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Growing Food Justice in West Bloomington, IL

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Abstract

In some places in the United States, guns are more accessible than tomatoes. In a nation where food is in relative abundance, how can this be? Food security is the ready availability of nutritious and safe food and the assured ability to obtain it through normal sources (Morris et al 1992). Food justice asserts that no one should live without enough food because of economic constraints or social inequities. In this way, food justice frames the lack of healthy food sources in poor communities as a human rights issue (People's Grocery 2008). However, in some communities, access to fresh, healthy food is not always possible. In 2000 food *insecurity*, the uncertain or limited access to food through normal channels, affected 33 million Americans, which translates to over 10% of US households (Wisconsin Food Security Project, 2008). "Food deserts" are the places where food insecurity exists. (Morton et al 2005, Shaw 2006). When one considers that four of the ten leading causes of death in the United States are chronic diseases for which diet is a major risk factor, the need to turn food deserts into food secure communities becomes glaringly apparent (Zenk et al 2005).

This study focuses on West Bloomington, IL—a community that can most likely be classified as a food desert. I hope that my research has attracted attention to the food insecurity of West Bloomington so that the area can be transformed into a food secure community. Ultimately, three solutions emerged to grow food justice in West Bloomington: a farmers market that accepts food stamps, expansion of the community garden, and the addition of a full-service grocery store. The first priority *has* to be attracting a full-service grocery store to the West side. Without a source of fresh food *within* the community, the health of residents may be negatively affected. To compliment a grocery store, local food options such a farmers market with a food stamp program or the expansion of the community garden can enhance the food security of West Bloomington.

Growing Food Justice in West Bloomington

Introduction

In some places in the United States, guns are more accessible than tomatoes. In a nation where food is in relative abundance, how can this be? Food security is the ready availability of nutritious and safe food and the assured ability to obtain it through normal sources (Morris et al 1992). Such normal high quality food sources include but are not limited to, supermarkets that stock fresh produce, farmers markets, community gardens.¹ Assuring easy access to fresh fruits and vegetables is an essential component of food security because eating these foods protects against cardiovascular disease, cancer, and Type II diabetes, while consumption of processed foods with high contents of fat, salt, and sugar may cause obesity and other related health problems (Shaw 2006). However, in some communities, access to fresh, healthy food is not always possible. In 2000 food *insecurity*, the uncertain or limited access to food through normal channels, affected 33 million Americans, which translates to over 10% of US households (Wisconsin Food Security Project, 2008). When one considers that four of the ten leading causes of death in the United States are chronic diseases for which diet is a major risk factor, the need to turn food insecure communities into food secure communities becomes glaringly apparent (Zenk et al 2005).

The central cause of food insecurity is poverty. Food sources such as grocery stores often choose not to locate their business in low-income communities due to the perceived risk of financial loss (Morland 2002b). Additionally, businesses fear the high crime rates that are often associated with low-income communities. Whether it be financial or safety concerns, poverty is the determining factor of food insecurity. A food desert is most often an economically depressed community with sparse retail outlets that are usually limited to gas stations, liquor stores, and convenience stores which only stock nutritionally- deficient processed food. Food deserts determine the conditions under which low-income communities must exert greater effort to obtain food through normal sources (Morton et al 2005). Food deserts exist in communities where certain segments of the population are underserved by affordable, high quality food sources (Winne, 2007). Why do low-income populations face such a challenge in accessing fresh, and healthy food? What efforts have been put forth to remedy the situation? The just sustainability paradigm, an approach which takes into equal consideration both ecological sustainability and social justice, is particularly useful in considering food security in low-income communities (Agyeman et al 2003).

¹ Food security is the availability of fresh, and healthy food. However, “fresh and healthy food” carries with it a variety of meanings. In the literature on food security, most scholars would define the produce available at a local chain supermarket as fresh and healthy food. Thus, within the existing literature on food deserts and food insecurity, fresh and healthy food does not necessarily mean locally produced food or organic food. To me, this is a huge gap within the literature. All people not only deserve equal access to “fresh and healthy” food at, say, Kroger, but also access to locally produced, and organic food available through such outlets as farmers markets. In my research, I have sought to incorporate not only the traditional conception of “fresh and healthy food” but also a more sustainable conception of food security that takes into consideration ecological sustainability via locally produced and organic food.

This study focuses on West Bloomington, IL—a community that can most likely be classified as a food desert. A consumer in Bloomington-Normal only has to consider where he or she shops for food to realize that no grocery stores are anywhere near West Bloomington. In my research, I assess the state of food availability in West Bloomington. Through consultation with the West Bloomington community, I identify what impediments the community believes are preventing its residents from equal access to local, fresh and healthy food that their neighbors in other parts of Bloomington-Normal enjoy. To accomplish this end, I have worked to integrate food concerns into the current revitalization efforts that are being planned for the West Side. To influence the redevelopment efforts on the West side, it was important to first develop an understanding of the actors involved in the process so that I could present my concerns to them. My research thus focused on the West Bloomington Neighborhood Plan² (see appendix) and the players that wield influence over its contents. Fortunately, my research was not the first of its kind in the Bloomington-Normal Community. Elaine Sebal, the director of the Bloomington Farmers Market, attempted to pilot a food stamp program at the local farmers market in the summer of 2007. Although the effort ultimately proved to be unsuccessful, it proved helpful to my research efforts in the Bloomington-Normal community concerning food security. My research thus sought to build off Elaine's efforts and to promote dialogue concerning food justice in Bloomington-Normal.

First, it is essential to survey the existing literature on food security. This literature helps to characterize and explain the root causes of food deserts. Additionally, the literature on the Just Sustainability Paradigm points to solutions to food insecurity, which are applicable to West Bloomington. After an explanation of my methodological approach, I will present the findings of my fieldwork in West Bloomington. Lastly, I will analyze the results of my research and present policy recommendations to address the food insecurity of West Bloomington.

Review of Literature

Food deserts and the unequal access to fresh and healthy food

Most scholars define food deserts as the unavailability of fresh and healthy food to a certain segment of the population (Morton et al 2005, Winne 2007). The uneven distribution of the normal food system creates food deserts, or areas of relative exclusion where disadvantaged people experience physical and economic barriers (Shaw 2006). To visualize a food desert, consider the characteristics of an economically marginalized community where corner stores, liquor stores and gas stations are predominantly located. Fresh fruit and vegetables, which are readily available at large supermarket chains, are not stocked at these types of convenience

² The West Bloomington Neighborhood Plan directs the revitalization efforts in West Bloomington by mapping out dozens of action projects in the areas of community greening, youth, safety and well-being, economic development, housing and education. The Plan will be discussed in greater depth later in the paper.

stores.³ Shaw's study, "Food Deserts: Toward the Development of a Classification," proposes guidelines to determine food availability in a given community. In this study, communities were ranked as to whether they: 1) contained a shop selling ten or more kinds of fresh fruit and vegetable, 2) contained a grocery store but no shop selling ten or more kinds of fruit and vegetable, 3) contained a residential area but no grocery shop, and 4) were non-residential (Shaw 2006).

Who is most likely to be a resident of a food desert? Most studies agree that the common denominator among all those living in food deserts is low socioeconomic status (Morton et al 2005, Shaw 2006). However, some studies have gone further by directly linking race to the existence of food deserts (Morland 2002a, Morland 2002b, Zenk 2005). In the study *Neighborhood Racial Composition, Neighborhood Poverty, and the Spatial Accessibility of Supermarkets in Metropolitan Detroit*, Zenk found that distance to the nearest supermarket was similar among the least impoverished neighborhoods, regardless of racial composition; but among the most impoverished neighborhoods, neighborhoods in which African-Americans resided were 1.1 miles further from the nearest supermarket than where white neighborhoods. A comprehensive study by Morland et al (2002b), which examined food deserts located in Mississippi, North Carolina, Maryland and Minnesota, found the same disparity in the location of supermarkets in African American communities: four times more supermarkets were located in white neighborhoods compared to black neighborhoods. The specific numbers are telling (Morland et al 2002a): five supermarkets were located in 35 predominantly black neighborhoods to provide service for nearly 118,000 people. In contrast, there were 68 supermarkets to serve 259,500 residents of predominantly white neighborhoods. The ratio of supermarkets to residents for predominantly white communities was therefore 1:3,816 versus 1:23,582 for predominantly black areas- a difference of approximately seven fold. Another study by Morland et al (2002b), "The Contextual Effect of the Local Food Environment on Residents' Diets," confirmed the results of a previous study by using a different sample population and finding that five times more supermarkets were located in census tracts where whites resided as opposed to predominantly black communities. All these studies suggest that there is a racial divide in the uneven distribution of the food system.

Numerous studies have reaffirmed that the typical population living within food deserts is largely poor minorities. What barriers do these poor minorities face in accessing food? The most apparent barrier seems to be insufficient income. Disadvantaged consumers in low-income, minority communities pay more for basic products than those in more affluent districts (Alkon 2008). This is because most of the larger chain supermarkets, offering healthier food at lower prices than smaller convenience stores, are predominantly located in more affluent areas of town (Morland et al 2002a). Although the economic factor is the biggest obstacle facing the food insecure, other impediments do indeed exist. Shaw's study on food deserts proposes that the concept of food access be broken down into three contributory factors: assets, ability, and attitude (Shaw 2006).

³ If convenience stores happen to stock fresh food, their prices are significantly higher than produce available at a larger supermarket.

Asset problems may be defined as the lack of any financially valuable asset that prevents consumption of food the consumer can otherwise physically access and has the desire to consume. Asset problems are largely the economic barriers to purchasing healthy food described above. Ability problems may be defined as anything that physically prevents access to food which a consumer otherwise has the financial resources to purchase and the mental desire to buy. In the case of low-income populations, ability problems most often have to deal with the lack of reliable public or private transportation. Referring back to the Zenk study, opinions of Detroit residents were consistent with the study's findings, as these people reported that lack of access to supermarkets was a barrier to healthy eating (Zenk 2005). Additionally, the statistic that the nearest supermarket averaged 1.1 miles further from African American communities than white ones is particularly important when you consider another finding: 28% of households in these African American neighborhoods did not own a car (Zenk 2005). A study by Morland et al (2002a), "Neighborhood Characteristics Associated with the Location of Food Stores and Food Service Places," also found that African American households are less likely to have a reliable source of personal transportation, citing that the proportion of households without a car or truck available is higher among African Americans, regardless of wealth. Lastly, attitude problems that prevent food access can be defined as any state of mind that prevents the consumer from accessing foods they can otherwise physically bring into their home and have the necessary assets to procure. Attitude problems may include culturally based prejudices that create psychological barriers against certain foods, such as organic food, sometimes sarcastically referred to as "yuppie chow" among low-income populations (Guthman 2003). Using this three-pronged approach to classify food deserts allows for the possibility that a food desert might exist in an area where fruit and vegetable shops are numerous (Shaw 2006). If attitude problems are the cause of food access problems, then this situation is entirely plausible.

One interesting question that arises from the discussion of attitude problems is whether the availability of healthy, fresh, and local food affects consumption of such foods (Morland 2002b). In other words, if healthy food sources were made available to low-income residents of food deserts, would these take advantage of them or simply dismiss them as "yuppie chow?" One such study measured the relationship between physical availability of fresh, healthy food sources and people's adherence to health authorities' recommendations for a healthy diet (Morland et al 2002b). The study found that even after controlling for education and income level, a higher proportion of African Americans living in areas with at least one supermarket reported meeting dietary guidelines for fruits and vegetables than did African Americans living in areas with no supermarkets. Additionally, blacks reported an increased intake of fresh fruits and vegetables when there was one supermarket in their community, and a larger increase when there were two or more supermarkets, which corresponds to an average increase of 32% in the consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables for each additional supermarket (Morland et al 2002b). Thus, on the basis of this study, it would seem that if resources are available for fresh, healthy food, minority residents of food deserts would be inclined to take advantage of them.

The Just Sustainability Paradigm: incorporating sustainability and social justice into local food systems

Historically, the sustainability paradigm and environmental movement in general has been led by a homogenous group of white, middle to upper class people (Gottlieb and Fisher 1996). The movement has failed to take into consideration the needs of minorities and those in the lower socio-economic strata. In other words, the people that the environmental movement has forgotten are those most likely to inhabit a food desert. The just sustainability paradigm (JSP) is a critique of the traditional sustainability paradigm because it takes into equal consideration both ecological sustainability and social justice. The JSP attempts to marry sustainability and environmental justice through the emerging realization that a sustainable society must also be an equitable society (Agyeman et al 2003). Juxtaposing the agricultural sustainability of local and organic food with the social justice issue of food access to low-income communities, food security is a perfect issue for consideration within the JSP (Agyeman et al 2003, Alkon 2008).⁴ Food security activism often parallels environmental justice activism, casting healthy food as an environmental benefit to which the food-insecure are denied access (Gottlieb and Fisher 1996). Some studies go further claiming that because sustainable agriculture is largely conceptualized as an environmental issue, equal access to organic produce then should be seen as an inherent environmental right (Alkon 2008). Much is being done to eradicate food deserts by incorporating the principles of JSP into a food justice movement.

Food justice asserts that no one should live without enough food because of economic constraints or social inequities. In this way, food justice frames the lack of healthy food sources in poor communities as a human rights issue (People's Grocery 2008). Ranging from farmers markets, to community orchards and gardens, to gleaning programs, there are many local initiatives seeking to solve food insecurity. To begin, food justice principles are beginning to manifest themselves in farmers market policy. Nationally, the Farmers Market Nutrition Programs (FMNP) provides federal government stipends for fresh fruits and vegetables to seniors, women, infants, and children (WIC) (Hamilton 2005). The FMNPs are the most significant example of federal support for food justice through farmers markets and represent a vital nutritional program; unfortunately they have been under-funded and historically inadequate. Congress must identify and support a stable and significantly larger appropriation for FMNPs if they are to be anything other than a minor factor in farmers market operations or the nation's nutrition and hunger assistance efforts (Hamilton 2005).

The acceptance of food stamps at farmers markets through the electronic benefits transfer (EBT) program is another example of a federal food assistance program, albeit with somewhat limited success. The technology required for EBTs has created problems for farmers markets. For example, farmers markets are located in open-air venues, and the internet access needed for

⁴ The JSP has focused extensively on the environmental sustainability component of farming, but has failed to recognize the economic sustainability issue of local farmers. Farming is not a lucrative profession, and due to the large-scale industrialization of farming in the United States, small-scale local farmers have been hit particularly hard economically. The economic sustainability of local farmers is a concept that deserves more attention, since solving food insecurity depends on local farmers being able to survive economically.

the EBT technology is often difficult to provide. These problems have been overcome when farmers markets partner with local businesses, farm groups and banks to create pilot programs providing EBT access to farmers and markets (Hamilton 2005). The FMNP and the EBT program are both federal programs under the jurisdiction of the United States Department of Agriculture. Other, less known federal agencies like the Office of Community Services (OCS) also provide federal nutritional assistance programs to farmers markets. For example, in 2005 the OCS issued two notices of funding availability for the Community Food and Nutrition Program, both of which provided financial support for farmers markets and public markets (Hamilton 2005). In addition, local aldermen have been successful in pushing for food justice reforms. Assemblyman Felix Ortiz was concerned that the people in his Brooklyn, NY constituency were suffering from a lack of nutritiously available foods. To remedy this situation, he introduced legislation that gave New York farmers a personal property tax abatement on farm equipment if they sold at farmers markets in underserved communities (Winne 2007). The legislation produced tangible results, as farmers began parking their pick up trucks in New York's low-income communities to sell tomatoes, collard greens and cilantro (Winne 2007). The property abatement tax strategy has also been shown to help supermarkets in poor neighborhoods where operating costs are higher than they are in the suburbs (Winne 2007). Thus, support for food justice as a principle has infiltrated into federal and state policy. *However, it is essential that local communities suffering from food insecurity be cognizant of these policies so that they can apply for funding.* Often times a lack of advertising nutritional assistance programs prevents communities from taking advantage of their benefits.

Farmers market gleaning programs are another way to help to fill the void of fresh, local and healthy food in food deserts. Farmers markets all over the country have established arrangements for local and regional volunteer organizations to glean (to collect) surplus food at the end of the market day (Lyons 2008a). The surplus fresh fruits and vegetables are donated to a local food pantry or soup kitchen. For example, in New York City, City Harvest collected over 400,000 pounds of food from the city's Greenmarket system in 2007, which it redistributed to the poor. In Boston, the Boston Area Gleaners (BAG) collects surplus produce at the end of the market day and delivers it to public housing facilities (Lyons 2008a). There, Human Services hires a person to set up a table and sell bags of the produce, often worth around thirty dollars, for as little as two dollars to low income residents. In Washington State, the San Juan Island Farmers Market developed a gleaning program that arranges surplus produce into community-supported agriculture style boxes (Lyons 2008a).⁵ Eight boxes are assembled and sold to eight different low-income families for five dollars a box; these funds are matched by eight sponsors in the community who also give five dollars a week to pay for the cost of the food. This way, low-income families are able to enjoy fresh, local and healthy produce for just five dollars a week, while the farmers also receive some compensation for their donations through the money donated to the program by community sponsors. Additionally, two boxes go to the Senior

⁵ According to Lyons (2008A), "A CSA, (Community Supported Agriculture) is a way for the food buying public to create a relationship with a farm and to receive a weekly basket of produce. By making a financial commitment to a farm, people become "members" (or "shareholders," or "subscribers") of the CSA. Most CSA farmers prefer that members pay for the season up-front, but some farmers will accept weekly or monthly payments. Some CSAs also require that members work a small number of hours on the farm during the growing season.

Community Center, where the food is sold at reduced prices. To make farmers market gleaning programs work, it takes a dedicated, reliable core of volunteers to bridge the gap between the food gleaned at the market and its final destination in the hands of low-income members of the community (Lyons 2008a).⁶ Community groups such as church groups or groups of local college students can assist in the gleaning process by providing labor and transportation.

In addition to various farmers market programs that assist in making healthy food available to the poor, community gardens empower local communities to personally address food security. Community gardens epitomize the goal of food justice activism by providing equal access to healthy, high quality, safe and affordable food for people in all communities (growingpower.org 2008). In West Oakland, California, a widely recognized food desert, an organization called People's Grocery seeks to advance self-reliance and social justice by providing the community with the tools it needs to address the disparities within the food system and within the society at large (People's Grocery 2008). The tools in People's Grocery arsenal include: two urban food gardens, a two-acre rural farm, a greenhouse, and a variety of programs to get local youth and the community constructively involved in the production and distribution of organic food. The signature program for People's Grocery is the Grub Box. The Grub Box is a weekly box of culturally and seasonally appropriate fruits and vegetables tailored to low-income budgets. People's Grocery implements a dual pricing system to cover the eighteen-dollar cost of the box. For low-income budgets, the Grub Box costs twelve dollars, while a weekly box with a sponsorship costs twenty-four dollars to help support the program.⁷

Fruit tree programs and orchard programs are also innovative ways to help the food deprived (Clark 2008, Philadelphia Orchard Project 2008). The vision of the Philadelphia Orchard Project is to ultimately become the first American metropolis to grow most of its own food by converting empty lots into orchards with food crops-trees that bear fruits, nuts and berry bushes (Philadelphia Orchard Project 2008). The Project seeks to specifically serve the needs of low-income residents. The lots can be purchased for around eight hundred dollars. Once an orchard project is complete, the Project works with the particular neighborhood on its maintenance and success as a food-producing project. Often this means that local volunteers, like the environmental club at Temple University, help in the orchard's upkeep. Similarly, the Portland Fruit Tree Project (PFTP) ensures that the harvest from fruit trees around the city that might normally go to waste finds its way into the hand of the food insecure (Clark 2008). PFTP uses a comprehensive, year round approach that involves the needs of tree owners, the seasonal needs of trees for pruning and harvesting, and the interests of those without their own trees who are willing to work. To preserve seasonal harvests, PFTP also sponsors canning workshops.

One last example of food justice in action has to do with community-supported agriculture (CSA). In a CSA program, farmers and their customers share in the risk and bounty

⁶ The literature on gleaning stressed a need for volunteers, while the literature on farmers markets and EBT programs stressed the need for funding. However, Elaine Sebald suggested that the need for volunteers is greater for EBT programs. According to her, finding a reliable group of volunteers is the biggest obstacle for EBT programs.

⁷ People's Grocery nationally recognized fundraiser, Harvesting Justice, was attended by the famous food advocate Michael Pollan in 2007.

of the growing season. The customer buys a share of the farm's harvest at the start of the growing season, and then receives a share of each week's harvest. Uprising Organics in Acme, Washington took CSAs to a whole new level in 2007 by only accepting food stamps as payment for its shares (Lyons 2008b). Only accepting food stamps puts a kink in the traditional CSA system, so Uprising Organics has to function a bit differently. Federal regulations do not permit food stamp recipients to pay in advance for their CSA share. Thus, Uprising Organics used a fundraiser, appealing to friends and family, the farmers market community and a local food cooperative, in order to raise enough money to cover expenses before their first weekly harvest. Just Food, an organization in New York City, does similar work to that of Uprising Organics by working with local communities and farmers to make CSAs more accessible to all income levels, including food stamp recipients (Lyons 2008b).

The Economic Sustainability of Local Farmers

The local farmer is an integral part of any food justice initiative, yet the vast majority of literature on food justice has not focused extensively on the economic situation of the local farmer. However, there is a body of literature within the field of agricultural economics that does address the economic sustainability of the local farmer. In their study "Bringing the Food Economy Home", Norberg-Hodge and Gorelick (2002) discuss solutions to improve the financial situation of the local farmer who is marginalized by a large-scale, industrialized, and globalized food economy. One solution to help the financial situation of the local farmer has to do with redirecting agricultural subsidies. Specifically, subsidies that now support the global food system need to be shifted towards more localized systems. Governments have spent tremendous sums of taxpayers' money to prop up a costly food system that pretends to provide 'cheap' food. If even a fraction of that sum were devoted to supporting local food systems instead, the cost of local food would decrease substantially, and its availability would grow rapidly (Norberg-Hodge and Gorelick 2002). Another solution focuses on educating the public on the benefits of local food systems. There is a need to recognize the importance of local knowledge to maintain existing local food systems, and to reclaim those that have been largely lost. Today, a one-size-fits-all educational model is being imposed worldwide, eliminating much of the knowledge and skills people need to live on their own resources, in their own places on the earth (Norberg-Hodge and Gorelick 2002). Yet another method to help local farmers survive economically is to change tax policy. Now, tax credits for capital- and energy-intensive technologies favor the largest and most global producers. Meanwhile, the more labor-intensive methods of small-scale diversified producers are penalized through income taxes, payroll taxes and other taxes on labor (Norberg-Hodge and Gorelick 2002). Lastly, there is a need for deregulation on the local level. According to Norberg-Hodge and Gorelick (2002), the steady deregulation of global trade and finance has led to the emergence of giant corporations whose activities are highly polluting and socially exploitative. This in turn has created a need for more social and environmental regulations, along with a massive bureaucracy to administer them. That bureaucracy is strangling smaller businesses with paperwork, inspections, fines, and the cost of mandated technologies (Norberg-Hodge and Gorelick 2002). The regulatory burden is too great for the small to bear, while the large transnational corporations happily pay up and expand as their smaller competitors die out. Ultimately, locally-produced food needs to be deregulated because it is far less likely than the industrialized food system to harm human health and the environment.

Additionally, Norberg-Hodge and Gorelick (2002) suggest that smaller operations are in fact more productive than larger industrial farming operations. Large-scale, single crop, industrial farms can produce a large amount of output per unit of labor, but diverse, sustainable crop systems are actually more productive in terms of output per unit of land. In other words, sustainable farms require more workers and create more jobs, but produce more food on smaller plots of land than industrial farms (Norberg-Hodge and Gorelick 2002). Local food systems have economic benefits as well, since most of the money spent on food goes to the farmer, not corporate middlemen. Juan Moreno, a farmer in the Andalucian region of Spain, observes: "When we used to sell our vegetables to supermarkets we got almost nothing for them. Now, through the local co-op, we're getting much more - three times as much for some vegetables." (Norberg-Hodge and Gorelick 2002).

To sum up the literature reviewed, economically and socially disadvantaged neighborhoods have inadequate access to healthy foods. This negatively affects the dietary quality and health of the residents of these neighborhoods (Zenk et al 2005). The places where these communities are located are called food deserts and residents of food deserts can be described as food insecure. Some studies have directly linked food deserts to racial lines, demonstrating that a disproportionate number of supermarkets are located in predominantly white communities as opposed to African-American communities.

Food security is best understood by applying the principles of the just sustainability paradigm, as it points to both the sustainability of local food and the social justice issue of food access. By incorporating the principles of the JSP, the food justice movement has sought to turn food deserts into food secure communities. There are various strategies to achieve food justice, including through the policy realm, farmers markets, community gardens and CSAs. Lastly, any food justice initiative needs to take into consideration the economic sustainability of local farmers, and work towards influencing policy in hopes of improving the financial situation of these farmers.⁸

Food Justice in Bloomington-Normal

The West Bloomington community seems to fit the characteristics of a food desert. It is economically depressed and lacks any source of fresh, healthy food. Bloomington-Normal has plenty of supermarkets, but all are clustered around the east side of Veterans Parkway, making them inaccessible for the majority of the disadvantaged in West Bloomington. Additionally, West Bloomington does not have a farmers market within the confines of its community⁹.

⁸ The JSP has not focused extensively on the economic sustainability of local farmers. Farming is not a profitable profession, especially small-scale farming. If local farmers are not able to survive economically, they will not be able to provide locally-grown food to low-income communities. Thus, the success of the food justice movement hinges on the economic success of local farmers.

⁹ The downtown Bloomington farmers market is very close in proximity to West Bloomington, so access is not the problem. However, as my findings demonstrate, the attitude barrier is a huge impediment. There is definitely a cultural, class, and racial divide between the West Bloomington community and the downtown Bloomington farmers market.

Without a personal vehicle and given the lack of reliability in Bloomington public transportation, West Bloomington residents seem largely excluded from the normal food system that the rest of the community enjoys. It would seem that the food justice movement needs to take root in the West Bloomington community. In fact such efforts have begun. From a gleaning program, to an attempt at an EBT program at the Bloomington farmers market, to a community garden, food justice initiatives are attempting to take root in the community.

A farmers market gleaning program began in Bloomington in 2005 (Sebald 2008a). Surplus from the Bloomington farmers market goes directly to the Midwest Food Bank¹⁰ located on Veterans Parkway. Several volunteers from the Bloomington farmers market work with one or two volunteers from the Midwest Food bank to gather the surplus produce and deliver it to the food bank for distribution. This is not the best approach to supply fresh food to low-income communities because it does not provide a reliable, predicable supply of produce (Sebald 2008a). More investigation would need to be conducted to determine how the gleaning program could be tweaked to better serve the needs of low-income communities.¹¹

In an effort to compliment the already existing gleaning program, in 2008 Elaine Sebald, Marsha Veninga and others undertook an effort to provide fresh, local and healthy food to low-income communities in Bloomington-Normal by trying to establish an Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) program at the downtown Bloomington farmers market (Sebald 2008a). Unfortunately, the funding from the state of Illinois to pay for the costly EBT equipment fell through. Even had the funding been available, though, concerns remained about staffing people to run the EBT machines at the farmers market in Bloomington (Sebald 2008a). The obstacles to an EBT program are almost all logistical, and it will take a reliable pool of volunteers to make the program a success. Although the EBT program was not a success in Bloomington, many key obstacles have been identified.¹² These obstacles, such as a lack of a pool of reliable volunteers, deserve closer examination so that they can be overcome in the near future.

In addition to the gleaning program and the efforts to establish an EBT program at the Bloomington farmers market, other initiatives attempt to address food security. For example, the West Bloomington community is seeking to incorporate food security into the West Bloomington Neighborhood Plan (Veninga 2008a). This Plan includes a community profile, strategies and projects for the revitalization efforts, and a plan for implementation. Thus far, a community garden is in its fledgling stages at the corner of Roosevelt and Mulberry Streets

¹⁰ The Midwest Food Bank (MFB), a nonprofit organization, was created just five years ago when the Kieser family began providing food out of a shed on their family farm. The MFB began by serving about 10 food pantries in McLean County. In 2007, they served over 500 organizations across the Midwest. The food given out each month now reaches over 100,000 people.

¹¹ See appendix for my proposed outline for a gleaning program in Bloomington-Normal.

¹² Although the EBT program never came to fruition, in 2008 the McLean County farmers markets became eligible for participation in the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP), and both the Bloomington and Normal farmers markets participated. The FMNP provides coupons for seniors and Women, Infants and Children (WIC) to purchase fresh produce from the farmers market and farm stands.

(Veninga 2008a). However, community members feel that Teska Associates, the developer of West Bloomington and overseer of the West Bloomington Neighborhood Plan, has not taken food security questions into serious consideration (Sebald 2008a, Veninga 2008a). Here, much can be done to push Teska Associates to adopt elements of a Just Sustainability Paradigm (JSP) in its development of the West Bloomington Neighborhood Plan.

All these efforts in the Bloomington-Normal community show that a commitment to food justice exists, but is in its early stages. Although certain individuals have worked on food justice issues, the larger policy focus has not been given adequate attention, as evidenced by the lack of a food plan in the West Bloomington Neighborhood Plan. With the examples of other communities in mind, much can be done to move forward with food justice in this region. For example, the farmers market gleaning program could identify specific families to directly donate their surplus to. Vacant lots on the West side could be the location for future orchards. And CSAs could look into the possibility of serving food stamp recipients. It is essential that Teska Associates and the West Bloomington Task Force take food into consideration while crafting strategies for the revitalization efforts on the West side.

Yet an impediment presently prevents the swift action that is needed to remedy food insecurity. In Bloomington-Normal it appears there has been little correspondence between local food groups like the Bloomington farmers market and the Heartland Local Food Network on the one hand and community groups that represent low-income populations like the West Bloomington Task Force on the other.¹³ This is puzzling because both seem to be working toward the same goal: making local, healthy food more accessible to poor populations. In her book, "Together at the Table," Allen stresses the importance of involving the victims of social injustices in crafting solutions to those problems. Most people in leadership positions often come from and lead materially or socially privileged lives and in this sense it is difficult for them to feel the "raw nerve of outrage" that comes from personally and consistently experiencing social injustice (Allen 2004). Thus, it is essential for leaders to take into consideration the situation and needs of the community they represent. In the literature of food deserts, there are numerous examples of local food groups and community groups coming together, such as in Boston with the farmers market and the public housing authority (Lyons 2008a). In the same way that the JSP seeks to connect sustainability and environmental justice goals, my project seeks to plant the seeds of food justice in greater Bloomington-Normal. Hopefully, my research has pointed towards the creation of a food justice group for the West Bloomington Neighborhood Plan that contains members from both the local food groups and the community groups.

Research Design, Methodology, and Ethical Issues

My first goal was to identify West Bloomington as a food desert in hopes of directing attention and efforts toward the alleviation of the community's food insecurity. Second, I hoped to identify West Bloomington's interest in local foods and communicate these interests to local food groups in Bloomington as to begin a dialogue between local food groups and communities in search of food security. As my project developed, a significant goal became to use West

¹³ Additionally, there has been no communication between local farmers and low-income residents.

Bloomington's interest in local foods to persuade Teska Associates, the developer overseeing revitalization efforts in West Bloomington, to honestly consider incorporating a local food system into its development strategy outlined in the West Bloomington Neighborhood Plan.

I began my study by trying to determine if West Bloomington West-Bloomington could be classified as a food desert. To assess the community's food security situation, I planned to survey its residents using the USDA's Core Food Insecurity Variables (see appendix for various food security surveys). This method was implemented successfully by Morton et al 2005 in the study "Solving the Problems of Iowa Food Deserts: Food Insecurity and Civic Structure." The perfect place to survey the West Bloomington residents would have been at the periodic summits they held to discuss the revitalization efforts of the community. I attended one such community summit but was unable to put together a survey in time to distribute, as my project was still in its fledgling stages. Ultimately, it proved to be very difficult to distribute a survey to a sampling of the entire community, and I realized that given the time constraints, participatory observation might be the easiest way to gather data concerning food security in West Bloomington. I took note of food issues that came up during the Third Community Summit. I attended the Harvest Festival and talked with many attendees about the topics of food deserts and food justice. I observed customers at the downtown farmers market and talked with producers. Additionally, I attended the Heartland Local Food Network (HLFN) meetings two times a month and raised concerns about food access in West Bloomington as to put food security on the group's agenda. This type of participatory observation, combined with attendance at the HLFN meetings, was essential for me to develop an understanding of the situation of local food access in the Bloomington-Normal area.

Once food insecurity in West Bloomington was established, it was also important to gauge the community's attitude towards what it feels is being done to alleviate their food insecurity. I planned to use another survey implemented in Morton's study that measures the perceptions of the civic structure of local food systems (see appendix). I hoped that the results of this survey would point to areas that needed future improvement to make Bloomington more food secure. However, for the reasons discussed above, I was unable to implement the survey. Instead, at the Harvest Festival¹⁴, I talked with community members about their perceptions of food security and interviewed Jeff Woodard, an active community leader.

I also interviewed community leaders in West Bloomington that are members of the West Bloomington Task Force. The West Bloomington Task Force is a group that is instrumental in identifying the needs of West Bloomington and also exerts influence on materials that are included in the West Bloomington Plan. I talked with Karen Schmidt, the alderwoman of West Bloomington. She forwarded my research on food security to Marty Vanags of the Economic Development Council and Scott Goldstein of Teska Associates, the developer in charge of the revitalization efforts. Collectively, I hope to use the discussions with Karen to help promote the addition of a food plan in the West Bloomington Neighborhood Plan. By initiating dialogue

¹⁴ The Harvest Festival was held on October 25, 2008 at the West Side Community Garden. It was a Halloween celebration that brought together the whole community, with a special focus on the youth of the community.

between local food groups and community groups, I hoped to lay the foundation to cement future partnerships.

In regards to ethical issues, I foresaw possible tension between the farmers and the disadvantaged families receiving the produce. This tension is evident in my discussion with a local farmer that follows in the research results. Should farmers be expected to give away their surplus for free? Should families expect not to pay for the produce they receive? Does a farmer have an obligation to feed the disadvantaged in his/her community without expecting any compensation in return? Keeping in mind the disadvantaged family's situation, how much is enough as far as compensation is concerned? I think it is important to keep in mind that being a farmer isn't exactly a profitable profession. For example, with Uprising Organics, the CSA that accepts only food stamps, the farmers fit economically into the demographic of their subscribers (Lyons 2008b). Thus, can the farmers be expected to give away food when their economic situation is possibly as dire as those they are trying to feed? I think a mutual understanding of both the farmers and family's situation will benefit each party immensely. Again, many of these issues become apparent in the results of my interviews with local farmers in the Bloomington-Normal area.

Summary of Research

West Bloomington: A Food Desert?

In talking with community leaders and residents, it is clear that there are not many viable food options in West Bloomington. There is no large chain supermarket and relatively little options available for fresh food. The Walmart near the interstate center seems to be the one of the only food options available to West side residents, although the variety of fresh produce that Walmart offers is limited. Additionally, the Walmart is not located in the center of town, where the revitalization efforts are aimed, and it is difficult for residents without a personal vehicle to reach Walmart. Deborah Halperin, director of the Action Research Center (ARC), provided me with a list of food options that her organization compiled (See Appendix). From the list, one can gather that sources for fresh food are limited. The two 'grocery' stores mentioned, Pops and the convenience store by Starcrest Cleaners, stock no fresh produce whatsoever.

During the Summit, one visibly upset resident stood up and proclaimed that he would love to see a grocery store come back to the West side. He was referring to the closing of Tom's Parkway Foods.¹⁵ Additionally, food availability was broached during the discussion of road construction revitalization efforts. The same visibly upset resident pointed out that there were only three streets that connected west side residents to the east side grocery stores. However, the man said that these roads were often congested and difficult to travel even with a car. He wants to see a grocery store on the west side to remedy this problem. The applause following this man's comments spoke to the need of a full-service grocery store in West Bloomington.

¹⁵ I was unable to discover when and for what reason Tom's Parkway Foods shut down. Following the literature on food deserts, one reason for its closure may be that its business was unprofitable in a low-income area.

In researching viable food options for West Bloomington residents, I came across an oasis in a food desert. Brown's Fresh Produce is located on Brown St. on the west side. David Brown is the owner and he sells produce that he grows on his farm just three miles away. His business has been in the community for over forty years. Brown sells his produce at his indoor space on the west side from April to October and also has a stand at the Bloomington farmers' market. Residents never mentioned Brown's as a source for fresh food, which means that they are unaware of its existence or aware of its existence and choose not to shop there due to access, attitude, or financial reasons. The prices at Brown's market are relatively low when compared to other farmers at the downtown market, so financial concerns may not be the biggest issue. However, Brown's is not located in the center of West Bloomington, so access can definitely play a role in residents' decisions not to shop there.

The West Bloomington Neighborhood Plan: Seizing Opportunities for Renewal

Teska Associates, Inc., in partnership with the Economic Development Council of the Bloomington-Normal Area and the City of Bloomington, is working with a coalition of organizations from the public, private and non-profit sectors to direct a neighborhood revitalization effort on Bloomington's West side (teskaassociates 2008). The West Bloomington Task Force is hard at work conducting grassroots outreach, identifying the unique strengths of the community, and researching economic development opportunities for the neighborhood. The ultimate goals of this planning effort are to support and to strengthen the community's families, homes, job prospects, access to education, safety, health and quality of life (teskaassociates 2008). In April of 2008, together with the West Bloomington community, the Task Force drafted the West Bloomington Neighborhood Plan, which includes a community profile, strategies and projects for the revitalization efforts, and a plan for implementation. In order to gather input from the community, the Task Force held three community Summits. These summits provide an open forum for the community to express their ideas. I attended the third summit where the Task Force presented a draft of the West Bloomington Neighborhood Plan to the community. Ultimately, the West Bloomington Neighborhood Plan is a comprehensive effort that, if implemented as it is written, will improve the quality of life in the community. However, the West Bloomington Neighborhood Plan fails to explicitly address food security.

Integrating a Food Plan into the West Bloomington Neighborhood Plan

Once I became familiar with the West Bloomington Neighborhood Plan and the state of food availability on the West side, I decided to contact the most influential actors in the revitalization efforts. Karen Schmidt, the alderwoman for the West side, is a member the West Bloomington Task Force. We discussed the food insecurity of the community and possible ways to implement a food plan into the West Bloomington Neighborhood Plan. I drafted a more concise document concerning my ideas about how local food can be integrated into the Plan, which Karen shared with the Task Force during their meeting on November 13, 2008 (see appendix). According to Karen, the idea of including food concerns into the Plan was well received by the Task Force. The final draft of the West Bloomington Neighborhood Plan will be presented to City Council in December 2008. The hope is that a food plan will be included into the final Plan in some capacity.

During my research, three viable options emerged to help solve West Bloomington's food insecurity. Through my discussion with Elaine and Marsha, the addition of a weekday farmers market on the West side seemed to be a good option, although this solution does raise several issues that will be discussed later. In talking with Jeff Woodard, the expansion and further development of the already existing community garden emerged as a plausible option to remedy food insecurity. Lastly, the addition of a full service grocery store facilitated by the micro-loan program offered by the Economic Development Council is another way to make West Bloomington food secure. Each of these options is discussed in greater depth below.

Policy Proposals

A Weekday Farmers Market on the Westside?

According to Elaine Sebald, the addition of a weekday farmers market on the west side seems to be one of the best ways for West Bloomington to gain access to the locally grown food system.¹⁶ Not only would it make fresh food available in West Bloomington, but farmers markets also help to build a sense of community, as they serve as a weekly meeting place for local residents to shop for locally produced food. However, adding an additional farmers market in West Bloomington is not so simple. There are issues that need to be addressed before a farmers market can take root on the west side.

The downtown Bloomington farmers market is very accessible to the west side, so physical access to locally grown food does not seem to be the problem here. Nonetheless, from participant observation at the farmers market and through interviews with local farmers selling at the market, it is clear that West side residents do not make it a habit to frequent the downtown market. While farmers and the market manager Elaine Sebald have noticed an increase in low income residents shopping at the market due to the introduction of Farmers Market Nutrition Programs this past summer, the vast majority of residents in West Bloomington probably do not shop at the downtown farmers market.

I interviewed a local farmer that sells at the Bloomington farmers market and David Brown of the aforementioned Brown's Fresh Produce to discover what impediments producers foresee in the possible implementation of a weekday farmers market on the west side. The local farmer, whose prices are a bit higher than most producers at the market, seemed somewhat leery about the possibility of selling to low-income residents. His concerns are indeed valid, given that farming isn't exactly the most profitable of professions. Specifically, he worried about the barrier of cost and also about competing with chain stores such as Walmart. This particular farmer feared he would lose money if he had to sell his produce for cheaper to accommodate West side residents. He also questioned if the West side community recognized the difference between the locally produced food he sells and the produce sold in Walmart. Additionally, he wondered if fresh food was a priority for lower income people and questioned if they know how to cook fresh food or even had the time to do so. Lastly, he was not completely aware of how the food stamp program was administered and expressed an interest in learning more. It was

¹⁶ Future studies need to consult the a larger portion of the West Bloomington community to determine their opinion on the possibility of a farmers market.

clear that he believed that low-income communities should have the same access to food as the rest of the population. While the issues he raised seem a bit callous on the surface, these are the uncomfortable questions that must be asked in order to better address the food insecurity of West Bloomington. The issues he discussed must be investigated further before a farmers market is introduced to the west side.

In talking with David Brown of Brown's Fresh Produce, the aforementioned oasis in the food desert, a distinct divide emerged. David sells the very same produce at his indoor space on the west side as he does at his stand at the downtown farmers market. However, he notices a visible difference in his clientele base. Some West Bloomington residents shop at his store, yet very few of these customers ever come to the farmers market. Brown does not accept food stamps at his indoor store and the market also does not have a food stamp program. Thus, what can account for the difference in clientele? From participant observation, it is clear that the downtown farmers market is a gathering for upper middle class whites. The air has a definite "yuppie" feel to it. This atmosphere tends to make the market less welcoming for the cultural diversity that customers of the West side bring. I see two possible ways to remedy this situation. First, an EBT (Electronic Benefit Transfer) (food stamp) program can be fully implemented at the downtown market. This would make the locally grown food more affordable for west side residents, but would not address the cultural barrier identified above. As we have seen, Farmers Market Nutrition Programs, which only provide a small stipend, have already been successful in attracting West side residents to the market. EBT programs are more comprehensive and beneficial so there is reason to believe that the introduction of this type of program would attract even more residents from the West side¹⁷. However, the availability of these programs needs to be better advertised to potential benefactors. Additionally, the EBT solves the economic problem of food access but does not solve the cultural barrier described above. Therefore, another option is to add a weekday farmers market located in the heart of the west side. This additional farmers market would be more culturally unique to the west side. This new farmers market would have to have an EBT program. Elaine Sebald believes that there is a greater likelihood of finding organizations like State Farm to help with the expenses and volunteers needed for a farmers market food stamp program if it were located on the West side rather than attempting to implement an EBT program at the downtown market. Also, according to Karen Schmidt, Teska is very open to the possibility of attracting a farmers market to the West Side. Nonetheless, the idea of two separate farmers markets, one in downtown Bloomington and one on the West side, is problematic as far as cultural, class, and racial divides are concerned. This issue will be discussed in greater depth in the discussion portion of this paper.

¹⁷ While Farmers Market Nutrition Programs are merely two or three dollar coupons, EBT programs are much more extensive. The benefits of an EBT program, which average \$109.93 a month per person, are based on a plan set by the government to represent a low-cost but nutritionally adequate diet. Participants apply locally to receive an electronic card that is used like an ATM card to buy food at most grocery stores and some farmers markets. The maximum benefit for a household of four is \$588 a month (Black 2008).

"Soul by the Pound:" Expanding the Community Garden to Serve as a Reliable Food Source

The second option to remedy the food insecurity of the West side is the expansion and development of the community garden. As stated previously, the West Side Community Garden is a tremendous source of pride for the community. It seems to be *the* main symbol for the revitalization efforts. The 0.3 acre garden contains around 25 different plots. The garden began late this past summer, but has still proved to be extremely successful. According to the West Bloomington Neighborhood Plan, the community garden serves as a springboard for community action:

The community garden, located on the southeast corner of Mulberry and Roosevelt on a City-owned lot, formed in mid-2008 and immediately local gardeners started planting vegetables, flowers and other green delights. The garden quickly became a meeting place for neighborly interaction, volunteerism, and neighborhood pride, as well as a focal point for local events, festivals and celebrations! Due to its popularity and success, the Community Greening Committee is exploring the possibility of opening another garden on the Westside...

It is clear that the community takes great pride in its garden. However, it does not see the garden as a viable food source (Woodard 2008). This conception can be changed and two people in the community are working to do so.

A woman named Vicky started a community garden blog that can be accessed through the Teska Associates website. The blog offers instructions for gardening techniques and provides various recipes. Vicky mentioned that she believes one of the main obstacles to growing your own food is lack of knowledge. She thinks many people are interested in having a plot in the garden, but simply are hesitant because they have never gardened before. The blog has not been as successful as imagined and there needs to be more educational outreach in the community concerning gardening techniques. Certainly, community sponsored seminars to teach novice gardeners how to grow their own food would help reduce food insecurity and also inspire pride through self-sufficiency.

Jeff Woodard also has a vested interest in the community garden and has his own plot. A picture of Jeff tending to his garden was featured in the local newspaper article that covered the Harvest Festival. Jeff grew up in Rockford, Illinois. He observed countless similarities between West Bloomington and his native town. He feels that both communities suffer from the same disease: food insecurity. Growing up in a type of food desert himself, Jeff brings an interesting perspective to the issue of food security. He believes that community gardens are essential in instilling such community values as pride, self-help, and self-sufficiency. Despite not having the financial power to own a house, people who have plots in the community garden can produce and consume their own food. Jeff indicated that there has been discussion in the community about sharing vegetables produced at the garden through a type of farmers market run by the children in the community, but nothing concrete has come of this discussion¹⁸.

¹⁸ The importance of involving the youth in the community in food justice solutions cannot be stressed enough. While youth were present at the Harvest Festival, there needs to be a more outreach and education concerning the principles and benefits of local food system. Churches and businesses like State Farm can be possible sponsors for educational outreach programs concerning community gardens, farmers markets and other local food initiatives.

Jeff also foresees several obstacles to food justice. The mentality of producing the most food and the highest profit tends to marginalize low-income people in the American food system (Woodard 2008). He suggested that food production on a smaller level would result in a decrease in the amount of food insecure communities. For example, Jeff described how fish markets were always prevalent in African-American communities. However, the industrialization of the fish industry forced smaller competitors out of the market and resulted in national rather than local production (Woodard 2008). Often times these national production methods fail to reach poor communities, resulting in food insecurity. Additionally, some state food and health regulations are excessive and unnecessary and in the process prevent smaller producers from making a profit (Woodard 2008). This encourages larger scale production which tends to create food insecurity. Jeff believes that if some of these unnecessarily stringent regulations are lifted, then local producers can produce more, making more locally produced food available for low income communities. Ultimately, the issues Jeff raised address the importance of the economic sustainability of local farmers.¹⁹ If stringent regulations stifle local farmers, they will never be able to survive economically and thus never be able to produce enough locally grown produce to provide for low-income communities.

Most importantly, Jeff shared his ideas concerning the development of the community garden as a reliable food source. To accomplish this goal, Jeff is in the process of developing a how to guide/recipe book for the West side. The book will focus on produce that is easy to grow and cultivate and that suits the Midwestern climate. Using African cuisine as a guide, the book identifies the seven staples that Jeff believes are most suited for the community garden: collard greens, turnips, yams, okra, squash, melon, and spinach. Included in the book will be guidelines on how to cultivate each crop, how many people can be fed by planting a given amount of each crop, and how to preserve each harvest. By using his method as a guide, a family can supply up to 50% of their annual diet by tending to a plot in the community garden. If produced in pamphlet form, this information can be distributed to the entire community. This idea is very promising and will provide the community with a viable option to supply up to 50% of their food consumption, thus helping to move towards community food security.

In addition, Jeff envisions the creation of an ethnic food store on the West side called "Soul by the Pound." This food store will sell fresh produce from the community garden tailored to the African cuisine described above in the warm months, and frozen food of the same kind in the winter months. The store would also offer catfish from Mississippi and peanuts from New Mexico. Discussions with the Economic Development Council may turn "Soul by the Pound" into a reality, as Jeff may be eligible for a micro-loan program to help start his business.

¹⁹ The economic sustainability of local farmers was not a stated focus of my research on food security. However, after compiling all my research on food security, it became evident that the economic sustainability of farmers is essential to addressing food insecurity. Further research needs to be conducted, with a special focus on the farmers' economic situation and their connection with low-income communities.

Micro-enterprise Loans and the Economic Development Council

This brings us to a third option for remedying food insecurity in West Bloomington: the utilization of micro-loan programs offered by the Economic Development Council. While community gardens and farmers markets provide sources for fresh food, they need to be complimented by full service grocery stores.²⁰ Here, the importance of attracting businesses to the West side becomes readily apparent. The Economic Development Council's micro-enterprise loan program offers between \$1,000 and \$35,000 in micro-loans. The criteria for lending is based on ability to pay, intent of project, and likelihood that the business venture will be successful. From the community Summit, I gathered that micro-loans are also available for already existing businesses looking to expand. Here, I see great possibility in Brown's Fresh Produce obtaining a micro-loan. The store is not open year round, and David Brown mentioned that his customers expressed interest in the store carrying food items such as bacon, eggs and milk. With a micro-loan, Brown's Fresh Produce could become a reliable source of fresh food for West Bloomington year-round. *Whether it's through a micro-loan or some other means, the West side needs a full service grocery store to prevent food insecurity.*

In summary, there are several options for achieving food justice in West Bloomington: a farmers market that accepts food stamps, expansion of the community garden, and the addition of a full-service grocery store. The first priority *has* to be attracting a full-service grocery store to the West side. Without a source of fresh food *within* the community, the health of residents may be negatively affected. To compliment a grocery store, local food options such as farmers markets and the community garden will be particularly useful. Additionally, the establishment of a more structured gleaning program, which I outlined but was unable to research in depth, is another option to achieve food justice for West Bloomington.

Discussion

A revitalization of the West side will not be complete unless food security is taken into consideration. From my attendance at the Third Community Summit, it is clear that food is indeed on the radar of West side residents and the Task Force. Look no further than the many pictures of the fledgling West Side Community Garden on the cover of the Plan to recognize that the garden is an immense source of pride for residents. Nonetheless, there needs to be a more focused effort to include food security into the Plan. When the final West Bloomington Neighborhood Plan is presented in December of 2008, I will discover to what extent the Task Force has implemented food security into the revitalization efforts. Even if food security is addressed in writing, my research demonstrates that there remain many impediments in the implementation phase.

²⁰ Farmers markets only supply communities with food during the growing season, typically May through October. A full-service grocery store is needed to meet the needs of the community that cannot be met by an open-air farmers market.

Yuppie Chow and Farmers Markets

One such impediment concerns the establishment of weekday farmers market on the West side. As stated previously, there are two options concerning farmers markets: establishing a food stamp program at the downtown Bloomington farmers market to make it more financially accessible to West side residents, or establishing a weekday farmers market on the West Side that accepts food stamps and would be more 'culturally unique' to the neighborhood. Throughout my research, leaders in the community, including members of Teska and the West Bloomington Task Force, espoused the establishment of a new farmers market located *in* the West side, citing a higher likelihood of obtaining the funding needed to establish a food stamp program and a more 'culturally unique' market to suit the West side community. While a farmers market on the West side would help to build a sense of community in the same way as the community garden has done, why does West Bloomington need its own farmers market when the downtown Bloomington farmers market is in such close proximity? Creating two separate farmers markets that are each 'culturally suitable' for two distinct social spheres, the 'yuppie-feeling' downtown market and the more 'culturally diverse' West side market, will perpetuate rather than address the class and racial divisions that exist in Bloomington-Normal. Adding an additional farmers market to the West Side is the more comfortable solution, as cultural, class and racial lines will not be crossed and will continue to be preserved. Cultural diversity will not infiltrate the downtown farmers market because West side residents will have *their* farmers market in *their separate* community. Ultimately, two separate farmers markets is not the solution unless Bloomington wants to continue to be a collection of Bloomingtons rather than one, united Bloomington.

Although a farmers market on the West side could fit the needs of the community by being more 'culturally' unique, I believe that integrating West side residents into the already existing downtown farmers market is more beneficial. My findings suggest that one of the major barriers to accessing fresh and healthy food for West Bloomington residents is the attitude barrier. The upper-middle class atmosphere that dominates the downtown farmers market needs to be changed to include residents from the West side. West side residents need to know that they are welcomed customers at the downtown. To penetrate the cultural barrier of the downtown farmers market, there needs to be more advertising of the farmers market on the West side. West side residents need to be aware that Farmers Market Nutrition Programs like WIC are available on the West side. Additionally, the downtown Bloomington market needs to be receptive of food stamp programs. Elaine Sebald, the market manager, is indeed receptive to the idea and attempted to develop a program. However, regular customers of the market and sellers at the market must realize that a food stamp program at the market will change the upper middle class atmosphere. Diversity at the downtown market will enhance class and racial relations in Bloomington-Normal. Downtown Bloomington needs to make a connection with its neighbors in West Bloomington.

Currently, there are two revitalizations simultaneously occurring in Bloomington: the aforementioned West Bloomington Neighborhood Plan and the Downtown Bloomington

Association²¹. Both revitalization efforts seek to enhance the quality of life in their communities. To further the development of a more socially inclusive downtown farmers market and to overcome socioeconomic obstacles in general, revitalization efforts on the West side must be coordinated with revitalizations efforts aimed at downtown Bloomington. For the same reason that one farmers market is more beneficial than two, the Downtown Bloomington Association and West Bloomington Task Force need to work together to further their redevelopment efforts and to promote more intermingling of classes, races, and cultures.

Local farmers and economic sustainability

Often times the word 'farmers' in phrase 'farmers markets' is overlooked or taken for granted. Farmers are an essential component of food justice, because without their production, low-income communities could never gain access to locally-produced food. As Jeff Woodard observed, many unnecessary restrictions limit the production and profits of local farmers.²² Additionally, organic farmers in the United States currently receive little, if any, subsidies from the government. Policies need to focus on providing financial assistance to local farmers so that local food systems can succeed. Local farmers do their part in addressing the *ecological* sustainability of farming so the government needs to do its part in addressing their *economic* sustainability. Additionally, it is important that low-income communities recognize the economic situation of local farmers. There seems to be a misconception that local farmers are somewhat prosperous, when in all actuality they may not be in a better financial position than their customers in low-income communities. A mutual understanding of each party's situation can only enhance food justice initiatives. Ultimately, to achieve food justice, community leaders, residents, *and local farmers* need to work together to build local food systems. While this study focused more on the residents and community aspect of food justice, it must be recognized that local farmers are an integral part of the food justice equation. Thus, future studies need to take into account the financial situation of local farmers.

Limitations

This study on food justice in Bloomington-Normal is definitely more qualitative than quantitative. Future studies should attempt to obtain more concrete numbers concerning the number of grocery stores on the West side, exact proximity of existing grocery stores to the West

²¹ I did not come across the Downtown Bloomington Association until very late in my research. I think this fact speaks to the disconnect between revitalization efforts on the West side and downtown Bloomington. The two areas are in such close proximity to each other that improvements in one community will surely benefit the other. For example, if the Downtown Bloomington Association attracts a grocery store to downtown, then West side residents will be able to access this store with relative ease, given downtown's close proximity. For more information on the Downtown Bloomington Association, see their website at: www.downtownbloomington.org

²² More research needs to be done to identify exactly what types of 'unnecessary regulations' burden local farmers.

side, etc.²³ While it seems clear to me that West Bloomington is a food desert, more quantitative results would be helpful to support this claim. Additionally, a more expansive survey assessing the food security of West Bloomington needs to be implemented. While I was able to talk with many community leaders and residents at the Harvest Festival, farmers markets, and community summits, a more expansive survey can reach the entire community to develop a better idea of the state of food availability in West Bloomington. Ultimately, a larger pool of West Bloomington residents needs to be consulted to determine their food needs.

Conclusion: Making tomatoes more accessible than guns

There is a definite stigma attached to West Bloomington. There is no question that Bloomington-Normal views the Westside as the “bad part of town.” The popular belief is that the Westside is a crime-ridden and unsafe community. The Harvest Festival was an important step to reversing that stigma. As Sue Floyd, a lifelong resident of the Westside states “There are a lot of people here who are regular, hard-working people.” Floyd continued, “To have something like this (the Harvest Festival) to get people to come out and see that they’re not going to get mugged, it’s a wonderful thing.” The Harvest Festival was truly an amazing gathering that reflected the diversity of the Westside that most people, I think, fail to recognize. Val Dumser, head of the garden, introduced me to all actors involved with the garden endeavor. I talked with Jeff Woodard, who, while tending to his plants, lamented the fact that it’s easier to find a gun in some communities than it is to find a tomato. I met a long time Hispanic resident of the Westside, known for the delicious salsa she makes from the peppers she grows in her plot, who had tears in her eyes as she recognized the importance of the community garden. I played games with some of the 250 to 300 children that were in attendance. For these children, the community garden serves as a symbol of pride and a sense of hope.

The Harvest Festival also went by the name of “Making a Difference Day.” I hope that the research I have done does make a difference for the Westside by putting food security on the priority list of the leaders of Bloomington. I hope that my project generates momentum for food justice in Bloomington-Normal. Food is a basic need that should be met for all people. Without food we cannot survive. Yet, all around this country, food insecure communities remain. Quantity of food is not the problem. The problem is distribution and access. Hopefully, the proposals I have outlined in this paper will go a long way in solving the food access problems of West Bloomington. Success depends on finding the political will necessary to make tomatoes more accessible than guns. How can certain people be denied something as elemental as food?

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²³ The Bloomington-Normal Economic Development Council, headed by Marty Vanags, will probably be the best source for this type of information.

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Appendix

Research Proposal for Gleaning Program

I wanted to research the feasibility of implementing a better-organized gleaning program for the West side. Due to time constraints, I was unable to do this. However, the San Juan Island Farmers Market hybrid CSA-gleaning program can be used as a model for a similar initiative in West Bloomington. To summarize the program again: a certain number of CSA-style boxes were prepared from the surplus at the farmers market. These boxes were then given to low-income families for the low cost of five dollars a box. Sponsors in the community also donated five dollars per box so that the farmers received some compensation for their donations. I think this is the type of program that can definitely work in Bloomington-Normal. Appropriate families can be selected from the West Bloomington area, while businesses like State Farm and universities like Illinois Wesleyan and Illinois State could be community sponsors. My work here will be primarily a coordination effort to revitalize the Bloomington farmers market gleaning program. I will contact each of the possible participating parties-families, farmers, and community partners- explain to them the basis of the program, and gauge their respective interests. Although more time consuming, I believe personal interviews will be more effective than a survey here because I can delve deeper into the specific interests of all participating parties. The challenge will be narrowing down families to receive the CSA-style boxes. I am hoping that the West Bloomington Task Force and community groups will be able to identify the families in their community that are most in need. Upon contacting all parties that will be involved in the gleaning program, I hope to arrange a meeting that will bring together the families, farmers and community sponsors in a focus group-type setting. A focus group will allow for an open forum in which all parties can express their ideas and develop a better understanding of individual needs. The success of a gleaning program depends on cooperation among all parties involved, so a focus group will bring to the fore any issues that may hinder cooperation. Some initial questions for the group include: How much would you be willing to pay for a week's worth of fresh produce? How much does the farmer need to receive to be fairly compensated? Is the community sponsor willing to match the price the family pays for the box? These are just initial questions. After contacting each party to get a feel for their attitude towards the program, I will be able to reflect deeper upon problematic issues to discuss at the focus group. After consulting all parties and analyzing the results, I hope to craft a pilot-gleaning program that can be in place for the start of next year's farmers market. I also will contact the San Juan Island Farmers Market to ask them about any logistical problems they have encountered in the implementation of the program.

Survey to Assess Food Security of West Bloomington

- Where do you buy your food?
- Do you feel that food is easily accessible in West Bloomington? Are there a number of options available?
- Is food something that you feel should be addressed in the West Bloomington Neighborhood Plan?
- What types of food sources would you like to see more of in West Bloomington? (grocery stores, a farmers market)
- If local food were available for purchase, would you be likely to buy it?
- Have you ever shopped at Brown's Fresh Produce Market? Would you like to see more food options similar to Brown's?
- Do you know that there is a farmers market in downtown Bloomington? Have you ever shopped there? If you have not, is there any specific reason?
- Do you feel there is a need for a farmers market in the West Bloomington neighborhood?

- Do you recognize a difference between local food produced by local farmers and food sold at stores such as Wal-Mart?
- Are you aware of Farmers Market Nutrition Programs that benefit seniors, Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and those using food stamps?
- Do you use food stamps?
- Do you have any suggestions for what farmers should grow?
- Can/Should the community garden be expanded to serve as reliable source of fresh produce for the community?

Table 2. USDA Core Food Insecurity Variables (Rural Random Sample)

	Percent
1. The food that I/we bought just didn't last, and I/we didn't have money to get more (often true, sometimes true = 1; never true = 0) <i>N</i> = 712	18
2. I/we couldn't afford to eat balanced meals. (often true, sometimes true = 1; never true = 0) <i>N</i> = 711	16
3. In the last 12 months did you and/or other adults in your household ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food? (yes = 1; no = 0) <i>N</i> = 675	8
4. If yes, how often did this happen? (Almost every month, some months but not every month = 1; for only 1 or 2 months = 0) <i>N</i> = 712	5
5. If yes, in the last 12 months, did you ever eat less than you felt you should have because there wasn't enough money to buy food? (yes = 1; no = 0) <i>N</i> = 712	7
6. If yes, in the last 12 months, were you ever hungry but didn't eat because you couldn't afford enough food? (yes = 1; no = 0) <i>N</i> = 712	7
USDA food security scale (0-6) ^a <i>N</i> = 669	
Food secure ("yes" to 0-1 items)	87.6
Food insecure ("yes" to 2-6 items)	12.4
Food insecure with hunger ("yes" to 5-6 items)	6.7

^a 0-1 items, household is food secure.

2, 3, 4 items food insecure with no hunger evident.

5, 6 items food insecure with hunger.

Short Form of the 12 Month Food Security Scale prepared by Nord and Andrews, 1999.

Table 3. Rural Civic Structure (Random Sample)

	Mean (SD)
1. There are group meal sites and home delivered meals available for elderly persons where I live (not available = 1; available 1-4 days per week = 2; available Monday through Friday only = 3; available 6-7 days per weeks = 4) <i>N</i> = 548	2.77 (.68)
2. My community has a number of active groups that work at solving food problems of community members (no active groups = 1; somewhat active groups = 2; many active groups = 3; a lot of active groups = 4) <i>N</i> = 447	1.87 (.62)
3. Local farmers and food manufacturers and distributors donate foods through food banks, food pantries, and other groups in our community (never = 1; sometimes = 2; often = 3; very often = 4) <i>N</i> = 445	2.16 (.71)
4. Churches in our community offer meals, food pantries, and emergency food supplies (never = 1; sometimes = 2; often = 3; very often = 4) <i>N</i> = 541	2.31 (.81)
5. Government food programs like Food Stamps and WIC work together with churches and nonprofit organizations to coordinate efforts to meet food needs of people (don't seem to work together = 1; work together a little = 2; work together = 3; work together a lot = 4) <i>N</i> = 369	2.50 (.86)
6. Group meal sites and food pantries/shelves usually have an active and large numbers of volunteers (no volunteers = 1; a few volunteers = 2; adequate number of volunteers = 3; many volunteers = 4) <i>N</i> = 436	2.38 (.60)
7. Elected officials are aware of food access and affordability problems in your community/neighborhood (not at all aware = 1; a little aware = 2; aware, but aren't doing anything to help = 3; aware and trying to do something to help = 4) <i>N</i> = 319	2.72 (.99)
Summated index of these items has a reliability for internal consistency $\alpha = .79$. The index mean is 16.46; SD is 3.66.	

Food Options in West Bloomington (According to Deborah Halperin of the Action Research Center)

Western Avenue Community Center has the Violet Espy food pantry.

I think Mt. Pisgah runs a food pantry on a very small scale for their families (I have not talked to Rev McSwain about this - but I saw a flyer at the last summit)

Heartland Head Start on Stillwell uses a catering service for the meals they serve their kids

Milestones Early Learning Center has an on-site kitchen and they order food from a vendor and prepare all meals on site

The community garden (@ Lee & Mulberry) does have some families using their garden space for fresh food

There is a store on Market near downtown in the same strip mall as the Starcrest Cleaners. It's a convenience store but we did hear residents - especially those without cars - say they use it as a grocery store. The other store - Pops - is farther west down Market right before Morris.

The Boys & Girls Club on Illinois gets some of their snacks from the Midwest Food Bank (or at least they used to).

There is a discount bread store next to the car wash at Market & Stillwell. That place is always busy!

Developing a **Food Plan** for West Bloomington
(Presented to the West Bloomington Task Force, November 13, 2008)

The ultimate goals of the revitalization efforts in West Bloomington, as embodied by the West Bloomington Neighborhood Plan, are “to support and to strengthen the community’s families, homes, job prospects, access to education, safety, health and *quality of life*.” Most of these issues have been given adequate consideration within the Plan. However, food, the most basic of human needs, needs to be addressed in a more focused and comprehensive manner under the Plan. While one of the stated goals of the Plan is to enhance the quality of life in West Bloomington, it is almost impossible to do so without giving food the consideration it deserves.

High quality, fresh food enhances the quality of life, while processed, nutritionally deficient food negatively affects human health. Thus, easy access to fresh fruits and vegetables is essential to the food security of any community and must be given adequate consideration under the Plan. Considering the consequences that a lack of fresh foods can have on human health, the need to increase the availability of high quality foods in West Bloomington becomes apparent:

- Eating fresh fruits and vegetables protects against cardiovascular disease, cancer and Type II diabetes, while consumption of processed foods with high contents of fat, salt, and sugar may cause obesity and other related health problems.
- Four of the ten leading causes of death in the United States are chronic diseases for which diet is a major risk factor.

As evidenced by the concerns voiced at the Third Community Summit, food is an issue that is important to West Bloomington residents. From food pantries to farmers markets to grocery stores, food was a common theme at the Summit. Additionally, the Westside Community Garden has served and will continue to serve as an immense symbol of pride for Westside residents. Indeed, the community garden has been a rallying point during the revitalization efforts. Specifically, the Harvest Festival showed how the garden has pulled the community together, while also demonstrating how important food is to building a sense of community. In the spirit of the West Bloomington Neighborhood Plan, the community garden can be used “as a springboard” for developing other food initiatives that can be a part of a more comprehensive food plan for the Westside.

Possible elements of a more focused Food Plan include:

- A weekday farmers market that accepts food stamps
- Further expansion and development of the community garden
- A full-service grocery store
- Urban agriculture classes
- Nutrition and cooking education together with a community cookbook
- A kitchen incubator
- Community orchards
- The addition of a Food Committee to the Plan and the Task Force