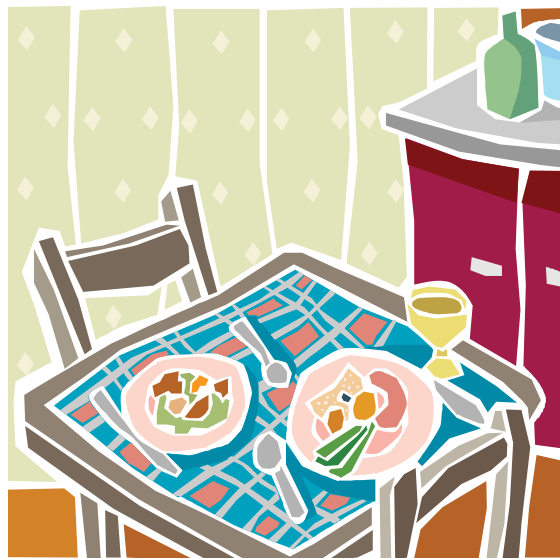


From Our Own Soil

A Community Food Assessment

Benton County, Oregon, and Its Foodshed

2006



Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon

In cooperation with Oregon State University & the Rural Studies Initiative

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Monroe United Methodist Church
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And All Participating Farms

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Introduction: *Why a Community Food Assessment?*

For half a century, Americans have abdicated their responsibility for the food production and distribution system to interests outside their local communities. Agricultural policies, subsidies and the decline of rural communities have left family farmers and small food processors on a downslide.

Community food assessments give us an opportunity to take a hard look at what still exists of our food system and identify opportunities to rebuild our local food economy. A successful food assessment is collaborative, participatory and inclusive of a diversity of stakeholders. It is a process of systematically examining food-related issues and assets in a community in order to prompt changes and build food security.

In recent decades, Corvallis and Benton County actively sought to replace food production and processing with other industries. This is consistent with national trends toward globalization and consolidation, as small family farms across America buckle in the face of suburban sprawl and large agribusiness. While the local food movement has gained significant ground nationally in the past ten years, the overall market for local produce remains extremely small. Even though the number of farmers' markets has jumped 79 percent to 3,100 between 1994 and 2002, the USDA estimates that farmers' markets account for less than two percent of the \$70 billion American consumers spend on produce. And as for farms with annual incomes of \$10,000 to \$99,000, which characterize most vendors at farmers' markets, on average they still report a negative profit margin and rely heavily on non-farm income sources (Philpott 2006).

As a small community situated in the heart of the Willamette Valley, it is vital that we in Benton County encourage the trend toward locally produced, processed and consumed food. This trend is essential to rebuilding local food economies, assuring reliable food access, guarding against a potential peak-oil crisis and preparing for unstable geopolitical and climatic conditions. The purpose of this community food assessment is to stimulate thoughtful action that will enhance the equity and sustainability

of Benton County's local food system. It is our hope that through the process of gathering and presenting the data in this report, Benton County residents will formulate and set in motion changes that will enhance the food security of our community.

Our guiding questions involve two major topics of concern in Benton County: farmers and low-income residents. Specifically, our guiding questions are:

What successes and challenges do small growers in our region experience?

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

The third section of this assessment deals with the role that faith communities might play in reaching solutions to these questions. We ask:

How do communities of faith contribute to food security and how might they broaden their response to hunger to include supporting local family-scale farmers?

Throughout this assessment, which covers October of 2005 to August of 2006 (with the exception of studies in Alsea and Adair that were conducted in early 2005), we employ many different techniques in order to find answers to our guiding questions. In summary, our tools and techniques include the following:

Assessing the Issues of Local Family Farmers

- Interviews with 15 small family farmers
- Secondary data collected on agriculture
- Pricing study conducted in eight grocery stores and farmers' markets

Assessing Food Accessibility, Poverty and Hunger

- Interviews with residents of rural Benton County
- Interviews with leaders and clients of the emergency food system (food banks, food pantries, soup kitchens, etc.)
- Secondary data collected on hunger, poverty and the emergency food system

Assessing Potential Role of Faith Communities

- Local Food Surveys administered to members of ten faith communities
- Interviews with ten faith community leaders

Our goal is to enhance community food security in Benton County. We define community food security as “a condition in which all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance and social justice” (Hamm 2002).

This assessment is a collaborative effort spearheaded, coordinated and funded largely by Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO). Founded in 1974, EMO is an association of 17 Christian denominations including Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox bodies across the state that work together for unity and justice.

One of EMO’s core programs is the Interfaith Network for Earth Concerns (INEC). The mission of INEC is to connect, inform and empower people, congregations and religious institutions to work for justice and the care and renewal of the earth. INEC carries out EMO’s mission of earth stewardship, theological education and dialogue, public policy advocacy and “greening” of congregations.

The Interfaith Food and Farms Partnership (IFFP), a subsidiary project of INEC, began as a formal effort in fall 2005 with the arrival of several significant sources of funding, most notably a USDA Community Food Project grant. EMO launched IFFP in Benton and Multnomah Counties with teamwork from several statewide partners, including Oregon Food Bank, Heifer Project International, the Lutheran Advocacy Ministry, Oregon Farmers’ Market Association and Oregon State University Small Farms Extension.

The impetus for IFFP was sense of urgency within INEC about building community food security, intensified by rising fuel prices and the disappearance of small family farmers across America. For several years leading up to IFFP, INEC organized a handful of popular workshops on food security in collaboration with congregations around the state. INEC also began teaching the basics of community food assessment, a grassroots strategy for empowering communities to learn about farmers, food sources and hunger in their neighborhoods. These trainings fed a growing interest in forging connections with local farms.

In an attempt to confront hunger on the deepest

level, the mission of IFFP is to empower faith communities, farmers and neighborhoods to build rural-urban alliances and forge innovative partnerships in order to create a just and sustainable food system. IFFP challenges diverse congregations throughout the Willamette Valley to broaden their anti-hunger work to include a commitment to local family-scale farms. It also increases access to nutritious produce for low-income households and builds food literacy among all participants.

The premise of IFFP is that the survival of family farms is essential to community food security. As such, our aim is to mobilize the faith community as a basis of support for these farms. Specifically, we are developing and evaluating models for farm-to-congregation alliances in three low-income communities that can be replicated nationally by other organizations. These alliances are based in part on a model from Eugene, Oregon, where The Rev. John Pitney has for years encouraged congregations to purchase shares of community supported agriculture farms.

Similarly, IFFP is establishing covenants between congregations and farmers. This year in Benton County, we helped develop a coupon program for farm-fresh produce among eight

We define community food security as “a condition in which all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance and social justice.”



Julia Sunkler of My Pharm was a 2006 participant in the *That's My Farmer* coupon program.

congregations and eight small farms. Ten percent of proceeds from coupon sales go to generating give-away coupons for low-income people. We work in collaboration with local food pantries and gleaners' groups to distribute these give-away coupons to those in need. This season, congregations have sold thousands of dollars' worth of coupons and generated hundreds of dollars' worth of vouchers for low-income people. We are receiving – and fulfilling – requests each day from low-income residents for the give-away coupons. The popularity of this coupon program demonstrates an impressive demand for nutritious local produce for people on all economic levels.

Significant support for this assessment came from Oregon State University, Oregon Food Bank, Ten Rivers Food Web and many local faith communities and farms. Support came in many forms – as financial backing from the Rural Studies Initiative, which enabled many graduate and undergraduate students to conduct field research; as academic assistance from Joan Gross, Deb Burke, Nancy Rosenberger, Leslie Richards, Larry Lev, Garry Stephenson and their respective OSU departments; as donated meeting space from the First Alternative Co-op and St. Mary's Catholic Parish so that we could discuss details of our plan; and as advice from assessment veteran Sharon Thornberry, former board president of the Community Food Security Coalition and community food projects advocate for Oregon Food Bank.

What's Wrong with the Current Food System?

In recent years, our food systems have become truly global in scope and structure. In the United States, we import and export hundreds of billions of dollars worth of food every year. Supermarket shelves abound with a dazzling array of foods, with more and more fresh items available year round. In the period from 1980 through 2000, US per capita food consumption grew from about 1800 pounds per year to 2000 pounds per year. "What exactly is the problem?" an observer of this picture of the abundant and productive food system may be tempted to ask.

Yet, despite the apparent glut in our supermarkets, both urban and rural communities face numerous problems with respect to food production, distribution and consumption. The



About 50 people gathered for dinner at St. Mary's Catholic Church on February 27, 2006, to discuss how to build a stronger local food system.

following are only a few illustrations of the great cause for concern about current and future food security.

Millions of Americans are food insecure.

- The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) reports, based on a national Consensus Bureau survey, that in 1999, ten percent of all US households, representing 19 million adults and 12 million children, were "food insecure."
- Of these, five million adults and 2.7 million children suffered from food insecurity that was so severe that they were classified as "hungry."
- In a recent national survey of emergency food programs, America's Second Harvest found that their network served 23 million people in a year (nine percent more than in 1997), including over nine million children.

Diet-related health problems are on the rise.

- One-third of all cancer deaths are linked to diet, according to the National Cancer Institute.
- An estimated 300,000 deaths per year may be attributable to obesity.
- Just seven diet-related healthy conditions cost the United States \$80 billion annually in medical costs and productivity losses, according to the latest Economic Research Service estimates.
- An estimated 76 million persons contract food-borne illnesses each year in the United States. The high incidence of food-borne diseases in children, especially infants, are a major concern.

The US food industry aggressively promotes unhealthy foods.

- The US food industry spent \$7 billion in advertising in 1997. Most of this advertising focused on highly processed and packaged foods. Advertising for fruits, vegetables and other healthful foods is negligible in comparison.
- In 1997, food manufacturers accounted for almost two-thirds of food system advertising. Another 28 percent was covered by fast food outlets (up from about 5% in 1980).

The food industry is becoming more concentrated.

- A handful of huge multinational corporations control an increasing share of production, processing and distribution of food products, squeezing out local and regional businesses.
- Today the top five firms account for 42% of retail sales, whereas in 1997, they accounted for only 24% of the market.
- Four companies control 84% of the US cereal market.

The US farm sector is declining.

- Thirty-two percent of the best quality farmland in the US has already irretrievably been lost to development; as much as 70% of the remaining prime farmland is threatened by sprawl.
- The number of farms has declined dramatically since its peak in 1935, dropping from 6.8 million in 1935 to only 1.9 million in 1997.
- Market forces have squeezed US farmers to the point that it is extremely difficult to make a living producing food. In 1998 farmers earned an average of only \$7,000 per year from their farming operations.
- The conventional food system has significant negative impacts on air, water, soil and biodiversity.
- The 1998 National Water Quality Inventory reports that agricultural non-point source pollution is the leading source of water quality impacts to surveyed rivers and lakes and a major contributor to contamination of the ocean.
- Conventional agricultural production also pollutes the air and soil and damages wildlife habitat.

What Are the Core Components of the Food System?

Food production activities refer to the cultivation of plants and animal domestication. Also included in food production is how food products are developed through agricultural techniques such as irrigation, crop rotation, propagation and integrated pest management as well as how food is processed into value-added and non-perishable products.

Food distribution involves the networks of people, companies and institutions that transport, process and store food from food production sites, such as farms, factories, or warehouses, before delivering it to stores and other entities that sell it to consumers.

Food consumption refers to all activities and processes by which an individual, society and culture acquires (e.g. purchases, strategizes, gleans, manages, ingests, digests) and utilizes (e.g. cooks, ritualizes, presents) food material that has been produced and distributed.

Food recycling is the series of activities, such as composting, where discarded food materials are collected, sorted, processed and converted into other materials and used in the production of new products.

- Adapted from the 2005 San Francisco Collaborative Food System Assessment, San Francisco Food Alliance.

- Long-distance transportation of food, now mostly by truck, creates air pollution and contributes to global warming

Thus, despite appearances that our food supply is safe, abundant and affordable, serious food-related problems affect most of the population and there are grave threats to the long-term security and sustainability of the food system.

Excerpted from "What's Cooking in Your Food System? A Guide to Community Food Assessment", 2002.

Chapter I. The Supply Side: Farming and Marketing in the Benton County Foodshed

Ultimately, our aim is to determine what individuals and institutions in our community can do to support these growers.

Although in recent decades American farming has trended sharply toward consolidation and commoditization, a significant counter-trend towards locally-centered agricultural systems that rely on direct marketing has emerged to provide consumers with fresher food options: community supported agriculture (CSA), farmers' markets and sales to institutions (Halweil 2004). Farmers who sell directly to their customers through these and other innovative arrangements retain more of the food dollar for themselves, thereby increasing their ability to create an economically sustainable livelihood.

This is not intended to be a comprehensive report on farming in the mid valley. The focus of our research is direct market farms, that is, farmers who are primarily selling their products directly to the people who will cook or consume it, rather than to wholesale distributors or brokers.

In order to gain a fuller understanding of the small and mid-sized direct market farms in our foodshed, we conducted fifteen interviews with growers on their land. First and foremost, our conversations reveal a strong interest among farmers in increasing local markets for their products.

In this section of the report we include a summary of our interviews with fifteen

farmers in Linn, Benton and Polk counties; four profiles of farmers who represent important characteristics of this group of local direct-market farmers; and an analysis of our findings in the context of secondary research.

Research Methods

Between March and June 2006 we interviewed fifteen food producers who live in Benton, Linn and Polk Counties. All the farms are located within a 25-mile radius of Corvallis. They were contacted either at farmers' markets or because they attended a February 27, 2006 event in Corvallis hosted by Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon and Saint Mary's Catholic Parish. This

event, which included a meal made with locally grown ingredients, brought together local food producers and congregational leaders for a community dialogue about building rural-urban alliances, increasing marketing opportunities for farmers and building food security. The growers we interviewed for this report share in common a demonstrated interest in marketing directly to consumers whether through alliances with faith communities, CSA operations, farm stands or farmers' market participation.

Our on-farm interviews prompted growers to describe their farming practices, list the types of crops or animals that they raise, explain their marketing methods, describe challenges and barriers they perceive and assess their interest in having a community food processing facility in the area, among other questions. Many of our questions reflect our interest in developing innovative connections between faith-based communities and small, new, immigrant and/or women farmers, with an emphasis on helping low-income people gain access to healthy food. The purpose of this research is to explore the elements of local food production among direct market farmers and the marketing strategies these producers use to sustain themselves. Ultimately, our aim is to determine what individuals and institutions in our community can do to support these growers.

Summary of Findings

Our fifteen interviews reveal a wide range of farm operations. All the farmers we interviewed own at least some of the land they are farming. Two of the larger farms lease additional farmable land from their neighbors. Including leased land, the average farm size was 29 acres, of which 15 acres on average were in production. These averages exclude a mid-sized grass-fed beef operation which, at 1200 acres, is far larger than the others. Eight hundred of those acres were in production with the remaining 400 acres in wooded and/or riparian areas.

Most of the farmers we talked to were either using their land for full production or had specific reasons for not doing so, such as

avoidance of riparian areas or observance of fallow cycles. But six out of 15 farms had extra land that was not in production due to issues relating to a lack of demand for their products. In addition, one young farmer indicated that he would like to have more land in order to expand his operation but is currently limited by a lack of capital. All of these farmers said they would like to develop new local markets for what they grow or raise.

Almost all the farms produced and sold a variety of products such as fruits, vegetables, eggs and cut flowers. Eight out of 15 farmers also sold animals – only the grass-fed beef operation is strictly a meat producer. Several farmers offered value-added products such as jam. Similarly, most used multiple pathways to market their products, including “direct” (farmers’ market, farm stand, CSA); “semi-direct” (sales to a retailer or institution); and “indirect” (sales to a wholesaler or distributor). On average, surveyed producers used four marketing channels, with larger producers using a greater variety than smaller producers. One small producer described his strategy as “the four-legged milking stool of marketing.” For him, that meant participation in buying clubs and farmers’ markets, offering on-farm sales and selling directly to local restaurants.

The producers we interviewed identified their farming practices as “sustainably grown,” uncertified organic or certified organically grown, or a combination of these practices. Approximately 85% of these growers’ products are sold within a 50-mile radius of their farms.

When asked about top challenges, labor and marketing were named most frequently, followed by pest control (especially among organic farmers) and limitations on capital (money, farm equipment, etc.). Challenges surrounding labor include the farmer’s own capabilities (i.e. having enough time and energy to do the work required) as well as difficulties finding reliable workers to help them.

Asked to name barriers to marketing their products locally, an overwhelming majority of those surveyed mentioned finding customers and selling their products in a timely manner as significant challenges. A common lament is that many people do not know the value of buying locally or organically grown food and have little understanding of the difficulties and costs faced

by local farmers. However, the certified organic growers in the group (there were six) indicated a higher level of satisfaction with their current markets than the other growers.

Over half of the farmers surveyed expressed strong interest in the prospect of having a community food processing facility nearby for their canning, drying, processing and food packaging needs. In recognizing the potential contribution of such a facility, one farmer noted that: “We make hay in the spring for the critters [to eat] in the winter. The same applies for people food.”

Although entrepreneurial and highly motivated, many farmers indicated that values drive their decisions on what to grow and how to market their products. Concerns for sustainable livelihoods, communities and the environment were frequently mentioned or demonstrated. Finally, many farmers felt cooperative relationships between family members and neighbors with similar values were important.

Farm Profiles

We include the following four farm profiles to give a sense of how a few farmers run their operations and some of the values that guide their work. We chose these farms because, collectively, they reflect many of the ethics and behaviors of other interviewees. They range in size from 2.7 to 55 acres, and they all exhibit some form of vertical diversification.

Gathering Together Farm

Gathering Together Farm (GTF) serves as an example of a successful local organic farm that has flourished by forming multiple direct market connections. Located just a few miles south of



John Eveland and Sally Brewer of Gathering Together Farm run a restaurant on their Philomath Farm.

A common lament is that many people do not know the value of buying locally or organically grown food and have little understanding of the difficulties and costs faced by local farmers.



John Eveland has been farming in Philomath for almost 20 years.

Philomath, GTF grows about 40 different fruit and vegetable crops on 55 acres. The owners, John Eveland and Sally Brewer, have been building their diverse farming operation for 19 years. GTF now employs 40-50 people (both seasonal and full-time) to run an operation that supplies several restaurants, a 200+ member CSA, and sells to First Alternative Co-op and Organically Grown Co-op (OGC) wholesaler. They also have a strong presence in nine farmers' markets both locally and in Portland and Newport. GTF participates in EMO's Interfaith Food and Farms Partnership and has supported the *That's My Farmer* coupon program for the two years it has been operating (2005 and 2006).

Of particular note is GTF's long-standing connection to Nearly Normal's Restaurant in Corvallis. This restaurant, operated since 1979 by John and his family, has provided the kind of steady demand for products helpful to building a successful small farm operation. In recent years, John and Sally have taken this recipe a step farther and established their own farm stand and a restaurant that utilizes as much of their own produce and that of other local farms as possible. In this way, GTF keeps a whole lot more of the food dollar on their own farm.

A pattern can be seen in this farming operation: self-sufficiency combined with a cooperative spirit that stems from family ties. Another long-standing GTF tradition is to treat workers to a hearty meal with ingredients grown, as much as

possible, on the farm. Their on-farm restaurant is an extension of this concept of sharing their products and skills through prepared food, thereby adding value to the raw ingredients. Just as farmers' markets serve as a model of how modern consumers can reconnect to their food sources, GTF models how a sustainable farm can thrive by creating innovative ways to increase those connections.

Egor's Acres

Dave Eskeldson of Egor's Acres, near Scio, started farming just a few years ago, returning to Oregon after retiring from a career in teaching. Dave has 45 acres of land that he keeps in a rotation of grass pasture (as a cover crop), hay and vegetables. All his land is certified organic with about a dozen acres in vegetable production this year. Dave describes his operation as a small organic farm that grows its own starts and hires unionized labor to do transplanting, weeding and harvesting. Having found a few market niches, Dave's farm is now economically self-sufficient, though he says he couldn't have made it go without the help of his retirement savings.

Dave doesn't participate in any farmer's markets or run a CSA operation; instead, he has found other innovative ways to sell his fresh produce. He currently sells directly to Life Source Natural Food Store in Salem, First Alternative Co-op in Corvallis and to wholesaler OGC. Just recently he began selling to Wild Oats in Bend. In addition, Dave supplies produce directly to Willamette University's food service provider, Bon Appétit. Bon Appétit has very high standards and progressive policies regarding food, including buying and promoting the consumption of locally grown products. Because Dave only hires unionized labor through Northwest Treeplanters and Farmworkers



Dave Eskeldson sells produce to Willamette University.

United, known by its Spanish acronym PCUN (Pinos y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste), a PCUN labor representative introduced him to Willamette's chef. Through organized "Meet your farmer" activities, Dave and his son Steve, who recently acquired a nearby farm of his own, engage with students who are enjoying the benefits of locally grown food.

In common with other farmers interviewed for this food assessment, Dave is new to farming after changing careers. He has had to invest a lot of his resources, both time and money, into making the farm financially viable. Through keen marketing skills and some fortunate turns, he has developed a winning strategy. Egor's Acres' connection to Willamette is especially exciting and is another model that other small farmers could investigate in order to establish a steady local demand for their products.

SweetWell Farm



Ellen Hubbe and Nancy Sowdon began farming in 2000 with a pair of Belgian work horses.

SweetWell Farm is a 62-acre spread located southeast of Scio, Oregon, owned and operated by a mother/daughters family unit: Ellen Hubbe, Lise Hubbe and Nancy Sowdon (since husband/dad Gery Hubbe died unexpectedly in 2001). Together, Ellen, Lise and Nancy have carried out the original aim of developing a farm based on the sustainability and community service. They began in 2000 with a pair of Belgian work horses, a small collection of horse-drawn equipment and the vision of an old-style, diverse family farm.

SweetWell is a mixed enterprise operation that includes draft horses, Jersey cows, market hogs, broiler chickens and laying hens, as well as vegetables, fruits, pasture, hay and other



Lise Hubbe spreads manure on her fields with the help of Daisy and Grace.

feed and forage crops. Farm products are sold directly to customers who come from around the Willamette Valley to collect their orders and shop at the farm stand. In the last year, about a dozen families in Eugene organized themselves to travel to the farm weekly to pick up fresh food. Members of this group often bring children and turn them loose to collect eggs and visit piglets, cows and horses. Families experience a place based on respect for all life: soil, animals, plants, wildlife and people. The farmers enjoy a chance to maintain close contact with their customers. One of the benefits of direct customer-farmer relationships is the ability to accommodate fluctuations in production: When Nancy raised over a hundred hens last summer, families in Eugene sought additional egg customers to join their group.

Although SweetWell uses organic practices, they have not pursued organic certification. Lise and Nancy experiment with crop and animal rotation, including having pigs on forage as part of their market garden rotations. They use management-intensive grazing with their cows and chickens to preserve forage, improve soil fertility and prevent overgrazing. Movable coops and fencing enable chickens to follow cows in pasture rotation, cleaning fly larva and spreading their manure over the fields.

Draft horses Daisy and Grace provide horsepower for a great many tasks: They plow, disc, harrow, plant, cultivate, mow and rake, spread manure and give hay rides. Two young horses that have been in training are now joining in the work. With recent spikes in the price of oil, one neighboring farmer commented of the old-fashioned horsepower: "Oats *are* pretty cheap fuel."

Midway Farms

For six years Cynthia Kapple has been farming 2.7 acres to supply her family and farm stand with fresh produce, cut flowers and eggs. She also provides a place for her neighbors to sell the fruits of their various labors: homemade soaps, baked goods and crafts. Cynthia clearly enjoys this community-building aspect of her farm stand business. She also benefits from the added diversity that her neighbors bring to such a venture. This, she explains, is why she calls it Midway Farms (plural), because she sees it as a multi-farm venture. Cynthia's kids, husband and a neighbor-friend also help out on the farm, contributing energy and learning skills.

Cynthia talks enthusiastically about creating an ecosystem as well as a human community space. Her acreage has small wildlife areas within it to support native species: an old log in the middle of the garden harbors a huge snake; last year a telephone pole was fenced off to protect a nearby quail nest; and the barn now hosts a barn owl. She is also friendly to the spiders in the garden. Cynthia considers her farm organic in spirit, but it is not certified. She uses straw mulch, home-brewed fish emulsion and is trying no-till techniques in some places. Though of modest size, in peak season Midway Farms' 100+ hens produce 40 dozen eggs/week. A family farm in Alsea supplies free range eggs through the winter for Midway Farms' regular egg customers, allowing Cynthia's hens to be free from exposure to the artificial lights that are commonly used to boost egg production.

Customer loyalty is the factor Cynthia considers key to making Midway a success. Loyal customers purchase what is offered at the stand, even if it is not necessarily what they were expecting. In return Cynthia practices a strict anti-gouging ethic. For example, she won't charge more for an heirloom tomato just because it's rare. "If it takes the same amount of energy to grow, why should I charge more?" she asks.

Due to Midway's small size and location (between Corvallis and Albany on Highway 20), Cynthia's only market outlet is her farm stand. However, she has additional acreage nearby and would like to produce more food in the future. Like other small farms that market directly to the public, Midway benefits from roadside visibility. Emerging partnerships between small farms like Midway and the local community generate



Cynthia Kapple runs a farm stand on Hwy. 20.

valuable social capital, allowing these farmers to develop reliable new markets and to gradually put more land into production.

Building a Local Food System: Prospects for Our Community

Thus far we have discussed findings from our interviews with fifteen local food producers. Considering the broader context of agriculture in the Mid-Willamette Valley, what insights can we gain?

Oregon Farmland Plentiful, Though Declining

While the overall number of farms in Oregon increased from approximately 37,000 to 40,000 between 1991 and 2005, the total land area being farmed decreased by about 700,000 acres or 4% during the same time period (see Figure 1). This is more rapid than farmland reduction in the United States over the same 15-year period, which shrank from 981.7 million acres to 933.4 million acres, or a loss of about 2% (see Table 1).

The average farm size in Oregon decreased over this period of time from 481 to 428 acres. A similar pattern can be seen in the broader United States statistics on farm size and farm numbers over the same period.

For the purposes of the Census of Agriculture, the USDA defines a farm as: "an operation with [at least] \$1,000 of agricultural production and sales or an operation that normally would have had \$1,000 of sales." This definition makes it more difficult to carry out a useful food system assessment since many rural residences are included in the total number of farms and

Figure 1. Decline in Oregon Farmland, 1991-2005

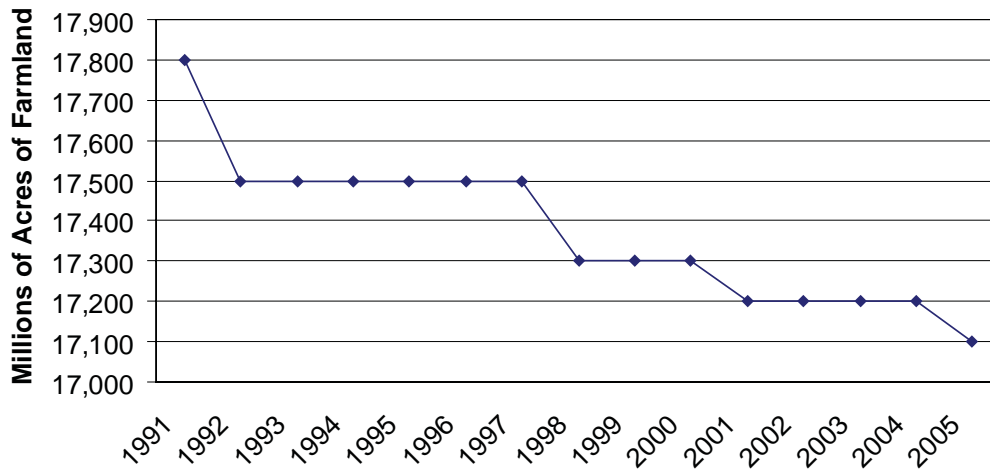


Table 1. Number of farms and land in farms, Oregon and the U.S., 1991-2005

Year	Oregon			United States		
	Number of farms	Land in farms	Average size of farm	Number of farms	Land in farms	Average size of farm
	<i>1,000</i>	<i>1,000 acres</i>	<i>Acres</i>	<i>1,000</i>	<i>1,000 acres</i>	<i>Acres</i>
1991	37.0	17,800	481	2,117	981,736	464
1992	37.5	17,500	467	2,108	978,503	464
1993	37.5	17,500	467	2,202	968,845	440
1994	38.0	17,500	461	2,198	965,935	440
1995	38.5	17,500	455	2,196	962,515	438
1996	38.5	17,500	455	2,191	958,675	438
1997	39.0	17,500	449	2,191	956,010	436
1998	39.5	17,300	438	2,192	952,080	434
1999	40.0	17,300	433	2,187	948,460	434
2000	40.0	17,300	433	2,167	945,080	436
2001	40.0	17,300	433	2,167	945,080	436
2002	40.0	17,200	430	2,149	942,070	438
2003	40.0	17,200	430	2,135	940,300	440
2004	40.0	17,200	430	2,127	938,650	441
2005	40.0	17,200	430	2,113	936,600	443
	40.0	17,100	428	2,101	933,400	444

Source: Agri-Facts Oregon, March 2006. USDA Census of Agriculture.

thus muddy the picture. In 2002, according to Census of Agriculture data, there were 4,582 farms in Linn, Benton and Polk counties. Of these, two-thirds (2,998) were farms under 50 acres in size (Figure 2). For more detail on USDA definition of farm size, see Table 2.

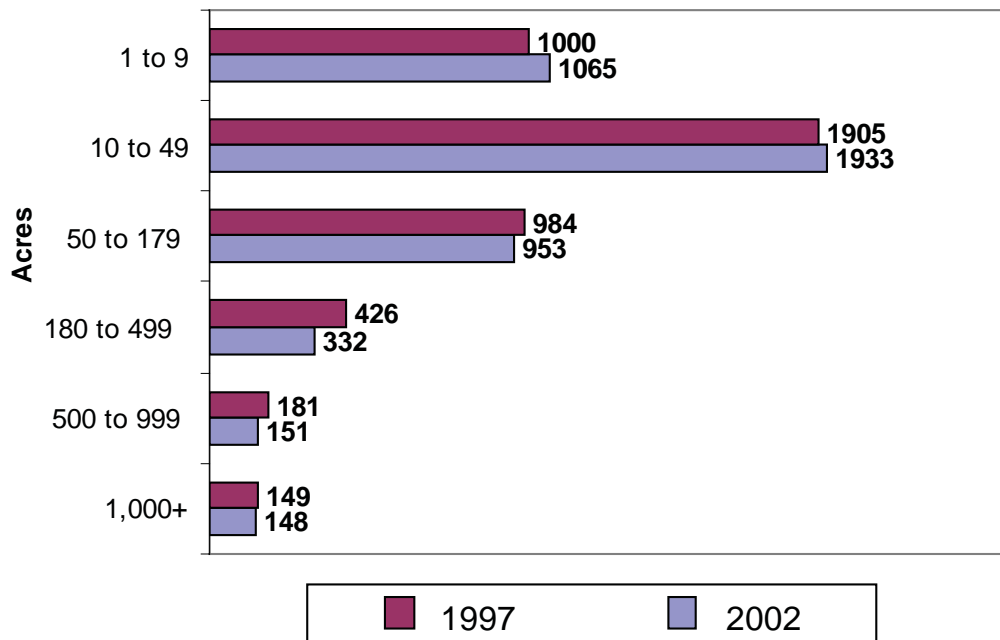
The total number of farms decreased slightly in these three counties between 1997 and 2002, even while small farm numbers increased somewhat. Farms between 50 and 999 acres decreased.

In some cases, another useful way of measuring farm size is gross income. While Linn, Benton and Polk counties have many farms, 69% of

them sold less than \$10,000 per year and 47% sold less than \$2,500 per year (U.S. Census 2002). These gross sales figures, which do not take into consideration expenses or owner labor, also include rural residents who are not striving to make a living from farming, or at least not on a full-time basis. These figures are consistent with a study based on the 1987 census discussing how part-time farmers comprise approximately half of all U.S. growers:

“A growing trend toward part-time farming has developed in recent years. For some it provides a means of maintaining a family tradition of farming. Others rely on it as a supplement to their off-farm income.”

Figure 2. Change in Number of Farms of Various Sizes in Linn, Benton and Polk Counties, 1997 and 2002



Source: USDA Census of Agriculture. Statistics for Oregon, 1997 and 2002.

Table 2. Defining the Farm Typology, According to USDA.

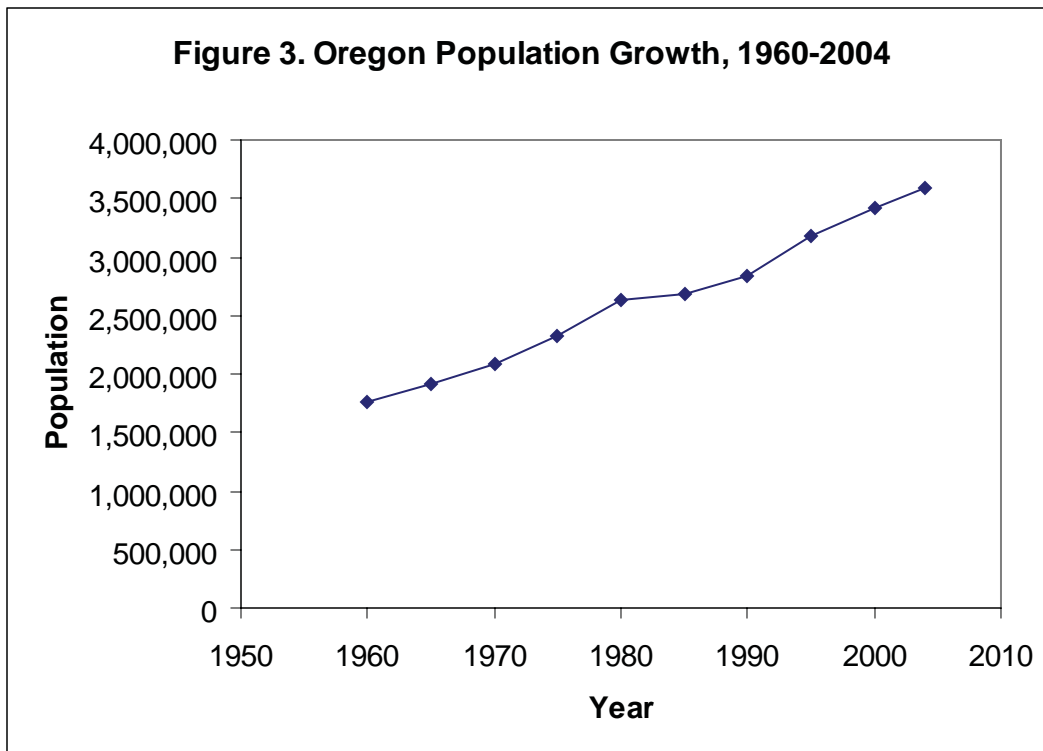
Adapted from the USDA Agriculture Fact Book 2001-2002, <http://www.usda.gov/factbook/>.

Small Family Farms (sales less than \$250,000)	Other Family Farms	Nonfamily Farms
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited-resource farms. Small farms with sales less than \$100,000, farm assets less than \$150,000, and total operator household income less than \$20,000. Operators may report any major occupation, except hired manager. • Retirement farms. Small farms whose operators report they are retired. • Residential/lifestyle farms. Small farms whose operators report a major occupation other than farming. • Farming-occupation farms. Small farms whose operators report farming as their major occupation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large family farms. Sales between \$250,000 and \$499,999. • Very large family farms. Sales of \$500,000 or more. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nonfamily Farms. Farms organized as nonfamily corporations or cooperatives, as well as farms operated by hired managers.

Population Pressures Could Further Threaten Farmland

Population growth in Oregon could push farmland into further decline, especially in the rapidly growing, fertile Willamette Valley. The population of Oregon has more than doubled in the past 45 years and is projected to reach 4,833,119 by 2030 (PSU Population Research

Center 2004). This is a projected increase of over 1,250,000 people, or 25 percent, and could drastically affect land use, particularly abutting urban areas where local food production is critical. (See Figure 3.)



The population of Oregon has more than doubled in the past 45 years and is projected to reach 4,833,119 by 2030.

Source: Oregon Population Report, 2005.

Overwhelmingly, Local Growers Want Local Marketing Opportunities

The majority of the local growers we spoke to in our interviews expressed a strong interest in developing or expanding local marketing opportunities. As fuel prices rise, keeping food sales in our community becomes a more urgent economic matter for small and mid-sized farmers. Many have additional arable land and would like to raise more food. The limiting factor for these farmers, we found, is steady, reliable local markets.

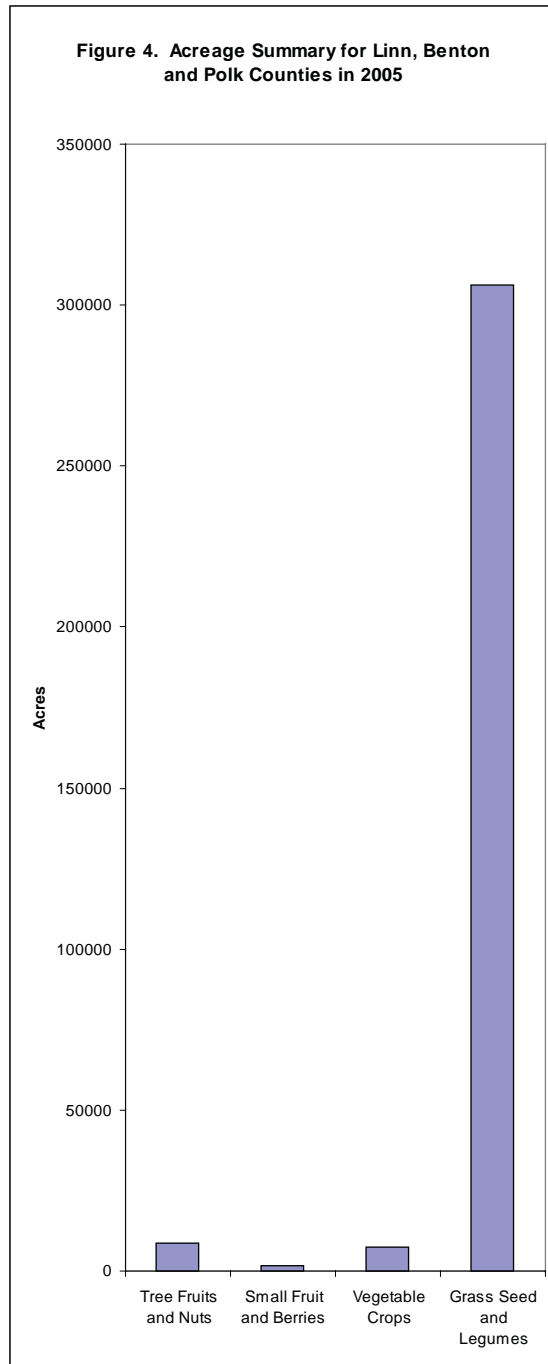
Past community research, conducted by the Ten Rivers Food Web, also demonstrates a strong interest among farmers in increasing local markets. A survey conducted in the summer of 2005, which sought to assess the level of interest among local growers in selling food to schools, showed that local farmers were interested in school cafeterias as potential markets (see farm-to-school survey results below). We have yet to fully explore other institutional markets, such as college cafeterias, hospitals, retirement communities, prisons and corporate campuses. These businesses buy and consume hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of food each year, much of which could be sourced locally. This shift – from conventional methods of food sourcing through large distributors to direct

sourcing from local farmers – depends largely on stimulating community awareness, building relationships between appropriate parties and cultivating a strong commitment on the part of institutional buyers.

Edible Crops Grown for Local Consumption Could Be Expanded

Food production comprises a relatively small portion of agricultural land use in our region (see Figure 4). In the past ten years, harvested food acreage has declined in Linn, Benton and Polk Counties. Fruits, nuts and berries have increased by 1,415 acres, or 15.7%, since 1996, while vegetable crops have decreased by 4,063 acres, or 35.5% since 1996, yielding a net loss of food crops (see Table 3). Global markets have also prompted reductions in production of wheat and peppermint oil in the three-county area.

According to Mark Mellbye of the Linn County Extension Service, the vast majority of acres formerly growing vegetables, wheat and peppermint in these three counties are now growing grass seed. In the past decade, grass seed production has increased 14.3% or an additional 38,390 acres. Three to five percent is planted in specialty seed and a small fraction has been lost to housing developments (Mellbye 2006).



However, we should take caution not to oversimplify our understanding the national and global forces that influence local agricultural land use. Most canned and frozen products have historically been exported from our region. The impact of processing facilities and export-oriented crops on the local food system is quite complex. For example, the increase in grass seed production in the Willamette Valley is intimately related to the decrease in demand for other export crops such as soft white wheat, shipped mostly to Asia, and peppermint oil, used for the production of toothpaste and other manufactured products (Lev 2006). Consumer demand and global economic trends play a role changes in both local and global food systems.

Could Food Processing Facilities Revitalize the Local Food System?

In spite of the recent decline in processed vegetable capacity in our region, the majority of small and mid-sized growers we interviewed responded enthusiastically to the idea of developing new processing facilities that are appropriate for their needs in supplying local consumers on a year-round basis. Processing facilities could represent a new local market for growers and a means of building food security, as food could be raised, processed and consumed within the local community.

Food processing facilities that focus on supplying local markets are not a new idea, but one that has gone out of fashion in recent decades. Just as farming in the United States experienced industrialization and consolidation in the decades since the 1930s, a similar trend happened in the food processing sector. Over time, smaller local mills and canneries were replaced by larger facilities and later many canneries gave way to processing facilities for frozen foods (Halweil 2004).

Historically, few of the valley’s large processing plants – for example, AgriFrozen in Woodburn; Pictsweet Mushroom Farm in Salem; the

Table 3. Combined Harvested Acreage Summary for Linn, Benton and Polk Counties, 1996 and 2005

Year Harvested	Tree Fruits and Nuts	Small Fruit and Berries	Vegetable Crops	Grass Seed and Legumes
1996	7,675	1,325	11,428	267,790
2005	8,855	1,560	7,365	306,180

Data source for Figure 4 and Table 3: Oregon Agricultural Information Network, 2006

AgriPac Cannery in Eugene; Smuckers of Woodburn; and Chiquita of Salem – were central participants in a local food system, in which locally produced food is consumed within the region. These facilities, all of which are now closed, came and went in response to national and global agricultural trends, stimulating and then dismantling sectors of our local economy. Future processing facilities could do more to play a role in local markets while paying greater attention to environmental impact in ways that many past examples did not.

Increasing Consumer Demand for Locally Grown Food: An Essential Next Step

As we have seen from our interviews and secondary data, we have many acres of farmland and skilled food producers with an interest in local markets in the Mid-Willamette Valley. Given the availability of land and farmers, the missing link to further building the local food system is through increasing consumer demand for these products.

Heavily influenced by price, convenience and advertising, many of us are accustomed to shopping at large supermarkets where the average food item travels between 1,500-2,200 miles from farm to market (Pirog 2001). The farmer remains an anonymous and forgotten piece of a highly complex puzzle. The food, while perhaps quite affordable on the grocery store shelf, represents tremendous hidden costs: fossil fuel requirements, greenhouse gas emissions and money drained from local economies.

Fortunately, the foundation for a community-based food system already exists in Benton County and its surrounding region. Many local direct market farmers have the capacity and willingness to expand production but are held back by constraints on their time, especially the effort required to find new markets. These farmers typically utilize multiple direct marketing pathways (e.g. farmers' markets, restaurants) and to a lesser extent, sales to wholesale distributors. Most operate diversified farms that produce and sell a variety of products such as meat, vegetables, cut flowers and "starts." These producers are concerned not only about sustaining themselves as farmers, but also preserving the farmland and open space around our communities. Many are committed to forging direct connections with the local



A field of organically grown leeks at Denison Farms.

community that engage these different aspects of sustainability simultaneously.

Building social networks between urban communities and local farms offers great potential benefits for all sides (Meter 2005). Such networks enhance economic opportunities for farms and rural communities, promote family farm revitalization and provide nutritious food for local communities. Farmers' markets and CSA operations provide examples of these kinds of mutually beneficial alliances. Because small farm income can be highly variable from year to year, CSA subscriptions – taking in customer money at the beginning of the season – can lessen the risk of catastrophic loss and offer farmers consistent sales (Hendrickson 2005). This sharing of risk and reward is a unique and important aspect to successful rural-urban alliances.

On an individual, household and institutional level, our community needs to make an ongoing commitment to buying locally grown food in order to encourage more production and thereby build food security. We are fortunate to have at our fingertips an abundance of farmers' markets, farm stands, grocery stores and co-ops that source from local farmers and label food origins. The responsibility lies with the individual to become more discriminating shoppers, choosing pears grown in the Northwest instead of pears shipped from Argentina. Community education programs can assist as well – buy local campaigns, nutrition education, school gardens and field trips to farms are examples of powerful tools for increasing food literacy.

Food, while perhaps quite affordable on the grocery store shelf, represents tremendous hidden costs: fossil fuel requirements, greenhouse gas emissions and money drained from local economies.

Local Food for Local Kids

Results of a Farm-to-School Survey

The farm-to-school movement began with a handful of parents who were concerned about the food their children ate in school cafeterias. In the past ten years, this grassroots movement has mushroomed into thousands of innovative programs – school gardens, salad bars stocked with locally grown produce, nutrition education curricula and much more – in hundreds of school districts across America. Farm-to-school programs are viewed by many as a means of creating opportunities for local farmers while tackling health issues such as the epidemic increase in childhood overweight.

During the summer of 2005, we surveyed 27 farmers at the Corvallis and Albany Farmers' Markets as part of a Ten Rivers Food Web effort to gauge the interest of growers in selling their products to schools.

In our survey, only two farms indicated any experience selling to schools. One had supplied small apples, perfectly sized for children, to schools in Polk County. The other had supplied food to a cafeteria in the Portland area.

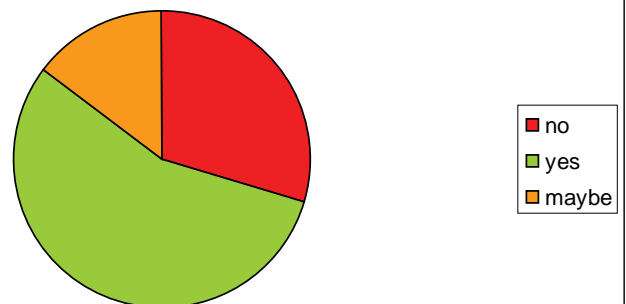
Seventy percent of respondents said “yes” or “maybe” (15 and 4 respectively) when asked if they had extra capacity to provide food specifically for a farm-to-school program. More than half of these producers had extra product on hand and would until the fall season. Notably, many said that if they had advance notice of a specific need from a school, they would happily plan and plant ahead for that need. The question “how much product would be available” was met mostly with shrugs and either “lots” or reference to acreage available.

About two-thirds of all respondents said they do not do value-added processing though a few of those were willing to think about how they could do so in future. Several of the current processors were willing to expand their value-added capacity if the right opportunity came along.

Only three of 27 farmers declined to hear more about a potential farm-to-school program. These were all farmers who have niche markets, selling mainly through the farmers' market to high-end consumers (mushroom grower and specialty organic producer). These food producers indicated that they “have enough to do” without involving themselves in a farm-to-school program and are not interested in expanding their businesses.

Of those interested in farm-to-school efforts, roughly half were “somewhat” or “strongly” interested in such a prospect. Farmers wished to learn more about what kinds of products are desirable to schools. Many farms have extra acreage that could be put to use for growing more food. Often it is a question of what crops they have time to produce, if they had a steady demand to fill, and whether they can take risks to expand production.

Figure 5. Local Farms With Extra Capacity for a Farm-to-School Program



Community groups and institutions can facilitate a shift to a local food system by building connections with local growers. By changing institutional buying patterns, we can develop vast new markets for farmers and even encourage an influx of new farmers. We recommend the “four-legged milking stool approach,” meaning many approaches at the same time. By increasing supply and demand in equal measure, we can gradually build community food security in the Mid-Willamette Valley.

Chapter II. Low-Income People and Food in Benton County

The low-income portion of the food community assessment draws from general statistics as well as from several studies: (1) a qualitative interview-based study of 58 low-income people living in Adair and Alsea done in 2004 and (2) a survey-based study of low-income people living in Corvallis: students, food bank clients and gleaners. The first section gives a context for poverty in Benton County and looks at other expenses that make food security a problem for people. The second part explains food habits, experiences and attitudes found among people interviewed in Adair and Alsea. The third part explores the responses of low-income people living in Corvallis.

In 2000, 14.6% of Benton County's population fell below the poverty line (1252 families), with two-thirds of those families with children and nearly half of the families headed by single women. Although Benton County seems rather affluent, the percentage of population living in poverty in Benton County is above both the state's and the country's percentage (by 3 and 2 percentage points respectively).

In Benton County in 1999, the median income was \$41, 987, slightly higher than that for all of Oregon. However, the percentage of households earning less than 185% of the poverty level was 28.2%, also slightly higher than the state average. In 2003, 15.7% of the residents of Benton County received services from the Department of Human Services. In short, in 1999, 12.6% of people had trouble meeting their food needs.

In Benton County, the following types of families are significantly more likely to be below the poverty line in Benton County: male-headed families with no wife present, female-headed families with no husband present and households with unrelated individuals. From 1979 to 1999 in Benton County, there was a slight decrease in percentage of families in general under the poverty line and families with children under 18. However, there was a 2% increase in female-headed families with children under the poverty line. On the other hand, families with married couples under 65 are slightly less likely to be

below the poverty line in Benton County than Oregon as a whole.

[According to research done by Mark Edwards and Bruce Weber, in comparison with the statistics from other states, the group that stands out as different in Oregon, are ironically families with two wage earners and children. This has not been corroborated in Benton County statistically and was not found in the Adair/Alsea study.]

Given these statistics, it is not surprising to hear that the number of people relying on food boxes from Linn Benton Food Share increased by 45% since 1997 and a full 15% over just the last two years. For example, the South Corvallis Food Bank served 25 families when it began in 2001, but in 2006 it serves 150 families a month or a total of 650 individuals. In Benton County, many people also participate in Gleaning Groups, volunteer groups which gather excess food from stores and farms as well as receiving food from Linn Benton Food Share. In both cases, fresh fruits and vegetables, notably from local organic farms, are available seasonally for low-income people availing themselves of emergency food. At a recent distribution of a gleaning group, for example, families received several heads of lettuce and fresh beets from local sources.

In 2002, a Hunger Survey was done at 16 emergency food pantries in Linn and Benton Counties. The study indicated that people receiving food stamps experience further need for food by the end of the month. Children's food intake is a matter of concern for this group when we hear that a fifth of the families reported that their children had to cut or skip meals—every month, in 44 percent of the cases. Furthermore, the problem of transportation in getting to stores to buy food comes to light as 22 percent of these folks have no car and a further 22 percent have cars but no money for gas.

In Benton County as a whole, the young experience more poverty than the aged. People in the 18-24 age group experienced the highest rates of poverty at 17.1%, while people 65 and older experienced the lowest rate at 4.9%. This is

an interesting statistic, which can be accounted for in part by the university population—a population that needs more study.

To understand the situation of low-income people in Benton County in relation to food, it is important to have a broader view of their lives. Note that “low-income” people does not usually mean that they are from a family background that would be qualified as “poor” or lower class. Most have been raised in what they consider to be middle class conditions and are adjusting to expenses that outweigh their incomes.

In the food security study that was done in Alsea and Adair, it is clear that other expenses directly influence the ability to eat enough food and to eat the food one prefers. Housing (rent, mortgage) emerged as the main and most difficult expense. Utilities were a close second. Third were car-related expenses. Health was not cited often, but those with any history of health problems cite medical bills and pharmaceutical costs as their highest expense. For those who live in Adair and Alsea, car maintenance and gas are also a never-ending concern. For many, debts have accrued. When all of these pile up, a relatively small expense like school supplies, cell phone, or internet connection can seem quite large.

The high expense of housing in Benton County emerges as one of the problems which results in food insecurity. In 2006, a United Way Needs Assessment found almost 53% of households spend more than 30% of their income on housing. As one elderly Adair woman with a husband and a young adopted son said, “It’s hard to pay for food. We have to balance the budget: house first, utilities second, drugs third, food fourth, phone, cable, newspaper at the end. If there is no money, these go.” Cars were not such a problem for them because her husband had been a car mechanic and fixed up old cars for them—and for many of the neighbors. She fed breakfast to several other neighbor children in addition to her own and sometimes gave the neighbor woman a ride into town when she had no other way. Eventually, having lost much of her savings to the Enron scandal, however, this woman and her husband could no longer afford the mortgage payments. They sold their house to a landlord who allowed them to continue living there. The woman had a garden and canned tomatoes, spaghetti sauce, pickles, etc. As she

said, “No one will go hungry in this house.” She had participated in gleaning programs, but because of her health, she found it impossible to continue at this point. She and her husband were determined to never depend on public “handouts,” however.

People actually moved to Adair originally to escape high rents and to be able to keep dogs in rented houses, but recently the rents have been increasing up to \$650-\$800 for a three-bedroom house. The lower rent is compensated for by expensive utilities. Water is more highly priced than in Corvallis because the large, antiquated water system used by Adair is the original one used by the military base in World War II--the origin of the older houses that these people now live in. The houses were built with electric heat that is expensive and does not heat adequately. Tenants whose landlords had put in woodstoves were pleased; some received wood via a gleaners’ program or a church program. A few people reported months when they had to choose between utilities and rent. Food was a secondary concern when this happened.

Transportation is an ongoing problem for low-income people trying to get food in Adair and Alsea. Low-income people have older cars that often need to be fixed and gas is becoming increasingly expensive. Car insurance is hard to keep up. Although low-income people can get help for utilities, for example, getting aid for cars is very difficult. Lack of transportation confounds not only food shopping at cheaper stores but also looking for or getting to jobs. A middle-aged single mother in Alsea, for example, had three cars, but none of them were working. She was on food stamps and TANF and did not have the money to get the cars fixed. She could not get into Corvallis to get cheap food and ended up buying more expensive food at the one local food store. Meanwhile, two older children had come back home and needed the cars to find work.

Transportation is a big problem in Alsea for sick and disabled people. In the past, people over 60 or disabled people in Alsea could ride Dial-a-Bus into Corvallis. One day a week they could come to a central point where they would be picked up and taken in. “At one time there must have been 6-7 people riding that bus. They would like donations to help pay for the gas. For some reason, they lost it. Then they were going to start

The high expense of housing in Benton County emerges as one of the problems which results in food insecurity.

Expenses for health problems often push low-income people off the precarious balance on which they are perched.

it up again, but I don't know what happened.”

Even in Corvallis, transportation can be an issue. In a study of 15 food bank clients (see below), one-third said they did not have reliable transportation. They had to go shopping by bus, bike, or get a ride with a friend or relative. A similar study of 8 Benton County gleaners (see below) showed that 12% do not have reliable transportation.

Expenses for health problems often push low-income people off the precarious balance on which they are perched. A woman in Adair who owed a great deal to a dentist for her daughter's dental work, was getting hounded by a collection company who was garnering her husband's salary—a legal practice in Oregon. She was not working as she had a younger child at home and her wages would have gone to paying for childcare. They were not making it, scrimping on food and keeping the electric heat off in the back bedrooms. The woman was at her wit's end, considering a return to Las Vegas to find work from when they had escaped so the children could have a better lifestyle—and perhaps to escape the debt collector. She considered herself middle class and had not availed herself of emergency food; the local church had delivered her a food box voluntarily, and while she was grateful, she said, “Poor people deserve food that everyone likes.” Nonetheless, she felt that she had a supportive community around her, even if only to complain with:

Me and my neighbors get together and complain how hard it is to live out here. They call it 'the curse of Adair.' It's the utilities, the rent, the groceries and the low wages. And it's not counting the car, the insurance, the medical. The neighbors get together for coffee on Saturday morning and talk about 'How will we make it this week?' It's more like a support group.

Many in our study were affected adversely by the cut-back in the Oregon Health Plan. One woman in Alsea who had had a back injury which was strained daily by the manual work that she did for income said, “I am having to choose between getting my pain medicine and eating!” A young mother in Adair said, “The kids were on Oregon Health Plan until the beginning of April. Then both of them got pneumonia and it was really bad. We had to splurge for granola bars and juice boxes for the kids sometimes.”

Low-income people who get mired in debt have a very difficult time. A woman with a husband and two children said,

We have credit card bills. It's really stupid because I didn't have the money, so when I didn't have cash to go and haul the gleaner food, what did I do? Take my credit card and fill my tank with gas. It was so easy to do, you know. It was a solution, when really it wasn't because now I owe those bills and it's like, I finally got to the point where here I have seven credit cards. They're all maxed out. I can't make the payments on them anymore because the balances are so high, and minimum payments just doesn't cut it. So, now I cut up the cards, I don't use them anymore.

Another woman simply ignored her sizable education loans and medical bills. There is no way that she can pay them, as she just makes enough to pay her relatively low rent, keep her truck running, feed her animals and hopefully have enough to eat.

On the other side of the equation, jobs were hard to come by for those who had been laid off, had lower education and could not update their skills. One man in the study had been laid off from a job that outsourced overseas. His pleas to be taken back on were ignored. People who had jobs often worked in jobs that required long or night hours—as in newspaper printing jobs or pizza delivery jobs—or in hard manual jobs such as cleaning up after construction workers. These low-income workers came home tired and had little time to shop for food, garden, preserve food, or even participate in gleaning groups. Women of small children did not find it worth their while to work, as childcare would wipe out their earnings.

Food Habits in the Alsea/Adair Study

Getting Food: Grocery Shopping

Low-income people in outer Benton County overwhelmingly choose Winco as their shopping place. Across the board, the reason is price. Indeed, Winco has positioned itself to have cheap prices, making the decision to stop accepting local fruits and vegetables in the early 90s. In fact, several low-income people in the study wished that there were a Wal-mart or Costco in Corvallis so that they could get

cheaper food than Winco offers. The second most used place is Rainbow Canned Foods Outlet that offers cheap canned and packaged goods as well as some fresh produce. A handful of people use Safeway, Richey's and Fred Meyer's, watching for sales and using coupons (4). A few people take advantage of Orowheat and Wonder Bread Stores for cheap bread (3). One man who was unemployed, used his time to find all the best bargains for his family in all the stores around town. Although one person each cited the Coop, Thriftway and Emmons Meat Market, these were hardly used. In Alsea, people use the one general store in town for necessities when they cannot get into town; during the summer and fall, people buy food from local folks who sell out of their gardens.

People interviewed used various strategies to stretch their dollars. One was to pay for the inflexible necessities first—rent, utilities, car and then use what is left over for food and other things. Another is to do a big shopping trip at the beginning of the month and try to make it last. Another is to shop carefully at various places with coupons. A woman from Adair said, "I usually get groceries on Sunday. I really shop carefully and use coupons. I don't just use them to use them, only if it's something I need. I get the Sunday Gazette-Times and Oregonian. I spend about 25-35 dollars a week on groceries. The bill is fifty but with sales and coupons I save." Yet another strategy is to shop for generic brands. A young father from Adair mentioned, "There is no such thing as extra money but when you feel like you have [a little], you go to the store and you buy the generic brand over this brand because in reality the name brands probably actually do taste a little better, that's why they were name brands...but why should I spend that extra ten cents when I don't have to?"

Favorite Foods: Adults

In general, it appears that people know what they should eat and they want to eat nutritionally. When low-income people in outer Benton County were asked about their favorite foods (they could mention as many as they wanted), meat (15 mentions among 34 people responding) rated high. Four more chose hamburgers or chicken sandwiches from fast food places. On the other hand, fish and tofu were mentioned by only a few each. Meat is particularly missed by people receiving

emergency food, although a gleaner mentioned that she can use her money to get meat because the gleaners fulfill her family's other needs.

Vegetables also rated high with 14 mentions. Fresh vegetables were hard to have consistently, however, when people followed the pattern of doing a big shopping once a month, or at most once a week.

Good nutrition and money problems worked against each other. A middle-aged, single woman in Adair who was paying medical expenses from a car accident and was getting severely cut back on hours at work, bewailed the fact that she couldn't afford the nutritional food she would like to eat. "I am not always getting the fresh fruit...I eat a lot of meatless meals. I would need \$35-40 more. I would add fruit and vegetables and higher quality meat, a pork chop or chicken. My main need is better foods. I don't have savings."

High-carbohydrate foods, however, came out on top for favorite food preferences. High-carbohydrate foods includes: pasta, macaroni and cheese, tacos, pizza, rice, potatoes and bread. A bit more than half (20 of 34) chose these as favorite foods. If we add sweets (baked goods, chips and soda), this rises to 28 mentions for 34 people.

Favorite Foods: Children

What about the favorite foods of children—according to parents? Again, meat was a high response with 10 mentions in the 17 people responding; eggs got 3 mentions and fish got 2. Vegetables did surprisingly well for children (10 of 17) with fruits at 3 of 17.

High-carbohydrate foods topped the list for children, however, just like with adults. Among 17 people responding about their children, various high-carbohydrate foods got 25 mentions. Cereal, bread, pizza and macaroni and cheese were especially popular.

Like parents everywhere, they had trouble making their children eat what they should. Children were often characterized as being picky eaters who don't really want the more nutritious dishes. To hear mothers talk, the differences between what people like in the family often influences and limits what is available. For example, a mother in Adair said, "The whole house has a hard time finding something that

In general, it appears that people know what they should eat and they want to eat nutritionally.

The study shows that several barriers stand in the way of gardening: time, knowledge, the vagaries of the weather, changes in life and place of residence.

everyone enjoys. I like meat. I would say the kids' favorite dinner is probably noodles or spaghetti. We're short on vegetables because the boys and I don't really care for vegetables. Only my daughter likes them."

Eating on a Typical Day

If we look at the responses for what people eat on a typical day, we see that ideals which reflect nutritional knowledge and personal preferences are difficult to live out on a daily basis. Out of 12 responses, rice, bread, macaroni and cheese, pizza and pasta top the list with 21 mentions. If we add hamburgers and casseroles with noodles and a bit of meat, there are 25 mentions. In contrast, proteins suffer with meat getting 5 mentions, fish one and dairy four. Fruits and vegetables almost disappear with only 4 mentions.

Interviewees struggled with both low incomes and irregular schedules. Breakfast was eaten with many carbohydrates (pancakes, cereal, toast, bacon). Lunch was informal and non-scheduled.—whatever can be picked up like leftovers or sandwiches. Dinner was a meal together, usually in front of the TV. As one mother said, "I cook twice a day; at breakfast, the kids are pretty much on their own to make their cereal or pop-tarts."

When adults are busy, food suffers. A single mother of three who is finishing university notes, "I'm not creative. We have oatmeal for breakfast. Open a can of soup and sandwich for lunch. And meat, rice, vegetables if it is a good dinner. Sometimes in this heat they don't want to eat dinner. So I say, 'Go have cereal!' At least it's fortified. They skip dinner sometimes. I wish they'd eat more. If my daughter cooks, it's hot dogs or pizza. I don't care for pizza and we get a heck of a lot of pizza!"

Seasons make a difference in the way people eat up to a point. Another young mother in Adair notes, "Our summer diets are completely different. It's more fresh vegetables because they are available at lower prices. In the winter it's fudge and cookies."

Low income people have little choice but to cook at home most of the time. In interviews with 15 Food Bank clients (see below), all but two said they cooked at home several times a day. However, a few of them questioned what

cooking is. "Does dumping a can of soup into a bowl and sticking it in the microwave count as 'cooking?'"

Gardening

In our interviews gardening was done by 10 of 58 people interviewed. Some middle-aged to older women and men had gardened all their lives and were very skilled. "I always got a garden....I grow tomatoes, cucumbers, beans, peas, strawberries," said an older Adair woman.

The study shows that several barriers stand in the way of gardening: time, knowledge, the vagaries of the weather, changes in life and place of residence.

In Alsea, a young woman reflected on the yearly difficulties of gardening. "When we do a garden...we grow tomatoes, cucumbers...lots and lots of corn. We did green beans the year before last. Onions, but our onions didn't do any good last year. We tried broccoli and cabbage last year. And the year before we did carrots and radishes...It's kind of hard to know what's gonna' grow good for you, it ain't the same [every year]." Another woman talked of mold on tomatoes one year from too much rain.

An older woman who had been a prolific gardener in the past now lived, by necessity, in a hunting shack that was located in an old logging site. The soil was bad and there were many trees. Although she tried to bring manure from where she kept her horses 10 miles away, it was difficult because of gas and her disabilities.

A woman who has always gardened and has four raised beds in her yard in Adair said, "Having a garden really adds. The trick is having time to garden." A mother in her thirties with a young child in Alsea had had a big garden, and her older son helped her with it. However, with the birth of her daughter and the demands of work, she said, "Right at the moment we just have some greens, and you know radishes. Typically we try to have a full garden in. We raise pigs every other year and we've got chickens."

A group of young adult children in Alsea talked of their plans for gardening, which had not been realized. "We were going to plant in the back yard, but Mom, she didn't have enough time to do it." They had tried to help get ready, but as one said, "I don't how to do a garden and stuff.

I've done gardens before, as far as helping people. But I've never had my own."

Community Gardens

The idea of a community garden in Adair or Alsea was met with various responses. In Adair, one woman who had raised her children there was enthusiastic. "A community garden sounds great. More people would participate than you think." In the summer of 2004, several women developed a recreation program for children in Adair, and one of the young mothers did a small community garden behind her house. The city helped to subsidize her water. It worked as long as the recreation program continued for that summer. Others in Adair were not so enthusiastic about community gardens. One doubted that people would be willing to put time into garden products that they would then have to share with others. Another thought it might be a good idea, but "People out here, the majority won't take the time."

Four people in Alsea thought a community garden would be a good idea. "If you got the right people. I think there'd be a lot of interest in that. And I think the kids would be interested too." Another woman suggested that a green house would be a good idea at the school, but wondered whether there would be a teacher at the school to take the leadership on that. Another woman liked the idea, but had doubts about factors of exclusion. This extremely low-income woman who had recently moved in said,

"I think that [community garden] would be an excellent idea. 'Cause what I've seen, most of these people around here, they don't mind doing garden work. Matter of fact, if you look around, they enjoy it."

Preservation

From our limited surveys and interviews, gleaners seemed to be the most active in preserving food, food bank clients next and the general population the least. Among eight gleaners in Corvallis surveyed, all were very active in preserving vegetables and fruits—freezing, canning, drying and making jams, jellies and butters. In a group of 15 Corvallis food bank clients, a full one-third reported growing or preserving some of their own food. Common vegetables grown were onions, potatoes, carrots, lettuce, peas, green beans and tomatoes.

However, in our general interviews in Adair and Alsea, canning and freezing were used by a small group (6 of 58). Many people could not afford freezers and many did not have the time or skill to can. Those who canned were middle-aged women who prided themselves on the big difference that it made in their lives. A woman who had moved around a great deal and struggled financially throughout her life said, "I had times in my life when I would skip lunch to make sure there was enough for dinner. I have a good storage pantry now. I am a food hoarder. My pantry has probably saved me from going hungry."

An older woman who had raised six children and was raising an adopted child with her husband brought cans of relish, spaghetti sauce, tomatoes, pears and pickled beets and cucumbers out to show us. Much of her produce came from her own garden. She had learned to can from her mother-in-law and said she would be glad to teach others. In general, jams and jellies were the most common canned item.

Several people found that present circumstances did not allow them to can, reflecting the energy and time that canning requires. A young woman said, "I didn't can this year, but my mom and my husband's dad can. But this summer I had a newborn, so it would have been too hard." On the other end of the spectrum, an older woman who is now disabled from diabetes said, "I've always done a lot of canning, although the last two years I haven't." Nonetheless her husband continued to "mess in the garden so we can have fresh cucumbers, tomatoes and zucchini."

A younger mother in Alsea expressed the desire to learn to can: "My husband keeps telling me you're gonna' learn how to can. And this summer we have to learn how to can, and my grandmother's gonna' teach me how to can."

Hunting and Fishing

Hunting and fishing did not emerge as important ways of getting food in the Adair/Alsea study. One of the attractions of rural life in Alsea is the ability to hunt and fish. A few people in Alsea were able to take advantage of it. One woman said, "My husband's a big time hunter/fisher...[my freezer] is completely full with fish and venison right now." Her husband brings her steelhead from the Alsea River and her neighbor brings her smelt from the Columbia.

WIC was praised by all who mentioned it as a good program.

Another woman who had just moved back to Alsea to be near relatives likes to fish, her son likes to crawdad, and her husband brings home deer and elk, which they store in their large freezer. “Whatever is in season, that’s what we’re going after. Crawdads are year round. You can take and dip them in some batter and throw it in the fryer.”

In general, however, few people seem to actually depend on hunting or fishing for food. Time is the problem for some. A woman in her 30s with children considered herself a hunter and fisher, but in the last 12 months had only had time to go fishing once and caught a trout. Failing health is the problem for others. Another older woman talked of hunting on her horse in the past, but she had now met with disabilities that did not allow that.

But even more, people repeatedly complained about the cost of hunting and fishing licenses. A low-income couple with their son came to Alsea hoping to be able to supplement their food by fishing, but the husband said, “I love to fish. I stood in the river for three hours on Thanksgiving Day...I finally caught one, but I was so cold...I’ve still got some frost bite on that toe.” When asked if he fished often, he replied, “I don’t have the ways or means. Licenses and stuff cost money. They just went up for the new season. Together it’s going to be like \$50 bucks.” Instead, living there without transportation, they became dependent on the rather expensive and sometimes out-of-date food at the only store in town.

Several people noted that they went to pick berries. One had taken her children to pick strawberries and blueberries. She suggested it as a way that people can get food, remembering her Grandmother’s enthusiasm for it.. “There are blackberries they can pick at the pond up north a bit [from Adair]. My Grandma was such a picker. She would put on her big overalls and tramp through the blackberries. She’d work so hard and we stand on the pavement!”

Special Diets

The people in the Alsea/ Adair study who were on special diets because of a physical condition struggled with the problem of maintaining their diets on a limited income. As an Adair woman who was overweight with diabetes mentioned, “Basically I try to eat sugar free. It probably costs

more, like low sugar cranberry juice is \$1.50 more. I’ll do odd things like mix OJ with diet soda. I have to be really careful.”

A man in his 40s on food stamps who was recently diagnosed with Type II diabetes and afraid that his four young children might also inherit with diabetes was trying hard to compensate:

We have switched from pasta to taco salad and whole wheat pasta. Hamburger, non-sweet cereals, salads to lower cholesterol and weight... We make pancakes with a special recipe and frozen vegetables instead of canned because the canned have sodium and sugar in them. We eat deli meats mostly ham, turkey, chicken, turkey, pastrami. We eat only a little bologna. We get turkey hot dogs. The kids don’t like to eat meat much. One kid eats only salads. The others like mac and cheese—Velveeta brand is best. We have peanut butter for the kids and powdered sugar with a shaker so we don’t use too much. It’s hard with candy. We have cookies in the first of the month...

Ingrained taste preference is an added factor to struggle with—not limited of course to low-income people. An Alsea woman said it clearly when she was asked what her favorite foods were: “Stuff that I am not supposed to be eating with sugar in it!”

Several mothers in Adair struggled with children who needed more expensive food because of dietary needs or preferences. A mother in Adair struggled with an autistic child who only liked about ten foods. “He is just entirely different. Bacon, cheese, nothing mixed together.”

Public Assistance

As to participation in emergency food programs, WIC was praised by all who mentioned it as a good program. A mother of an infant and several other young children in Adair said, “WIC gives us all our milk, eggs, cereal and peanut butter. Kids go through those like there is no tomorrow. They could live off those. WIC is a huge money saver. I don’t have to say no to a glass of milk.”

Free and reduced lunch, available in Adair at Corvallis schools, but not in Alsea, was seen very positively by Adair people. A debate goes on in Alsea around the free and reduced lunch program. Although the school would qualify, it is the feeling of the majority that they do not

Food Banks: A Conversation between an OSU Student and a Volunteer Worker at South Corvallis Food Bank, May 2006

Where does the food come from?

The food comes mostly from the Linn-Benton Food Share and the USDA but it is also donated by churches, local individuals and local companies. Some of the produce comes from the Youth Garden and sometimes locals bring in extra things from their gardens. Food banks in Corvallis pay twelve cents a pound to the Linn-Benton Food Share for everything but meat, which is forty cents a pound. One of the workers commented that they used to get lots of canned food “overages” from local businesses but now these businesses have discovered that they can sell them to the dollar store for a profit instead.

It seems like the food is mostly canned goods, peanut butter and boxes of Hamburger Helper. There are some potatoes, red onions, small apples and oranges.

It's difficult to get anything [fresh] in the winter and sometimes people don't really know what to do with the things that are available (spinach, kale, other leafy greens). We hope to do cooking demonstrations to give people ideas on how to use things.

What kinds of food do you run low on?

Meat is always in short supply but also jelly and dry milk. Dry milk is always good because you can add it to normal milk and double the quantity for 5% of the price. Jelly is good because that is what kids want. We always have peanut butter, but no jelly.

I see that volunteers walk around with people who come to the Food Bank? Why do you do this?

The primary reason is to ensure that no one takes too much. There are signs under all the items that tell how many each family can take. When supplies are good, the quantities are increased. At the other food bank in town, people are just given a box and have no choice at all, so we feel like people are pretty happy just to be able to choose things for themselves.

You have a lot of eggs, butter and yoghurt. I'm impressed. And you have fresh bread from New Morning Bakery.

New Morning Bakery is right down the road from us and when they have a little extra, they will call the Food Bank to come get it.

The people who come to the Food Bank are quite diverse. There a lot of children, but a lot of elderly people, too. And I've seen a number of Hispanic people.

About sixty percent of our clientele are “regulars” and about forty percent are homeless or migrant workers.

need it because several elderly women purchase and cook hot meals for the K-12 school children three times a week. They charge \$2.00 for a lunch. In addition, the district would have to improve their kitchen which they feel would be too expensive. On the other hand, as one woman said, “Only those who pay \$2 for lunches, they're the ones who get lunches.” Lower-income people in Alsea privately express the wish for free and reduced lunch program. One low-income mother said that she went to a meeting about it, but soon realized that she was outvoted by people with more influence than her. A high school student in Alsea tells of feeling bad when he can afford neither the food made in the

school nor the food that his friends are buying at the deli in the one store in town. “I just sit there and watch the others go off down the street to get food.” In addition, he did not eat well at home. His father got home late and made little for him to eat.

In Alsea, people often felt they did not want to receive “handouts” from the government in the form of food stamps. Especially older people were often determined never to take that route. In Adair, people were more open to this. For those who did receive food stamps, they felt they were adequate as long as their income was low enough. A family of 6 with both parents

“I get a lot of money in food stamps. It has kept us fed. If I shop at Winco, there is plenty for the whole month.”

15 Food Bank Clients in Corvallis: Results of Short Interviews

Who were they?

- Age: 18-66, median age 43.
- Gender: 2/3 women, 1/3 men
- Household size: 1-9 persons, median size of 4
- Household income: 66% less than \$20,000; 13% \$20-40,000; 21% no response.
- Ethnicity: 87% Anglos; 13% Hispanic

Food purchases: (People could mention more than one.)

- **Winco:** 75% (of these, 75% for price, others for selection and convenience)
- **Safeway:** 33% (4 of 5 because of closeness to home)
- **Fred Meyers:** One person because of organic foods and rewards program.
- **7-11:** “I usually end up blowing all my food stamps at the 7-11 because it’s right next to my house and I don’t have a car.”
- **Coop:** “Only if I shoplift.”

Reasons for choices in food purchases:

- Price (75 percent)
- Nutritional value (25 percent)
- Quality or freshness (25 percent).
- Other factors: organic/non-GMO foods, things children will eat, diabetes and the shopper is familiar with and knows how to cook.
- **Fruits and vegetables:** A third feel that they do not eat enough fruits and vegetables, but a little over a third feel that they do.
- **Local foods:** Only one-third buy local foods--fruits, vegetables, milk and eggs.
- **Hunger:** Two-thirds said hunger was very serious or somewhat serious in Benton County.
“You aren’t ever going to starve here like you will some places. You can always go dumpster diving behind the restaurants because they throw out lots of good stuff.”
“It’s relative- it’s definitely better here than other cities. A homeless man here told me that he can get a cooked meal every day of the week.”

Do you get enough of the kinds of foods you like?

- Yes: 60%
- Yes, but not the kinds I like: 10%
- No: 30%

unemployed, for example, received \$400 in food stamps and found it to be adequate. “We spend \$300 at the beginning of the month and then use the rest for eggs and milk and fresh stuff.” They could even have their children take Hamburger Helper to school during the school drives.

A woman with three children living with her mother was satisfied with food stamps, but had to be careful where she shopped. She commented, “I get a lot of money in food stamps. It has kept us fed. If I shop at Winco, there is plenty for the whole month. When I lived in Dallas, I shopped at Safeway and ran out of food stamps in two weeks.”

However, if circumstances such as income or family members changed, food stamps may quickly become inadequate. In the case of a single woman, her income increased just a bit from \$7 to \$8 an hour, and yet food stamps decreased from \$250 to \$10. Add this to the loss of the Oregon Health Plan because of increased income, and this woman suddenly found herself wondering where the money for food would come from. In another case, a mother in Alsea had to struggle with her case worker to get her food stamps increased when older children came back to live at home and were not yet working. A mother in Adair also had problems: We get food stamps but now they have lost me in the

system. I have to reapply for the food stamps. Next year I'll have a job and we won't need it anymore."

Those who get food stamps often shop at the beginning of the month and then see how long it lasts. Here we see that a family likes meat a lot, but their meat does not always last through the month.

Cabbage, I love cabbage, and we like steak. The children like chicken, mashed potatoes and corn. And of course scrambled eggs and bacon and toast. Bacon is a staple at our house. Gotta have bacon... We get it partially during the month, you know. First of the month I get my food stamps. Second of the month, we go out and we do major shopping. Like last week we went shopping and we went to Richey's and bought a bunch of beef, and every time we do that people, when we go through the check out, they're like oh, I'm going home with you! That's got to last us all month now. And then we bring it home and rewrap it and in the freezer it goes and that's got to last us all month, so...

Food banks were used in both communities. Clients need to be at 185% of the poverty level and are only permitted to get one box per month. Food banks vary as to how much choice clients have and what is available. In the Adair/Alsea study, people used food banks only when they needed them. A young mother in Adair, who was laid off recently, for example, said, "A food bank? I had a hard time going and saying I needed help but our pantry was empty. We had to wait for a month for salary. We used all our money on rent." Another woman said, "We get food stamps. And sometimes just recently in fact we go to that food bank near the Catholic Church. I just go once every 1-2 months. I don't like to use it too much." A mother from Alsea said, "The food bank is wonderful. I can't see any way to improve that because that's just been a godsend. They have been pretty generous."

Food bank clients often have to use other sources of emergency food to make it through the month. Just over half of 15 Corvallis food bank clients who were surveyed said that they also use food stamps. In addition, 40% got food from churches and 40% from family or friends. A third had visited a soup kitchen in the last year. In times of need, low-income people have to patch together a variety of sources.

Gleaning Groups

Gleaning is the practice of collecting useable food from various sources that if not gleaned would go to waste. It is a hands-on, volunteer-driven, "do-it-yourself" method which people utilize to supplement their food supply and to help others to do the same. It is an option open to anyone below 200% of the poverty level. Gleaning groups are given special attention here because they are especially strong in Oregon, and present a unique opportunity for local people to access food and for local farmers to channel their excess produce to low-income people.

According to Susan James, the gleaning coordinator from the Linn Benton Food Share (LBFS), there are 14 gleaning groups with over 5,500 gleaners in the Linn Benton Gleaning Program. Many of the gleaners are working and need gleaning to make ends meet, month after month. Several are from families where both parents are working service jobs and not making enough to cover all their expenses. To make ends meet, some raise their own meat and get the rest from gleaning. Elderly, disabled and children all work as gleaners. The gleaners not only collect food, but they also repack it into food boxes which they distribute among themselves and among the gleaning "adoptees." Every gleaner is supposed to have three adoptees, who are members of the gleaning group who for one reason or another are not able to help in collecting.

Once food is collected, there is a repack held at the LBFS warehouse. This happens at least once or twice a month, where up to 10,000 pounds of donated frozen vegetables, rice and pasta are repackaged. The gleaners usually start around 10 am and finish around noon with their re-pack. All gleaning groups distribute food at least once a week. There is also a wood share program which is a component of the gleaning program where people glean wood for heating. While the food and wood are free, gleaners do have to cover their own cost for transportation to the gleaning sites and also the driving involved in delivering the food boxes to the adoptees. With gas prices on the rise this is becoming more and more of a burden for the gleaners.

During the late summer and early fall the gleaners will receive produce from local farms, the majority of which is fruit. Once the peak

The gleaners not only collect food, but they also repack it into food boxes which they distribute among themselves and among the gleaning "adoptees."

“[Gleaners] don’t want white bread, they don’t want gooey sweets. They want whole grain stuff and the better stuff.”

season is over, little of what the gleaners receive is fresh. There are also other concerns; Susan’s co-worker Ryan McCambridge, the food share coordinator for the LBFS, mentioned that farming has become more mechanized and many local farmers have gone to grass seed. In addition to this, Oregon has lost many of its food processors. This is a problem for gleaners since it limits the availability of fresh local produce they can receive. Also with mechanized farming it is less likely there will be leftovers in the field for the gleaners to glean.

What about gleaning groups in the Alsea/Adair study? Because of the negative attitude toward government help in Alsea, the gleaning group was the preferred way to get food assistance because people volunteer and got food in return. However, participation depended on time and good personal relations with the people in charge of the gleaning group.

The food from gleaners varies considerably by what is available through the stores, Linn-Benton Food Share, or by the season. Gleaners often get a lot of one kind of food and are perplexed about how to store or use it all. For example, during our interviews, gleaners had gotten a lot of kidney beans and as one young mother said, “There’s a limit to how many kidney beans you can eat.” As the survey below shows, gleaners tend to be conscious of food quality and nutrition. Many wished for improved food: “Not enough fruits and vegetables or meat. We eat a lot of beans and rice.”

A young woman with 3 children and a husband who gleanes reports positively on what they get in their gleaner box (in winter): “Fruits and vegetables, frozen stuff. Broccoli and beans. Pizza pockets. Individual servings of rice. Broccoli and cheese in a box. If it is past date, the stores give it. Orowheat gives all their leftovers, and Safeway, Costco and Winco give bread. We get donuts, pies, cakes and cases of Half and Half creamers. The food is substantial. It’s what people should have except for the pastries but that is a treat because people can’t always buy it.”

Gleaners always have plenty of pastries in their boxes. One gleaner reported, “We get a variety of things, we get chips and cookies--whether we need them or not, you know. My husband eats lots of dessert, lots of sweets... Whatever we get from the gleaners, he eats them at night and

watches TV.” Another was more directly critical: “People may be getting food but not the food that is good for them. White flour and white sugar! But, people need to eat.”

On the other hand, a gleaning volunteer mentioned that food needs and preferences are hard to cater for in dividing the food up into boxes for the members and adoptees. What emerges here is that many people are aware of what they need nutritionally, and members are trying to care for each other. “[Gleaners] don’t want white bread, they don’t want gooey sweets. They want whole grain stuff and the better stuff...I try to remember who wants white bread, who wants wheat bread. Who’s on the Atkins diet that needs 100% whole wheat and who needs low carb...which ones are diabetics. It’s hard.”

Food from gleaning is not enough to feed most of the eight Corvallis gleaners in the survey reported on below. They have to turn to other forms of emergency food to make ends meet. The most-cited source of additional food was food banks (88%) with food stamps close behind (75%). Food from churches came next (63%) with food from family or neighbors mentioned by 50% of the gleaners in the survey. A much smaller percentage mentioned visiting a soup kitchen (25%)—the bottom of the barrel.

In Adair, there was not gleaning group, but a few of the younger women were talking of starting one. They realized that it was a lot of work to coordinate and that personal conflict could ensue, as it had in other gleaning groups. They were not sure if there would be enough demand in Adair. “People in Adair are right at that border where people are barely makin’ it... or people have pride in their way...or people don’t have time for Gleaners.” Another problem was where to locate the distribution center for such a group. “It would have to be at the church. You need a kitchen and it has to be year round, so it can’t be at the school. I think if your pride isn’t in your way, then neither is your religion.” Others were not sure that people would want to come to the church, giving the example of a woman in a mobile home nearby who “needs help, but won’t take holiday food boxes from the church because she’s not Christian.”

People interviewed in Adair reflected mixed points of view. One older woman living in

Gleaners

Who were they?

- Age: 47 to 66, with an average age of 54.
- Gender: All women
- Household size: median of 3 people; range from 1-4 people.
- Household income: 75 percent made less than \$20,000 a year. The rest between \$20,000-\$40,000 annually.

Reasons for choices in food purchases:

- Price: 40%
- Quality and freshness: 24%
- Health: 18%
- Local: 12%
- Organic: 6%

Favorite locations for food purchases:

- Winco: 62% (because of cheaper prices, first; distance and buying in bulk)
- Safeway: 37% (because of convenience and sales)
- Fred Meyers” 25% (because of coupons, sales, gas bonus, community connection)
- Coop: 25% (because of no pesticides)

Fruits and Vegetables:

Half eat fruits and vegetables daily.

“Not as often as I like. About 4 times a week. I can’t afford it.”

Local foods:

All have bought locally grown food, especially fruits, vegetables, eggs; 50% have bought local cheese or butter; 75% nuts.

Depending on price, 88% of the gleaners have an interest in buying local food that they don’t currently purchase.

“I would buy local if it was available more places and more affordable.”

Hunger:

All gleaners think hunger is a very or somewhat serious problem in Benton County.

“The biggest problem [with hunger] are people who are higher than welfare. We’re paying high rents, living on \$2000 a month and raising kids.”

Do you get enough of the kinds of foods you like?

- Yes: 37.5%
- Yes but not the kinds I like: 37.5%
- No: 25%

Adair was critical of the gleaning system in general. “Listen, I’ll tell you, if I was to take food through gleaning, I wouldn’t accept it. It’s the stuff grocery stores don’t want. I wouldn’t want a gleaning group out here. It’s good in the summer, but they go to the farmer’s market on Saturday and then deliver on Friday so it’s gone bad. They get pastries at Safeway and Costco,

and the bread is good, but it’s not what you need...I feel sorry for people who depend on gleaning.”

On the other hand, one of the women thinking of starting a gleaning group in Adair said, “I was telling my husband the other night, ‘Oh my goodness, everything I’m making is from

Students were generally uncomfortable at the thought of getting food from emergency sources and approximately a third did not think that hunger was a problem in Benton County.

the gleaners.’ We are so thankful. There are big Yukon potatoes like footballs. Some of it is moldy, but the green beans tasted very fresh. And cubed chicken. We get ‘space shuttle stuff’ like freeze dried ice cream. It’s alright. The kids love it. And freeze-dried strawberries. They are like play dough—not bad, but different.”

Students

Students’ access in general to local fruits and vegetables, or organic food, is very limited on campus, especially for those with meal plans. University students include low-income people, a fact indicated by the presence of 75-175 students per day at the free lunch offered on campus 3 days a week via Escape Hunger. In a small on-campus study that randomly interviewed 16 students about food need, however, only two people reported themselves to be food insecure. More research is needed on this population.

Twelve of the interviewees were between 18 and 22, all under 34; 14 were single. Income was less than \$20,000 a year for 81% of them. Students interviewed do cook for themselves—63% of those not living at the dorms cook for themselves everyday and 70% of those living in the dorms cook for themselves 1-2 times per week. Growing or preserving food were activities done by 19% of the students interviewed. Half of them bought food at Winco because it is cheap, the others shopping on campus or at Fred Meyers or Safeway because it is convenient to campus. The main issues that influence students’ decisions about the food they buy were taste (44%), cost (38%), ease of preparation (25%) and health (25%) The students were about evenly split on whether they eat enough of the kinds of food they would like to: 56%, yes; 44% no. International students had a harder time getting culturally appropriate foods and others find themselves busy: “I often eat whatever is available when I am at work. It isn’t healthy but what can I do?” Students were generally uncomfortable at the thought of getting food from emergency sources and approximately a third did not think that hunger was a problem in Benton County.

However, there are hints that students do experience need. In this study, one interviewee said, “One time we had to work under the table for a friend to get money for food...The food stamp system doesn’t give much incentive to

work because then they cut your food stamps.” When a professor gave a talk about local food insecurity a grad student came up right away, asking for more information about where the food banks are in Corvallis.

Students with adequate food are not always able to get healthy food. Students in the study talked about the problems in getting fresh fruits and vegetables (1) because their meal cards only work in two places on campus and (2) because places selling fresh fruits and vegetables, local food, or organic food do not exist on campus. More research will be done on food insecurity on campus and the possibility for increasing fresh fruits, vegetables and local or organic food in the fall.

Chapter III. Faith Communities: Assessing Their Potential Role in Building Community Food Security

We stressed the value of the survey as an educational tool, rather than solely a means of data collection.

The Unique Role of the Faith Community

Faith communities across the religious spectrum provide emergency food assistance for economically disadvantaged people, many of whom are themselves members of the congregations. Many faith groups are committed to striving toward social and economic justice and thus keep a close watch on hunger and need in their communities. Congregations sometimes have open land that can be converted into community gardens; they may have members who hold influential positions in community organizing and policy development; or they may have well-organized volunteer committees that are adept at planning events and building programs. The assets provided by faith communities are numerous and offer solutions to food insecurity in Oregon. This portion of the community food assessment focuses on the potential role of faith communities in building a vibrant local food system in Benton County. We seek to assess the level of interest and awareness of congregational members while also taking note of the programs, resources and priorities of their religious communities.

Methods of Data Collection: Faith Community Surveys and Interviews

We distributed surveys on community food security to congregations from April through July 2006. The following ten faith communities returned completed surveys in time for this report: St. Mary's Catholic Parish, Grace Lutheran Church, the Mennonite Fellowship, First Congregational United Church of Christ, First Presbyterian Church, First United Methodist Church, Monroe United Methodist, Alsea Christian Fellowship, Knollbrook Christian Reform Church and Good Samaritan Episcopal. All of these congregations are located in Benton County; all but two are located in Corvallis.

Clergy, staff and volunteers distributed surveys

to their members in a variety of ways. Some inserted the surveys into their weekly church bulletins and asked people to complete them at home and bring them back. Others handed surveys out after services during "coffee hour" and requested that completed surveys be returned immediately. Some clergy made "pulpit announcements" during services or published notices about the community food assessment in their newsletters. Still others distributed the surveys to staff members and asked that they give them out to their committees and ministries. For example, one church choir director handed surveys to his choir members.

We gave congregations as many surveys as they requested, which was approximately one survey per household. We did not track the return rate, as we did not wish to burden congregations with additional responsibilities or administrative tasks. Also, surveys were often mailed, faxed, or handed in weeks after they were first distributed at each congregation, making tracking difficult. We stressed the value of the survey as an educational tool, rather than solely a means of data collection. In other words, our goal was to raise awareness of community food security issues, and thus we considered our effort somewhat successful even if the respondent never sent in his or her completed survey.

In addition to completing surveys, we conducted an in-depth interview about the food- and hunger-related congregational activities with one or more leaders within each congregation. The purpose of these interviews was to learn more about the unique assets and opportunities offered by each congregation, as well as their activities within the community, the economic composition of the membership, and the interest level of the leadership in community food security issues. These interviews took place with either the pastor of the church or active members of social justice/outreach committees. These interviews lasted between thirty minutes and an hour. All but one interview took place at the church. The interview with the representative from the Mennonite Fellowship took place at the home of a member.

We made an effort to include eight additional congregations, including the local synagogue and mosque. For a variety of reasons, these outreach efforts did not yield surveys or in-depth interviews in time for this report. In some cases, we did not have the personal connections, time, or resources to accomplish work with these congregations. In two cases, congregations expressed hesitation about pursuing a new or different topic. As one staff person stated, his congregation was “a Christ-centered church that focused on the gospels and not on outreach.” In other cases, volunteers or clergy within the congregations were heavily involved in other projects or did not respond to our invitations for participation.

The Survey Sample

Completed surveys were received from 348 individuals from the 10 congregations, plus an additional 4 surveys from individuals who failed to identify their home congregation. All returned surveys (n=352) were included in the analysis. The number of surveys returned from each congregation varied considerably, as did the size of the each church. We received only one survey back from a small congregation in a very rural community and 81 surveys (representing 23% of the sample) from a much larger congregation in Corvallis.

Respondents were asked to provide some basic demographic information about themselves and their households, including age, sex, number of household members, household income and ethnicity. In addition, they were asked to categorize their neighborhood as low, middle, or upper-middle class. Table 4 below summarizes the demographic characteristics of the sample. As can be seen, most of the respondents were women, who averaged 57 years of age. Household size averaged about two people, and the majority of respondents had household incomes of \$40,000 or more. Nearly all (97%) of respondents identified themselves as non-Hispanic Whites.

Results of the Food Survey

The food survey administered to congregation members was divided into five sections: Questions on Cooking, Gardening and Shopping; Questions on Hunger, Questions on Local Farms, Questions on Your Congregation

Table 4. Demographic Characteristics of Food Survey Sample

Sample Size: N = 352

Sex of Respondent	
Male	81 (25%)
Female	245 (75%)
Age of Respondent	
Range	12 – 97
Mean	57
Number of Household Members	
Range	1 – 7
Mean	2.3
Household Income	
Under \$20,000	40 (13%)
\$20,000-\$40,000	71 (24%)
\$40,000-\$60,000	59 (20%)
Over \$60,000	126 (43%)
Race/Ethnicity	
White, non-Hispanic	293 (97%)
Hispanic/Latino	2 (1%)
Asian	5 (2%)
Native American	2 (1%)

Note: Numbers may not add exactly to 352 due to missing data. Percentages may not add exactly to 100 due to rounding error.

and Questions about You and Your Household. The responses to the final section have been summarized above in the description of the sample. In the presentation of the results from the rest of the questionnaire, each section will be discussed individually.

Questions on Cooking, Gardening and Shopping

This section asked respondents if someone in the household cooked or gardened, where foods for the household were purchased and about purchase of locally grown foods. Virtually all respondents (n = 286) reported that someone in the household knew how to cook and most (83%) said that someone in the household did basic cooking at least 5-6 times per week. About half of the sample (n = 179; 52%) reported that they had a vegetable garden or fruit trees, and another 4 people reported using a community

Despite concerns about cost, most of the sample reported buying locally grown food.

garden plot. A few (n = 29) indicated they did not use a community garden, but were interested in doing so. Perhaps reflective of Benton County's location in the heart of the Willamette Valley, 70% of respondents said that they preserve foods by canning, freezing, smoking, etc. When asked where they most often purchased their food, 99% said the grocery store.

Of those who responded to questions about locally grown foods (n=346) 93% said that they purchased locally grown foods on a regular (39%) or occasional (54%) basis. Reasons given for not buying locally grown food, illustrated in Figure 6, included cost, availability, not being able to find food I like and not knowing where to buy locally grown food.

Another question asked whether locally grown food was more or less expensive than other food. As can be seen in Figure 7, responses to that question also indicated that locally grown food

is perceived to be more expensive, with 62% of respondents indicating they believed that to be the case.

Despite concerns about cost, most of the sample reported buying locally grown food. Figure 8 indicates the percent of respondents who report that they buy a particular type of locally grown food, while Figure 9 reports the number of respondents who say that they do not currently buy a local food, but would like to. It is evident that most of the people completing a survey buy at least one locally grown product.

Survey respondents were asked how serious a problem they believed hunger to be in Benton County. As seen Figure 10, only 6% (n = 21) of people who completed surveys believed that hunger was not a problem in Benton County, while 59% (n = 203) thought it was a somewhat serious problem, and 32% (n = 109) indicated that they believed hunger was a very serious problem.

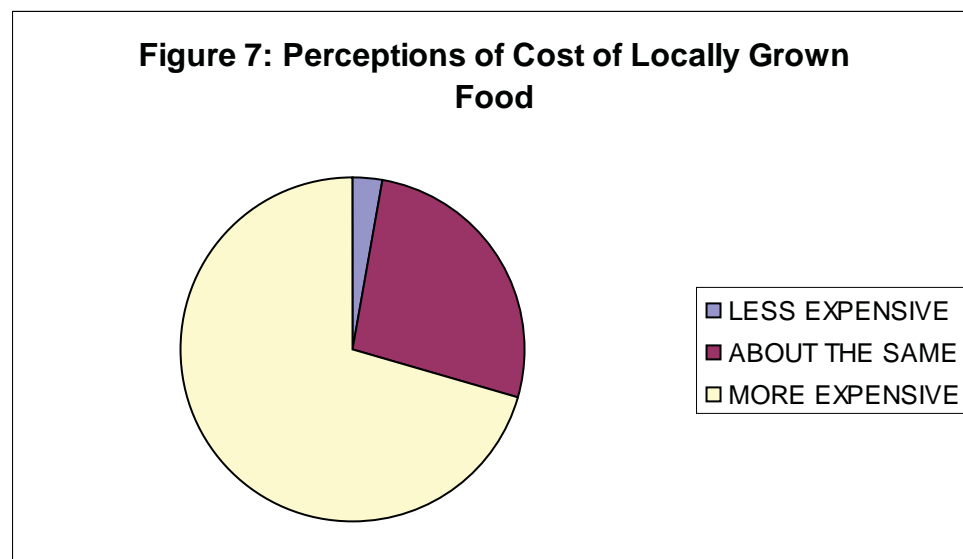
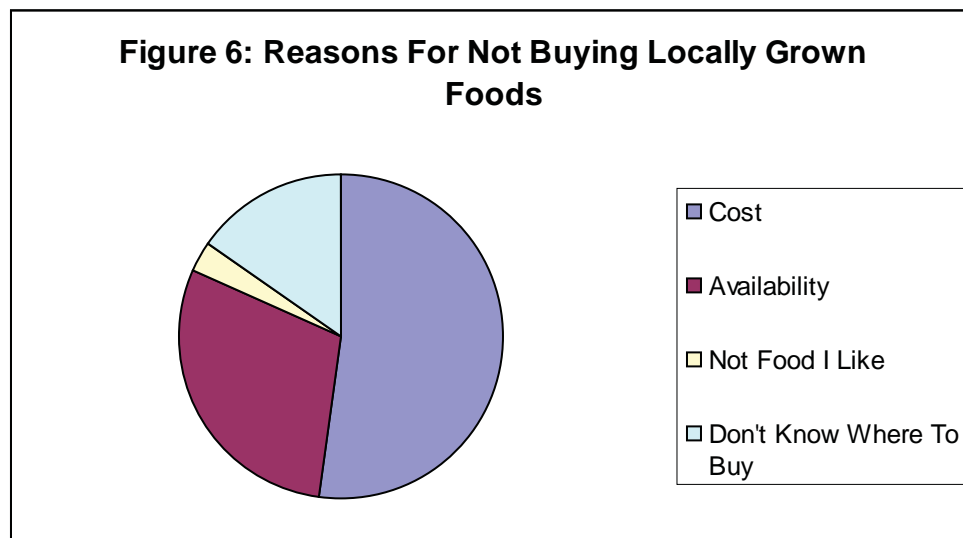


Figure 8: Number of Participants Who Currently Buy Locally Grown Food

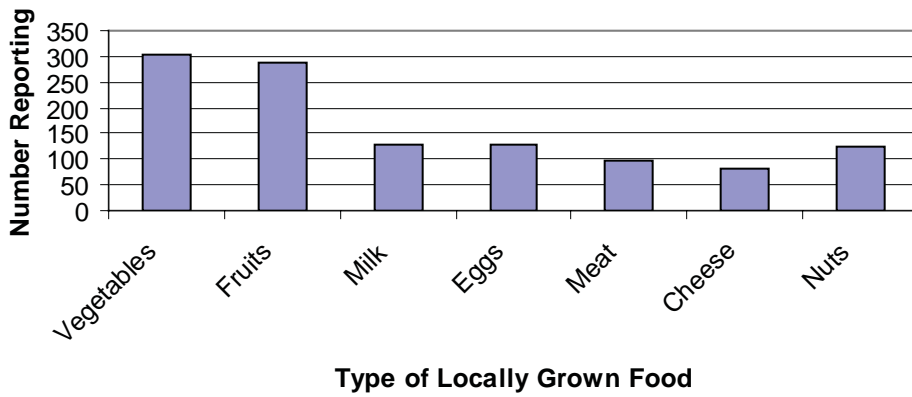


Figure 9: Number of Participants Who Do Not Currently Buy, But Would Like To

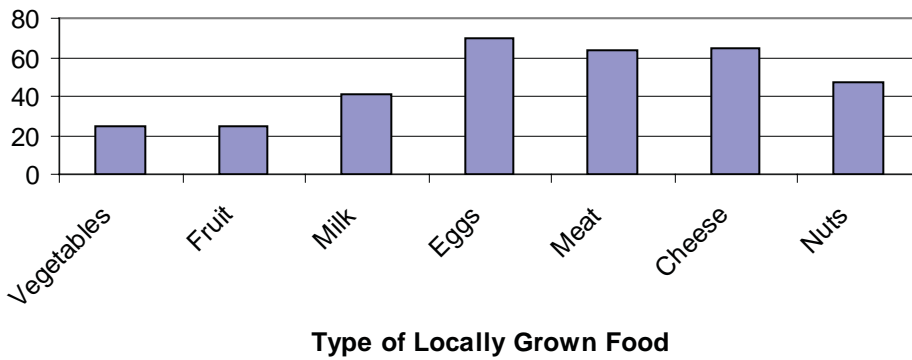
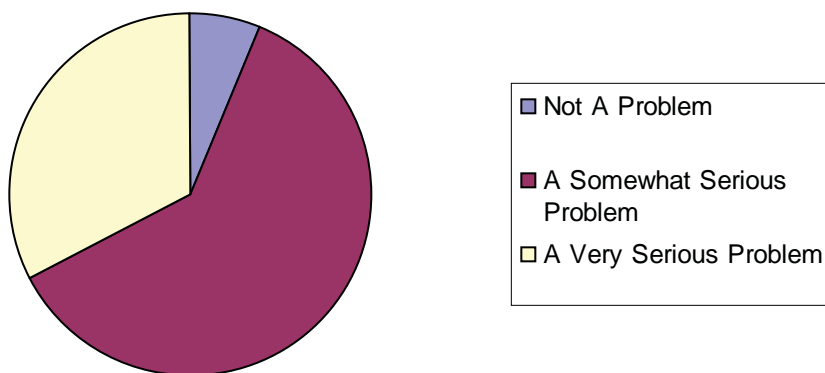


Figure 10: How Serious A Problem is Hunger?



Women perceived hunger to be a more serious problem than did men.

Questions on Hunger

Responses did not vary by income, however, women perceived hunger to be a more serious problem than did men. This difference was statistically significant. Few members of this sample had ever received food from some any formal support service (food bank, soup kitchen, food stamps, WIC, gleaners), with only 57 (17%) indicating receiving food from one or more of these sources. A few more, 61 in all, reported that they had difficulty stretching their food dollars until the end of the month. Thirteen respondents noted they did not have reliable, affordable transportation to go shopping.

Questions about Local Farms

Respondents were asked one open-ended question about local farms: What do you perceive to be the top two challenges for local farmers? Responses fell into eight general categories, summarized in Figure 11. The most common identified challenge was marketing and distribution of locally grown products. Comments included such things as: “getting food to a market”, “getting enough customers”, “ability to get their food distributed”. The next most common challenge had to do with prices and the ability of local farmers to compete with large scale or corporate farmers. Comments included: “competition from large business farms”, “competition of corporate grocery”, “larger supermarkets offering lower priced food, although lower quality.” Many mentioned the costs of farming and Oregon weather as challenges for local farmers. Less common were concerns about a stable pool of employees,

environmental issues related to organic farming, and government regulations and intervention. Of the people completing surveys, 194 (60%) had heard of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs and 67 (21%) had participated in one.

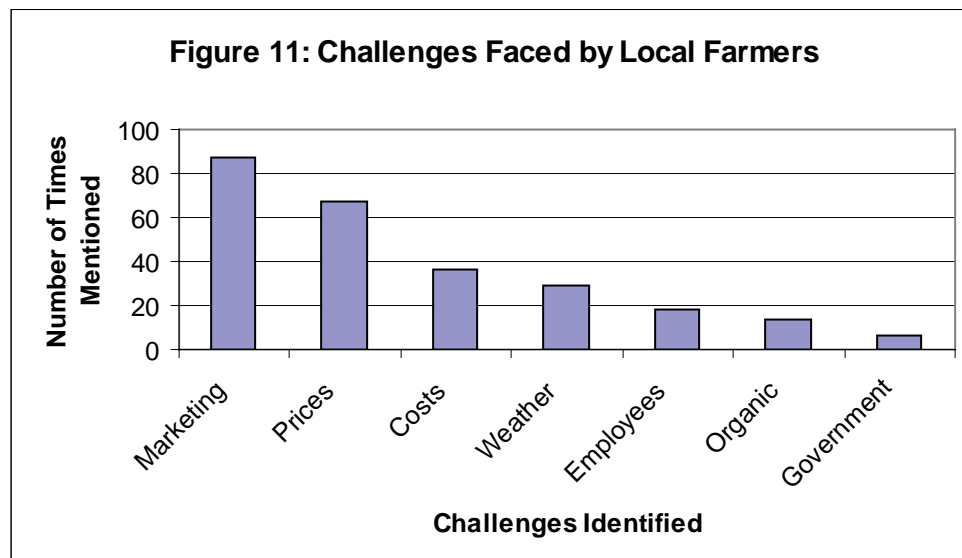
Questions about Your Congregation

In addition to asking respondents to identify their congregation, this section of the survey asked whether the individual felt that their congregation should make community garden space available to neighbors and members. Of those who answered the question, 51 responded “No”, while 100 said “Yes” and 120 said “Yes, but I don’t think our congregation has enough space/water/resources.”

Similarly, in response to a question about whether the individual would be interested in taking classes on cooking, preserving, or growing food at their congregation, 106 indicated they would be interested. In addition, 40 individuals reported that they could (and presumably would be willing to) teach such a class. Also, a significant majority (65%) said they would be willing to sponsor farmers’ market coupons or CSA shares for low-income individuals.

Data Collected from Low-Income Latinos in Corvallis

Due to concerns about missing the perspectives of the growing number of low-income Latinos in Corvallis, special efforts were made to recruit a sample from this population. We spoke to Latino clients at the South Corvallis Food Bank on the first two Saturdays in May, 2006.



We identified people as probable Latinos by observing their last names when they registered for their monthly visits, and then requested each client to participate in our survey. Volunteers chose to hear the survey questions in Spanish or English; we informed them that the information they shared would be kept anonymous and used for research purposes only. After completing of the survey, volunteers received three two-dollar coupons to spend at the Corvallis Farmers' Market on locally grown or produced foods.

We also surveyed Latino residents at their homes in two predominantly low-income neighborhoods of South Corvallis on the first Saturday of May. Participants were told that they were contributing to a community project on locally grown food and hunger and were given three two-dollar coupons to spend at the Farmers' Market.

The surveys were designed by a group of Oregon State students. In an effort to be as culturally sensitive as possible, the survey was much shorter than the community food security survey, and some of the questions were phrased as open-ended, rather than closed-choice items. In order to make valid comparisons, only those questions identical to the questions in the larger survey are reported here.

The Sample

Respondents were asked to provide some basic demographic information about themselves and their households, including age, sex, number of household members and household income. Table 5 summarizes the demographic characteristics of the sample. In contrast to the data from congregations, most of the respondents were men, who averaged 38 years of age. Household size was larger, averaging about four people, and two-thirds of respondents had household incomes below \$40,000.

Questions on Cooking, Gardening and Shopping

As with the congregational data, the Latino respondents nearly all respondents (n = 28) said that someone in their household know how to cook. About 68% of the respondents said that someone in the household cooked at home 5 days per week or more.

Most of the Latinos buy at least some type of locally grown food. As can be seen in the charts

Table 5. Demographic Characteristics of Latino Survey Sample

Sample Size: N = 29	
Sex of Respondent	
Male	16 (55%)
Female	13 (45%)
Age of Respondent	
Range	21 - 65
Mean	38
Number of Household Members	
Range	1 - 7
Mean	4.1
Household Income	
Under \$20,000	11 (38%)
\$20,000-\$40,000	7 (24%)
\$40,000-\$60,000	4 (14%)
Over \$60,000	1 (3%)

Note: Numbers may not add exactly to 29 due to missing data. Percentages may not add exactly to 100 due to rounding error.

below, their consumption patterns are very similar to those reported by respondents in the larger survey, with fruits and vegetables being purchased by a majority of households. They were clearly interested in purchasing local foods, however, no data were collected as to reasons why they did not do so.

Questions about Hunger

The Latinos were also asked about their perceptions of hunger in Benton County. Interestingly, they were no more likely to perceive that hunger was a problem in Benton County than were the largely non-Latino members of the congregational sample. In fact, nearly one in four perceived hunger to be no problem. Perhaps this is due to the fact that many may be recent immigrants, coming from countries where hunger is much more prevalent and severe. The figure below summarizes their responses.

Latinos were also asked whether they had received emergency food from any sources. Only 5 of 29 respondents indicated that they had done so, despite the fact that many had limited

Most of the Latinos buy at least some type of locally grown food.

Figure 12: Number of Latinos Who Currently Buy Locally Grown Food

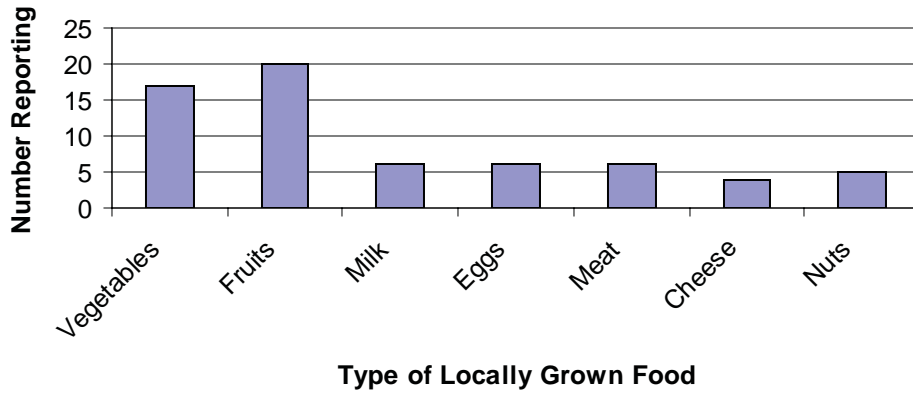


Figure 13: Number of Latinos Who Do Not Currently Buy But Would Like To

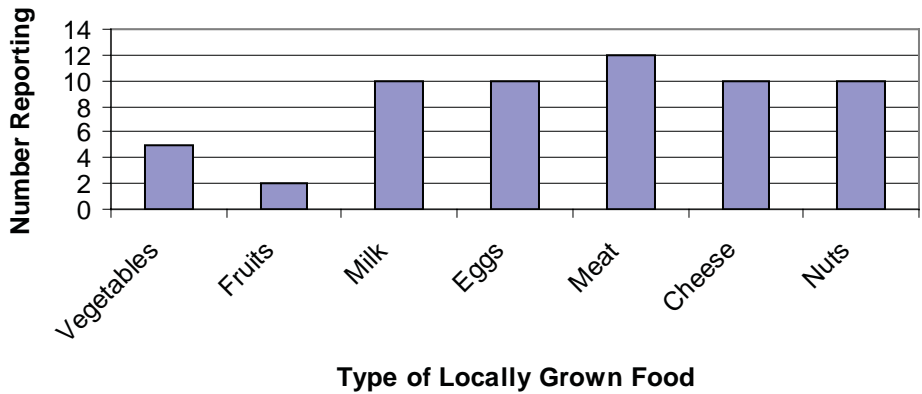
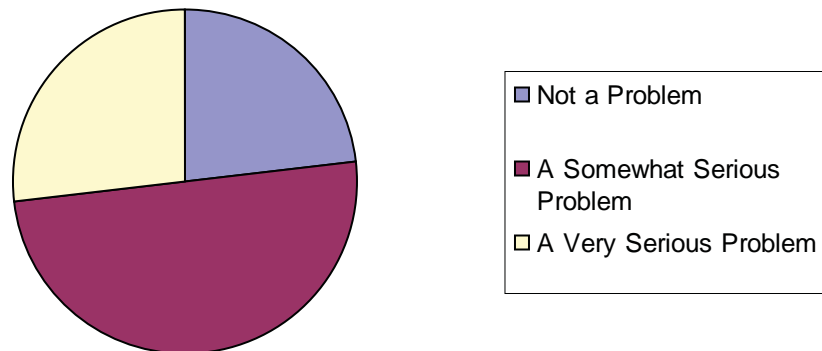


Figure 14: How Serious a Problem is Hunger? Latino Perceptions



incomes. In addition, only one person reported not having reliable affordable transportation to the store.

The Leadership Perspective: How Passionate Are Congregations about Community Food Security?

In addition to distributing local food surveys to these ten Benton County congregations, we talked individually with church pastors or relevant committees, such as outreach or social justice groups. Our interviews lasted between thirty minutes and an hour and included fourteen questions about the involvement of each congregation with emergency food programs, local farmers and related issues. We asked about the economic composition of church membership and the nature of their assistance to low-income families. What follows is a brief summary of our findings.

Social Justice and Care of Creation

Six of the ten congregations with whom we met had a committee or team that worked on social, community, or care of creation issues.

All congregations gave aid to low-income populations through both local and international avenues. Most congregations collected contributions in the form of special offerings - designated giving for local food needs or held events to replenish their outreach funds. Many contributed to the following causes: St. Vincent de Paul Food Pantry, Love INC, Linn Benton Food Share, South Corvallis Food Bank, We Care, FISH, Crop Walk, Rice Bowl and the That's My Farmer Coupon Program. Others had food barrels, benevolence funds and Thanksgiving baskets. Still others provided clothing, midwifery kits, school kits and vouchers to restaurants, gas and bus fares in cases of both domestic and international disasters.

Food Pantries, Food Banks and Community Meals

- All but one congregation collaborated with an emergency food organization. (The one that did not had no such organization in its community and has thus been trying to start a food pantry for several years.
- Three congregations operated food pantries or food banks on their premises.

- Five congregations contributed consistently to one or more specific food pantries and food banks. Another collaborated very informally with emergency food organization by holding an occasional food drive.
- Several congregations participate in Stone Soup, a daily soup kitchen which operates under the umbrella of St. Mary's Catholic Parish. The meals served at St. Mary's alone require the work of over 100 volunteers each week.
- Six congregations held potlucks, half of which were open to the public; one said their meals frequently drew between 80 and 100 people and offered an opportunity for low-income or single-parent families to dine out.

Partnering with Local Farmers

- Five congregational leaders said they thought their congregations had members who would be interested in obtaining food from local family farmers through the church itself. Three other congregations said they might be interested, and one did not know.
- One interviewee said instead that there were no farmers available to sell food: "No one is making a living from farming in the Alsea area. One man, who was a cattle rancher, is getting out of the business now. It is hard to grow produce in the Alsea area because of the large number of trees which provide much shade. A local man, who just died, grew a huge garden and used to give away most of the produce to people in the community."
- Three interviewees said their members were dedicated to shopping at the farmers' market. Two said that many of their members subscribed to community supported agriculture programs (CSA) and said they tried in the past to become a drop-site for weekly CSA produce deliveries. One committee thought their church should invest in a CSA share.
- One interviewee suggested that the farmers who attended their congregation might be good candidates for such an arrangement. One identified housebound elderly or disabled people as individuals who would appreciate food from local farmers and added that they had several members who participated in gleaners' groups.

The meals served at St. Mary's alone require the work of over 100 volunteers each week.

Sharing Locally Grown Food with Limited-Resource Families

- Four congregational leaders said they would have avenues for getting locally grown food to people with low incomes. One specified that they could accomplish this through the food bank. Another suggested that they would have to deliver it to people in their homes.

Resources, Assets and Challenges Congregations Bring to Local Food Partnerships

When asked which of the following assets the congregations had to offer, the majority had kitchens, refrigeration, parking lots, meeting and event space, staff and volunteers:

Table 6. Resources Offered by Congregations.

Resource	Yes	No
Kitchens	9	1
Cold Storage	9	1
Parking Lot Space	3	7
Land for Community Garden	9	1
Indoor Meeting Space	9	1
Event Space	9	1
Staff/Volunteers on evenings or weekends	9	1

- Regarding community gardens, one rural congregation had already begun a garden. Another congregation thought they had adequate space, but listed poor soil and a large deer population as deterrents.
- Six congregations had a food exchange or distribution program, such as members sharing homegrown produce.
- When asked whether they would be interested in partnering with local farmers to help them distribute their food, seven congregations responded positively. Three did not know or had never thought about it. Several congregations mentioned that the elderly church members would appreciate this kind of situation.

Congregations identified the following assets that would make a local food partnership possible for them (listed with most frequent responses first):

- Caring, generous people (5)
- High awareness of food security issues (4)
- Lots of retired people and committed volunteers (3)

- High income level
- Willingness to pay more
- Large congregation
- Involvement in many community programs (instead recreating more)

They listed the following challenges:

- Busy, overworked people (2)
- Lack of motivation (2)
- Unwillingness to work together on an outside or ongoing project
- Having a failed farmers' market in the past
- Encouraging people to change their habits and adopt more local buying practices
- Changes in staff
- Financial struggles of mainline churches
- Competing issues
- Lack of access by public transportation

Economic Composition of Congregations

- The majority of congregational leaders (6) described the economic composition of their congregations as middle and upper middle class, with occasional pockets of poverty. Three congregations said they had several to many low-income members. Only one large congregation said their membership ran the full gamut, with many members on either extreme.

Tips for Facilitating Collaborating Between Congregations

Congregational leaders suggested the following innovative means for encouraging collaboration between congregations in taking on a local food project:

1. Create one-time projects that are loosely ecumenical and don't involve joining anything;
2. Raise awareness among churches around a unifying issue
3. Give people something to do that doesn't require meetings
4. Print articles in newsletters about the farmers' market and encourage people to support local farmers
5. Overcome the conservative-liberal divide regarding political and theological issues and focus on a particular topic, like hunger, that is a universal concern.

Highlights of the Assessment: Understanding Faith Communities

As anticipated, congregations focus primarily on emergency food assistance in their food programs and ministries. However, there appears to be a strong and growing interest in a broader approach to resolving hunger through supporting local farmers and building a vibrant local food system.

Almost all congregation leaders we interviewed had resources such as meeting space and kitchens that were available to support projects. Members also appeared to be open to using congregational resources for local food projects. About one-third of those surveyed were interested in taking a food literacy (canning, nutrition, cooking) class at their congregation and forty respondents said that they could teach a class. Willingness to sponsor farmers' market coupons or community supported agriculture shares for low-income individuals was also strong (65%).

Most survey respondents from religious congregations purchased some local food and were interested in accessing a greater variety of local products. Respondents saw cost as a major barrier to buying more local food. This suggests a need for education about the many virtues of locally grown food beyond price and an examination of the myth that local food is more expensive. Availability was the second most frequently selected barrier to purchasing more local food; presumably, if local food were more readily available – such as on at a farm stand in the parking lot following church services – more people would buy it.

Most respondents were older, middle- or upper-middle class women; this is key characteristic of the faith community population in Benton County that we should bear in mind when designing projects. It also underscores the need for better access to local food – especially for seniors who are housebound or limited in their mobility.

About one-third of those surveyed were interested in taking a food literacy (canning, nutrition, cooking) class at their congregation and 40 respondents said that they could teach a class.

How Congregations Can Support Our Local Food System

In the eyes of many spiritual and religious practitioners, food plays a central role in faith traditions as symbol, as a place where faith meets practice, as a means of nurturing fellowship, and as a way to enjoy the goodness of creation. Meal graces and blessings are reminders that food is not to be taken for granted. Many farmers and gardeners view their work as a way to participate in the mysteries of life and to better know their Creator. The connection of many religious holidays to the seasons and agricultural cycles is still evident, although often obscured by our detachment from the food system and from the natural order. Being more mindful of food offers the potential to enhance one's spiritual life.

Faith communities have the potential to bring food back to the center of our daily lives and away from the periphery. Food is a justice issue for many people of faith. How food is produced and distributed has a great impact on people's lives. Is the farmer obtaining a fair price for her crops? Is the farm worker receiving adequate wages? Do their working and living conditions uphold human dignity? Are communities in other countries impoverished because their energy is put into growing inexpensive food for our country? Why in this time of economic prosperity in our region have the numbers of hungry people been increasing? These are a few of the questions that people of faith are compelled to ask when they apply concepts of justice to today's food system.

There are many opportunities for congregations to support personal, community and environmental health and justice by building a local food system. Supporting a local food system doesn't mean adding another project or program to an already full plate. The opportunity is in integrating this concern into the existing resources and commitments of congregations. Congregations can enhance local food systems through their daily activities.

- Adapted from an article by Jenny Holmes in Portland's Bounty, A Guide to Eating Locally and Seasonally in the Greater Portland Area, Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon, 2001.

“I think that the church in the United States – especially the Evangelical Church – is not caring for the land. Somebody’s got to change that.”

Calvin Presbyterian Church: New Community Garden Offers a Model of Faith Community Involvement

A conversation with Tyler Jones

Tyler Jones – farmer, student and deacon of his church – is a 26-year old History major at Oregon State University. He raises poultry and pork on five acres of family land outside Corvallis and sells his products directly to local markets. His latest marketing scheme involves developing business relationships with fraternities and sororities at OSU. Tyler is a also an active member of Calvin Presbyterian Church, an Evangelical congregation in northwest Corvallis, where he started a community garden earlier this year. The garden consists of about a half acre of tilled soil, now about half claimed by gardeners.



What is your farming background?

I grew up on five acres west of town and that’s where I raise livestock now. We call it Afton Field Farm. Aside from my childhood experience gardening at home and raising animals in 4-H, all of my experience comes from an internship I did with Joel Salatin at Polyface Farm in Swoope, Virginia, from 2002-2003.

While I was at Polyface Farm I got to meet all kinds of people who came to the farm to talk about sustainable agriculture. I have never met anyone who worked harder than Joel. He has a 500-acre farm – 130 acres in pasture and the rest in woods. He writes in the winter. He mills all his own lumber for the farm. The year I was there we raised 17,000 broilers on pasture in 60 pens. Every 3 weeks we butchered birds – 2000 birds in a batch. This farm was efficient like no other. They have 200 head of cattle in a cow-calf operation and 200 pigs, and a customer base of about 400 families. They also sell to restaurants and metropolitan buying clubs. They call it guerilla marketing because it’s completely under radar.

The church could have done lots of things with this land. Why a community garden?

I sat down this winter and brainstormed all the ways we could work together as a church with the community. The church should be an example of how to care for the land. It was God who gave us this place in the first place and gave us the calling to care for what had been given to us. I think that the church in the United States – especially the Evangelical Church – is not caring for the land. Somebody’s got to change that.

How have the neighbors responded to this garden?

People have been really encouraging. Every time I come out here I talk to lots of people. Everyone thinks it’s really neat that we’re doing this and that the church is involved. I hope next year people will fill the garden.

Is the garden viewed as an integral part of Calvin Presbyterian’s outreach efforts?

Yes, we see this as outreach to the community. I was the one who got the garden going, but I wasn’t the first person to think of this idea. I personally feel like I’m trying to show a good example to the church as much as I’m trying to show a good example to the community.

Does the garden cost the church anything?

We tried to raise enough money that it wouldn't. We had a garage sale and raised about \$700. We're hoping the city will give us free water, which they have done for the other gardens. We're probably going to do a harvest barbeque where I will donate the meat and sell dinners as an additional fundraiser.

Do you see a need for more community gardens in Corvallis and if so, where would you put them?

I think we should put small community gardens in every park and in vacant lots too, and huge expanses of open areas around schools. Every school should have at least a connection with a community garden, if not its own garden. It's the kids that need to be convinced to spend their food dollar somewhere else. It's incredible how influential kids are.

What is the level of knowledge that community gardeners are bringing to their plots?

There are several very knowledgeable gardeners, plus others with less experience. Some of the gardeners have been mentoring and helping each other – this is the ideal. There are a few Latino gardeners, too, some of whom grew up on farms in Central America.

What have you learned so far from this experience?

God created this garden and has been taking care of it. I'm just pulling the string and watching it go.

Overcoming Barriers to Starting New Projects

This assessment suggests that there are bountiful opportunities to work through congregations to increase food literacy and local food purchases while diminishing hunger.

Most congregations experience challenges when adopting new projects, especially lack of time, money and volunteers. However, there are creative ways that congregations can support local food systems with little effort. The following are five methods of weaving local food issues into existing work:

1. Incorporate local food and family farmers into existing projects or meals.
2. Let another congregation take the lead.
3. Work in collaboration with several congregations.
4. Invite a speaker to talk about food security, sustainable agriculture, or local food systems at regular events that involve food.
5. Encourage clergy to expand religious teachings about food to include local agriculture, justice and security; offer a practical follow-up action for members, such as shopping at farmers' market or subscribing to a CSA.

Developing Creative Farm-to-Congregation Projects

There are countless opportunities for farmers and congregations to connect, and different arrangements can meet different needs. For example, small-scale family farmers may benefit from an opportunity to have a farmers' table where they can sell produce following congregation services. The farmer gets free space and a large number of customers that come to his or her table all at once. The congregation has better access to fresh, locally grown food and an opportunity to get to know a farmer.

In general, inviting dialogue between faith communities and farmers is an effective means of opening doors to future collaboration. By establishing relationships and becoming familiar with each other's needs, congregations and farmers can identify mutually beneficial ways of working together – from farm field trips to harvest festivals and seasonal community meals.

Hundreds of Benton County residents assisted with this grassroots community food assessment over the past year. While the assessment was coordinated by EMO's Interfaith Food and Farms Partnership in cooperation with Oregon State University and the Rural Studies Initiative, the broad participation of community members was critical to its success.

Chapter IV. Summary and Conclusion: Supporting Farmers, Quelling Hunger

Farms

We began by asking, “*What successes and challenges do small growers in our region experience?*” and addressed this question by conducting interviews with 15 small family farmers and collecting secondary data collected on agriculture. The farmers we interviewed had an average farm size of 29 acres and raised fruits, vegetables, eggs, flowers and animals. They sold 50% of their produce within a 50-mile radius of their farms.

Farmers named labor, marketing and pest control as their top challenges. They also said that local marketing comes with several challenges, primarily finding customers, selling in a timely manner, and educating consumers about the value of local and/or organic food.

Despite challenges, farmers expressed a strong interest in increased local marketing opportunities.

- Over half of the 15 farmers we interviewed expressed a strong interest in having a community food processing facility and developing more local markets, especially within institutions (schools, university, hospital, retirement homes, etc.).
- In a survey of 27 farmers at the Corvallis and Albany Farmers’ Markets in 2005, 70% said yes or maybe to having extra capacity for a farm-to-school program.
- Of the four farms we describe in depth, all are involved in local food marketing through farmer’s markets, farm stands, community supported agriculture and buying groups. They also contribute to food banks and gleaning groups.

Farmland is plentiful, though in decline. In the last 15 years, Oregon has seen an increase in farms, but the total area farmed has decreased by 4%. At the same time, the number of part-time farmers has increased. Overall, edible crops are in decline as grass seed production increases. Since 1996, in Linn, Benton and Polk counties:

- Vegetable crops are down by 35.5%
- Fruits, nuts and berries are up by 15.7%
- Grass seed growing is up by 14.3%

Local food processing holds potential. Since the 1930s, small, local food processing has given way to larger, export-oriented food processing. Now, very few facilities for processing locally grown crops for local markets exist in the area. Food processing facilities that emphasize growing, processing and eating food within the community could revitalize the local food system.

As a community, we need to focus on building consumer demand for locally grown food.

Increasing local markets for farmers depends on cultivating people’s commitment to purchasing local food. On the individual and institutional levels, Benton County residents need to buy local food on a regular basis in order to keep family farmers on the land and build food security for all.

Low-Income Families

Second, we focused on poverty: “*What are the barriers to food access for low-income residents of Benton County?*” To address this question, we interviewed residents of rural Benton County and leaders and clients of the emergency food system (food banks, food pantries, soup kitchens, etc.). We also collected secondary data on hunger, poverty and the emergency food system.

Overall:

- **Low-income people want to eat more local fruits and vegetables.**
- **Food pantries and gleaning groups are effective channels for distributing locally grown fruits and vegetables.**

People who are hungry and food insecure live here:

- In 2002, one of every six families in Linn and Benton Counties depended on food from an emergency food pantry at least once each year (Linn Benton Food Share).
- Between 1997 and 2005, the number of people relying on food boxes went up 45%.
- Linn and Benton Counties have 16 emergency food pantries and 14 gleaning groups.

A qualitative study of 58 low-income people in Alsea and Adair found that:

Food security is threatened by competing expenses:

1. Housing

- In 2006, 53% of Benton County households spent 30% or more of their incomes on housing.
- Despite gardening and canning, an elderly couple cannot keep up with the mortgage and make other expenses. They don't want to depend on the government. They sell their house.

2. Utilities

- In Adair, people often have to choose between paying rent and paying utilities; water and electric heat are expensive.

3. Car expenses

- Transportation is necessary to get food and find jobs. The food sold in Alsea is expensive and jobs are few. Low-income people have trouble finding any aid for fixing cars or for helping with auto insurance.
- Alsea people who are sick and disabled have no public transportation into Philomath and Corvallis to shop for food at cheaper prices.

4. Health expenses

- Unexpected health expenses can mean there is not enough money for food.
- Cut-backs in the Oregon Health Plan make people choose between medicine and food.

Other Points from the Alsea/Adair Study:

Jobs:

- Low-income people lose jobs because of outsourcing from overseas. Service jobs like pizza deliverer or fast food worker are available but pay little and demand long hours.
- The working poor have little energy to cook, garden, can, or participate in gleaning groups that require 16 hours of volunteer labor per week.

Shopping:

- Poor people choose to shop at Winco because of cheap prices. Many do a big shopping trip at the

beginning of the month and try to make it last. Money runs out by the end of the month.

- Fresh fruits and vegetables cannot be bought regularly. Fresh fruits and vegetables are perceived as more expensive than processed foods.

Eating:

- Low-income people know what they should eat for good nutrition, such as eating fewer carbohydrates and more fresh fruits, vegetables and protein. Ideals are hard to live out, however. In daily eating, protein is low and fruits and vegetables almost disappear.
- Both adults and children favor meat. They often cannot afford as much meat as they would like, especially by the end of the month.
- The favorite foods for adults and children are carbohydrates such as pizza, macaroni-and-cheese, potatoes and pasta. These are also affordable.
- Low-income people rarely eat at restaurants because they can not afford it. Cooking is tiring and sometimes consists of heating up a can of soup in the microwave or peanut butter and jelly sandwiches.
- People on special diets for illness such as diabetes had trouble maintaining appropriate diets on limited incomes. Food from food banks and gleaning groups also presented a challenge.

Other ways of getting food:

- Few people gardened or canned food. Ten of the 58 people gardened but they struggled with inadequacies: time, soil, weather and, for younger people, knowledge. Only six of the 58 people (mostly older) reported canning food. People lack time and skills, or suffer from disabilities or aging.
- Community gardens were met with mixed responses. Some thought many would participate and others thought that people were too busy.
- Hunting and fishing did not emerge as important ways of getting food

even in Alsea. People cited the cost of licenses, time and ill health as reasons.

- Children, family and friends are also important sources of foods.

Food Assistance:

- Low-income people praised WIC (Program for Women Infants and Children) and the free-and-reduced school lunch programs. The latter were not available in Alsea where people pride themselves on not receiving handouts.
- People who get food stamps find them very helpful and often adequate if they shop where prices are low. In some months people have to go to a food bank by the end of the month. Food stamps may be reduced drastically if one's hourly wage rises by a dollar.
- Low-income people do not like to use food banks and only use them when they have to. Food banks are a "godsend" when needed.

Food bank clients: 15 surveyed for the Community Food Assessment

- 75% shop at Winco, mostly because of price
- 1/3 do not have reliable transportation
- 1/3 buy local foods
- 60% get enough foods that they like
- 2/3 said hunger was serious in Benton County
- In some food banks, clients can choose their food, and in others, they are given a box.
- In winter, there is little fresh food. Meat is always in short supply.

Gleaners: 8 surveyed for the Community Food Assessment

- Gleaners are volunteers living at or below 200% of poverty level. They get leftovers from grocery stores, farmers' markets and fields, and receive food from Linn Benton Food Share. They distribute boxes of food weekly to their members who must volunteer and to adoptees who are not able to volunteer.
- Fresh, local produce is limited



Summer produce at the Saturday Farmers' Market in Corvallis.

for Gleaners as local farmers raise mostly grass seed now.

- Gleaners get fresh fruits and vegetables in the summer, but they must store or can large amounts that they receive at one time. Many gleaners can and freeze food.
- Gleaners get a lot of bread and pastries all year round.
- 88% of gleaners also use food banks and 75% also use food stamps to feed their families adequately.

Students: 16 OSU students interviewed for the Community Food Assessment

- Students in dorms and apartments do cook, but they have limited access to local fruits and vegetables. Their meal cards are only good in limited places that have few fruits and vegetables and there is a lack of sources for local fruits and vegetables on or near campus.
- International students have a hard time getting culturally appropriate food.
- Students have little information about emergency food sources and would feel stigmatized going there. In 2005-2006, an average of 75 students attended the free lunches offered by Escape Hunger three times a week on campus.
- Students often do not eat as they would like to because of expense and busy lives.

Faith Communities

The last section of this assessment deals with the role that faith communities might play in reaching solutions to the previous two questions.

We ask, “How do communities of faith contribute to food security and how might they broaden their response to hunger to include supporting local family-scale farmers?” In order to address this question we administered Local Food Surveys to members of ten faith communities and conducted interviews with ten faith community leaders/committees.

Survey respondents were primarily middle-income consumers. In ten faith communities 352 people were surveyed in Corvallis, Philomath, Alsea and Monroe: 75% women and 63% with incomes over \$40,000. The mean age was 57.

- 50% had vegetable gardens or fruit trees
- 70% preserved food
- 93% bought locally grown food regularly or occasionally
- People would like to buy more local eggs, meat and dairy products.
- Cost was the main reason for not buying local. As with low-income people, middle-income people perceive local food as expensive.
- 17% got food assistance
- People were interested in learning more about cooking, preserving and growing food.
- People thought the main problems for farmers were marketing and distribution, just as the farmers did. They did not see labor as a problem, while farmers did.

Faith communities as institutions aiding low-income people:

- All 10 congregations give aid to low-income populations
- Three congregations operate food pantries.
- Six congregations have potlucks, with three open to the public.
- Seven congregations are interested in partnering with farmers and nine congregations have the facilities to do so.
- Calvin Presbyterian Church has a community garden, open to anyone.

Consumption side: 29 Latinos surveyed: 55% men, 62% with incomes under \$40,000, mean age of 38.

- Latinos purchase local fruits and vegetables.
- They would like to buy more local meat, eggs, milk and cheese.
- 19% get food assistance

Looking to the Future

The goal of this report is to lead to changes that will enhance community food security in Benton County and its foodshed. It is our hope that the information gleaned from this assessment will aid organizations and policy-makers in restoring the region’s local food system. We feel confident that the many individuals involved in this community food assessment built stronger connections and gained a deeper understanding of the questions spurred by conducting grassroots research. Future efforts can build on the research outlined in this report.

A truly successful assessment should raise further questions, inspire conversation and provoke continued assessment. It should also build relationships between diverse stakeholders, as personal connections form the basis of a sustainable local food system. EMO and its Interfaith Food and Farms Partnership will continue to lead efforts toward greater community food security in Benton County through continued administration of the “That’s My Farmer” coupon program and collaboration with TRFW and other groups. We look forward to pursuing many of the projects suggested by our assessment results, from farm-to-cafeteria programs to fundamental food policy changes.

A truly successful assessment should raise further questions, inspire conversation and provoke continued assessment.

Ten Rivers Food Web: An Emerging Local Organization

Imagine a community where all people have access to high quality, locally produced, nourishing, affordable and culturally diverse food on a non-emergency basis. This is the vision of a new organization that began in Corvallis in the spring of 2004 to encourage the consumption and production of locally grown and raised food.

In early 2006 the Food System Coalition – as it was then called – changed its name to the Ten Rivers Food Web (TRFW) to better describe the broad area of our foodshed and to facilitate connections in the tri-county area. With the new identity came a fresh articulation of purpose: To provide strategic leadership to build an economically and environmentally sustainable local food system in Benton, Linn and Lincoln Counties.

TRFW seeks to include a broad range of food-related players within our community – farmers, consumers, chefs, school board members, university faculty and students, grocers, food bank workers and seed producers, to name a few – and to collaboratively identify means of expanding production, distribution and consumption of locally raised food.

Residents of Corvallis and its surrounding areas may have come across TRFW at their November 2004 Food Summit, which drew over one hundred people; at last year's Farm-to-Fork Dinner, which featured all locally raised foods; in the Gazette-Times' and Albany Democrat-Herald's 2006 Growers Guide; or at the farmers' markets where they continue to conduct interactive surveys to learn about shoppers' preferences. TRFW has also developed a database of over 250 farmers, available on the organization's website (www.tenriversfoodweb.org).

EMO and TRFW have helped shape each other's programmatic work and vision over the years, and thus share many of the same goals. The two organizations collaborated extensively on this community food assessment, helping to establish connections between farmers, congregations and low-income populations. TRFW's future projects include developing a central community food processing center; helping the South Corvallis Food Bank find a home; publishing a resource directory of all locally-grown and -produced food and fiber and where it can be accessed; establishing neighborhood gardens throughout our communities; and organizing farmer-chef-fisher gatherings in the Mid-Willamette Valley.

TRFW invites you to get involved in any of their various committees: Food Literacy, Local Farm Coordination, Community Processing Facility, Farm-to-Cafeteria and Low-Income Projects. For more information on monthly meetings, upcoming events and volunteer opportunities, please visit their website at www.tenriversfoodweb.org.

The Ten Rivers Vision

We envision:

- A *diversified local farm economy* whose growers and processors are valued by the entire community and whose products are consumed with awareness of their origin.
- A *local grower/processor community* supplying a higher percentage of the foods eaten by Benton, Linn and Lincoln County residents. (Currently, approximately 2% of food consumed in Benton County is produced here.)
- Collaborations* among residents, organizations and governmental bodies to create the essential elements of a successful local food system (adequate rural and urban food-producing land, processing facilities, markets and infrastructure).
- Creative connections between producers and consumers*: farmers' markets, farm stands, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs, retail food stores, institutional dining facilities, schools, restaurants and congregations.
- Low-income residents having regular access to healthful*, locally produced foods through local

distribution networks.

—Anyone wishing to grow food for themselves, or farm for the community, *having access to land and training to grow and preserve food.*

—*Increases in:* knowledge about food, nutritional value of meals provided by schools and institutions, culturally-appropriate foods, local markets for local foods, viable jobs in agriculture and food processing, amounts of locally-produced foods in people's diets, land used for food production.

—*Decreases in:* hunger and food insecurity, obesity and diabetes, eating disorders, petroleum used for long-distance shipping of food, use of emergency food sources, food and packaging waste.

—*A community where people take pleasure in eating together.*

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