a disproportionate cost of bringing product in compared to the prices for which it can be sold. Raising prices of items is unfair to consumers who are also on limited budgets.

Store owners report making trips to discount grocery stores to source their product. Being forced to purchase inventory at discount grocery stores, as well as paying higher prices from distributors, requires rural stores to operate on very narrow margins in order to be competitive. Some distributors have recently added a fuel surcharge to each delivery.

As store owners often do not have the resources to hire someone to stock their shelves, some distributors will stock for them, as long as they get to decide on the items, often leading to store owners being required to display items that were provided for free, such as energy drinks, on counters at the front of the store. When business is so tight, it is difficult to refuse free product.

Fresh produce is often difficult to come by in rural stores, not because storeowners do not want to carry it, but because they cannot afford to absorb the cost of waste. Storeowners also want to carry local products, but the difficulty in small growers selling their food at small rural grocery stores is that neither can afford to absorb the risk of the product not selling.

Collaboration could be helpful for rural grocery stores, particularly in terms of distribution. By combining orders, rural grocery store owners could share the cost of distribution, as long as the cost of transporting products from one store to another is cost-effective.

While some stores have issues with community support, not all do. Some storeowners reported a feeling of community from their customers. While 78% of rural grocery stores surveyed accept Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, only one-third can accept Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) benefits. This is often because the stores do not meet basic stocking minimums for certain items that are

required in order to qualify to accept WIC. Being able to accept these benefits would allow rural grocery store owners access to a larger customer base.

Many consumers surveyed at rural stores in Benton County state their primary reason for visiting the rural store is to pick up a few essentials/emergency items. Because there are not many jobs available in rural areas, most rural Benton County workers commute, often to Corvallis. These residents often shop at the larger chain grocery stores while they are in Corvallis.

Federal Assistance

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as food stamps, provides low-income individuals and families with assistance in purchasing healthy foods, including fresh fruits and vegetables. In 2013, 13% residents of Benton County participated in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). This brought \$16,647,920 of federal dollars into the 53 food retailers in Benton County that participated in the program. (Partners for a Hunger Free Oregon, 2013). An estimated 38.1% of Benton County residents who are eligible for SNAP are participating in the program. This is the second lowest participation rate in Oregon. Partners for a Hunger-free Oregon estimates that if all eligible persons participated in the program, an additional \$10.8 million would be brought into Benton County's local economy and an extra 13,388 people would have help putting food on their tables (Partners for a Hunger Free Oregon, 2013). There is need for more SNAP outreach in Benton County in order to educate people about the program and to register more eligible participants. Every \$1 in SNAP that is spent creates \$1.73 in economic activity, according to Oregon Food Bank. The That's My Farmer SNAP Incentive program was started in Corvallis by Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon. The program allows SNAP farmers' market customers to receive an extra six dollars in tokens when they spend at least six dollars in SNAP benefits at the farmers' market. In 2011, Ten Rivers Food Web took over this program and expanded it to support more communities in the area. However, the That's My Farmer SNAP program has faced many funding issues, with funds running out before the farmers' market season has ended. Ten Rivers Food Web has worked hard to acquire funding and has partnered with many local businesses for this purpose (Ten Rivers Food Web, 2013).

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) provides women and children under the age of five with access to better nutrition. In Benton County, the WIC program provides monthly vouchers for nutritious foods, education, and counseling for nutrition and physical activity, breastfeeding support and education, including breast pumps, growth and health assessments, coupons to be

redeemed at local farmers' markets for fresh fruits and vegetables, and referrals to other health programs. In 2013, 2,462 women, infants, and children in Benton County were served by WIC, with a total of \$854,107 spent by participants at local retailers on healthy food. WIC also has a WIC Farm Direct Nutrition Program that allows WIC participants to purchase fresh produce at farmers' markets. In 2013, \$4,636 was spent through the WIC Farm Direct Nutrition Program at three Benton county farmers' markets and 19 farm stands, and has helped support 83 farmers (Benton County Health Department, 2014).

Other Nutritional Support Programs

In addition to the Creciendo en Salud initiative outlined above in the Latinos section there are other programs that address nutrition issues. In 2013, Ten Rivers Food Web partnered with Kyle Homertgen, Doctor of Osteopathy, Miao Zhao of Samaritan Health Services' InReach Clinic, and the Corvallis-Albany Farmers' Markets to launch a 16-week That's My Farmer Fruit and Vegetable Prescription Program. This pilot program provided eight participants and their families with \$25 per week in prescription vouchers that were redeemed at the Albany Farmers' Market for fruits and vegetables. Participants were also counseled on nutrition and educated about the benefits of eating fruits and vegetables. The program's mission was to promote the treatment of diet-related health issues by increasing the consumption of locally grown fruits and vegetables. However, this program was unable to continue and expand due to lack of funding.

Emergency Food System

Linn Benton Food Share (LBFS), run by the Community Services Consortium, serves as the regional food bank for Linn and Benton counties. This organization collects and delivers food to every emergency meal site in the two counties in order to fulfill their mission that "everybody eats." LBFS distributed 5,148,851 pounds of food to 74 member agencies from July 1, 2012 to June 30, 2013 (Linn Benton Food Share, 2014). During this period, member agency emergency food pantries distributed 9,588 food boxes to hungry individuals in Linn and Benton counties (Linn Benton Food Share, 2014). One in every five families in Linn and Benton Counties receive emergency food each year (Linn Benton Food Share, 2014). In Benton County, there are ten emergency food pantries, two emergency meal programs, four emergency shelters, two group shelters, five youth and senior care programs, and four gleaning groups that benefit from their coordination and support.

Fresh Alliance, a program of Oregon Food Bank, picks up products that are nearing their sell-by date from local stores and transports them in refrigerated trucks to a temperature-controlled sanitary building where they are sorted and inspected. These food items are made available to area hunger relief agencies within 24 hours of pick-up (Oregon Food Bank, 2014). Linn Benton Food Share also has the Food Rescue Program, where the organization collects food that has been prepared, but not served, in three OSU dining halls. The food is then immediately distributed to LBFS's network of meal sites in Benton and Linn Counties. Thanks to this program, an average of 5,500 pounds of food are diverted from the landfill each month and are instead used to feed hungry community members (Oregon Food Bank, 2014).

160,000 hours of volunteer time make all of this happen (Linn Benton Food Share, 2014). Because food pantry and soup kitchen volunteers have the most direct contact with low-income clients, there is a need to train volunteers about the resources that are available to clients. This way, volunteers will be able to advise clients and recommend resources that could help them get further help, such as gaining access to federal assistance programs or SNAP incentives programs.

More freezers and storage space are also needed to meet the increased demand for emergency food. Lack of adequate space is a challenge that food pantries often face in Benton County. As demand increases, food banks can quickly outgrow their space. Not only is their storage space inadequate, but shelves quickly become empty which can cause difficulty creating full food boxes by the end of the distribution period.

PROFILE: The South Corvallis Food Bank

The South Corvallis Food Bank has been looking for a larger space for years. They moved to a larger space in 2011, down the street from their old location, on 3rd street. This new space is three times larger than their previous location at 3,800 square feet. This increased space will help them accommodate an increase in donations and allow them the ability to purchase bulk foods and host cooking classes on-site. This space also allows for a waiting area so clients do not have to wait outside in the weather. The South Corvallis Food Bank distributed 300,000 pounds of food in 2014. This food served 300 households (or 1,100 individuals) per month. In order for clients to receive food, there is a short sign-in process and a survey that gathers information to be used for future funding sources. The South Corvallis Food Bank is set up so that clients can "shop" with volunteers to pick out what they want from the shelves. About 50 volunteers help out at the food bank each month, contributing a total of roughly 500 hours of volunteer time. In 2013, the South Corvallis Food Bank hosted the Seed to Supper program for clients to provide them with low-budget gardening education. The food bank accepts fresh produce from area gardeners and farmers and even welcomes excess

plant starts and seeds for clients. They have also been providing cooking demonstrations in the waiting area through the Linus Pauling Institute and through volunteers.

St. Vincent de Paul, located at St. Mary's Church in North Corvallis, provides food boxes to up to fourteen families per day, totaling 130 to 160 families per month. The food comes from Linn Benton Food Share as well as private donations. The food pantry is run entirely by volunteers, including stockers who move food items from the storage room to the shelves.

Outside of Corvallis, the Alsea Christian Fellowship Church is finding demand for their food bank has been growing tremendously; the church has a large number of elderly clients. The Philomath Food Bank serves about 150 and 175 families per month—between 500 and 700 individuals. The United Methodist Church in Monroe gives out approximately 90 food boxes per month. The Coast Range Food Bank, which serves the Summit/Blodgett area, distributes food to between 80 and 100 families per month. They also operate the Nashville Trading Post thrift shop, which raises money for the food bank. The Coast Range Food Bank is interested in planting a garden to provide more fresh produce to clients, but needs to find funding for a greenhouse to counter the extremely short growing season in the Coast Range.

In spite of support from Oregon Food Bank, Linn Benton Food Share, and several community gardens, obtaining appropriate foods can be a challenge for food banks. The OSU Food Pantry has trouble obtaining fresh, seasonal, healthy, sustainable, and culturally appropriate foods. Although they ask about food allergies and culturally important foods, it is difficult to meet these needs through their current sources.

Meal Sites

During the 2009-2010 fiscal year, Linn-Benton Food Share member soup kitchens and shelters served 261,118 meals in Benton and Linn counties (Community Services Consortium, 2014). There is a free hot meal available to anyone in need every day of the week in Corvallis through Stone Soup. The program operates out of two sites: St. Mary's Catholic Church and the First Christian Church. St. Mary's serves between 60 and 100 people at each of the four meals they serve each week. The First Christian Church serves between 80 and 120 people at each of the three meals they serve each week. Stone Soup sees the highest number of families at Saturday brunch and evidence of a greater need at the end of the month, which is when people are most likely to have run out of SNAP and WIC benefits.

Outside of Corvallis, the Neighbor to Neighbor meal site at the United Methodist Church in Philomath serves a free hot dinner on Tuesday evenings. The program, founded in 1998, serves between 50 and 70 people at each meal. While their clientele is mostly single men, they serve an average of approximately 20 children per meal, in addition to some seniors. The United Methodist Church in Monroe serves a free hot meal every Thursday in combination with the food box distribution. A food box program, Mesa Family Table, was also established in southern Corvallis, and allows families and individuals to pick up hot meals weekly on Thursdays.

Community Outreach Inc. is a homeless shelter that has a pantry and three kitchens available for clients to make meals. Due to decreases in funding, they are closing to non-residents on Sundays, with potential additional decreases in hours forthcoming. This is causing problems for Corvallis' homeless population. While Stone Soup still operates on the weekends, clients who depend upon emergency food assistance will now lack hot meal options between the 10:00 am meal on Saturday and the 5:30 pm meal on Sunday.

Gleaners

Gleaning is the practice of collecting usable food that would otherwise go to waste and distributing it to members. This program is particularly strong in Oregon. In Benton County, the volunteer-driven program is coordinated by the Community Services Consortium's Linn Benton Food Share. In 2014 there were 14 groups in the Linn-Benton gleaning program. In 2013, more than 7,900 people received over two million pounds of food through this program (Community Services Consortium, 2014). There are currently four active gleaning groups in Benton County: Alsea Valley, Marys River, Philomath, and South Benton County. Many gleaners are employed, but need gleaning to make ends meet each month. Food is collected, repacked into food boxes, and distributed amongst themselves and their "adoptees," members who are unable to help with collection and distribution. Each group distributes food at least once per week and holds large-scale repacks at the Linn Benton Food Share headquarters once or twice per month to repackage bulk donations, up to 10,000 pounds, into family-size portions. Firewood is also collected and distributed to members for the purpose of heating their homes. While the food, and firewood, is free, gleaners must cover transportation costs needed for collection and distribution. As gas prices rise, this becomes more of a barrier for those participating in these programs. During the growing season, gleaners receive produce from local farms and also harvest OSU research plots. However, gleaning has decreased in recent years due to the rise in mechanized farming, which leaves less food on the field after harvest. Also, if outside influences, like weather, affect crops, the

amount of food the gleaning programs receive is impacted. Only a small percentage of the food gleaners receive outside of the growing season is fresh, and often processed foods like pastries are donated, which can affect the nutrition that people in this program are getting.

Free and Reduced Lunch Program

Nearly 40% of students in Benton County qualified for free or reduced lunch during this time period (Communities Reporter, 2013). A total of 3,282 students participate in the program, with 2,838 of those qualifying for a free lunch, meaning they come from families that are at or below 130% of the poverty line, and 444 qualifying for reduced lunch, coming from families between 130-185% of the poverty line. The cost for a reduced meal is \$0.40. Corvallis School District 509J had the lowest rates, with 34.9% of students qualifying for the program. However, some schools in the district are hit harder than others. Garfield Elementary and Lincoln Elementary have the highest percentages of students who qualify for the program, with 67.6% and 74.9%, respectively. Just over 38% of students in Philomath School District 17J qualify for the program, with 530 receiving free lunch and 94 receiving reduced-price lunch. At Blodgett Elementary, 53.9% of the 39 students qualify for the free lunch program. Kings Valley Charter School has 37.4% of 166 students who qualify for free lunch and none who qualify for reduced. Roughly 57% of students in Monroe School District 1J qualify, with 236 who can receive free lunch and 34 reduced. Alsea School District 7J is hit the hardest, with 75.9% of 145 students in the district qualifying for the program (Benton County Health Department, 2011).

In order to receive government reimbursement for the meals, schools have to meet very specific USDA regulations for calories, fat, and sodium. In addition to the lunch programs, the district runs supper programs at the Boys' and Girls' Club and Lincoln School. Participating students also get free snacks at any school where more than 50% of students qualify for the program.

Benton County's summer free lunch program serves 500-800 meals each day during the summer months. Lunch is served at 11 sites throughout the county, including Corvallis, Philomath and Adair Village. Breakfast is also served at two locations in Corvallis. The only requirement is attending the meal and everyone under 18 is eligible to participate, regardless of income. In order to guarantee that food is eaten by children, all food must be eaten on site. Parents who accompany children are welcome to eat too, but for a cost of \$1.75 for breakfast and \$3.00 for lunch. Local food is used whenever it is available. In the summer of 2010, 33,908 meals were served. This was a 2% increase from 2009. An average of 664 meals were served daily. Of these, 37%

were eligible for the free and reduced lunch program. Benton County ranked sixth in the state for highest participation in summer meal programs (Partners for a Hunger Free Oregon, 2010).

Programs like Oregon Head Start, Old Mill Center, Free and Reduced Lunch, and the summer free lunch program provide meals to children who may not otherwise have enough to eat. Many of these programs are funded through state and federal sources and also through grants and donations. Without sustained funding, these programs will not be available in the future.

College Student Food Insecurity

Many college students are low income and do not eat adequate meals because of a lack of money. Only 2 out of 16 students interviewed by the Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO) reported themselves to be food insecure (EMO, 2006). However, the survey of 141 students has indicated that the problem is much larger. Forty-four percent of students reported that in the past six months, they had skipped meals, or limited their size, because they did not have enough money to buy more. Another 31.2% worried that they would run out of food before they have enough money to buy more.

Although students indicated not having enough food, only 2.1% reported going to a meal site or soup kitchen in order to have enough to eat. Coupled with such a high reported rate of food insecurity, this confirms that students are “generally uncomfortable at the thought of getting food from emergency sources” (EMO, 2006).

There are also limitations on students being able to receive SNAP benefits, which makes it even more difficult for this population of low-income individuals to achieve food security. Many students reported that the cost of food prevents them from cooking meals for themselves. Time is another factor that clearly limits students from getting the food that they need. Nearly 47% claimed that they do not make meals at home because no one has time to cook. Also, 27.7% indicated that limited time for shopping was a factor that prevents them from accessing the food that they need. Only 20% of students reported that there is nothing affecting their ability to get the food that they need. (EMO, 2006). Another barrier students face while living on campus is a lack of proper kitchens and cooking equipment. Often dormitories only have one small kitchen, which cannot accommodate the number of students who wish to cook meals for themselves. Students often have to rely on microwaves to heat up meals, resulting in a restricted choice of meal selection.

In 2007, the Escape Hunger program, which offered free lunch on campus 3 days a week, was converted into the Mealbox program. The Mealbox program puts money on ID cards of eligible students that can be used to purchase food anywhere on campus. The program's free application process, which takes student income and expenses into account, can result in students being given up to \$250 per term. The transition from Escape Hunger to Mealbox was made in order to guarantee that the limited funds available to support food insecure students were actually going to those in need, as well as to address the stigma and reluctance many students had in seeking emergency food assistance, such as soup kitchens and food pantries.

Conclusion

Benton County has an active food community with a long history. There are many wonderful initiatives and opportunities for continued farm and industry growth and increased access to healthy food. Moving forward, it will be important to take an analytical approach to assessing the successes, challenges and, barriers of the Benton County food system. There are many questions still to be asked. What does all this mean? What does this assessment really tell us?

- 1) The local food system is largely limited to commercial foods. It is not known how much home grown food, hunting, and fishing at the individual or family level contributes to food security in Benton County. This information will be useful when assessing the impact of high fuel costs on the food system.
- 2) Are the two questions that guided this assessment sufficient to guide the future of Ten Rivers Food Web leadership? The questions are: *What successes and challenges do Benton County small growers experience? What are the barriers to food access for low-income residents?* What other questions do we need to ask?
- 3) Do we take for granted that farms are and should be businesses? Prior to 1970 most farms were family assets and the farmers were usually engaged in the community in various capacities. Farms and food production are necessary parts of a community and need community based efforts for future farmers to access land, including urban farm land. Will a shift in thinking of farms from an economic standpoint to a community standpoint facilitate positive changes?
- 4) The increases in local sales from local growers and from CSAs are the result of the growing market in Portland rather than an increase in the Benton County market. Are we having the most productive conversation with our local growers?
- 5) The average consumption of local food in Benton County is close to 7%. Do we have the market to support more local consumption? What would make it possible to increase the market? To increase the percentage of local food consumption?

In addition to the questions concerning the Benton County Community Food Assessment, it will be important to raise new questions for Ten Rivers Food Web leadership. In order to move forward it will be important to address issues from new perspectives.

- 1) How do we replace an industrial food system with community food networks?
- 2) How can this report contribute to efforts to switch from a “local” food system to a “community food network”?
- 3) How much food would it take for Benton County to be food secure during a “long emergency”? What about the tri-county Ten Rivers Food Web area?
- 4) What is the growing capacity for Benton County?
- 5) What nutrients are or could be available from Benton County foods, and what are the deficiencies? How can these deficiencies be offset? How much land would be necessary to meet the nutritional needs of humans and animals? What is the availability of that land for the next generation of farmers?
- 6) How can industrial budgets and costs of feeding the Oregon State University population be reconciled with what a well-organized community food system could produce and offer?

These are all very important questions and the resulting conversations are necessary for moving Benton County toward a food system that can meet the needs of all of its inhabitants through community-based efforts.

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