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Thank you to the farmers, ranchers, growers, producers, business owners, chefs, educators, market managers, and local food activists for inviting me into your community and sharing your stories with me. It was a privilege to learn from you, work with you, and tell the story of your community food system in this assessment.
When the first settlers came to Oregon they were amazed by the rich soil, abundant water supply and even the islands of productivity in Oregon’s deserts. They were thrilled with the crops, fruits and berries they were able to raise, the rich pastureland as well as the streams teeming with fish and the bounty of wild game available to feed a growing population. It would have been impossible for them to believe that anyone could be hungry or food insecure in this land of plenty. It is incredible that hunger and food insecurity abound in Oregon nearly two centuries later. In fact, many of the areas that seemed so bountiful to those early settlers have the least access to food today.

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

Sharon Thornberry
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Introduction

What is a Community Food System?

Throughout the state of Oregon, and especially in the agricultural mecca of the Willamette Valley, one can’t travel far without hearing about food. Here, a regional culture is built around growing, creating, eating, and learning about food. The Eugene Saturday Market attracts farmers and shoppers from all over the Willamette Valley. Restaurants on Main Streets advertise “fresh and local” food on their menus. Farm to school programs are growing in popularity; Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) drop points can be found even in some of the small, rural communities. Farmers, teachers, local governments and businesses, and many others are coming together to support their local food system.

But what does this all mean? The phrase “community food system” is often used but rarely unpacked. First of all, a food system is the variable route that food takes to get from farm (or factory) to the dinner table and then ultimately back to the soil. This route, from production to processing to distribution to consumption and waste management, can be short and simple: a local farmer sells his produce directly to a consumer at a farmers’ market, and then the consumer composts her food scraps in her backyard garden. Over the course of the 20th century, however, the food system became much more complex: many farmers sell food items to regional distributors, who then send those items to facilities that turn raw food items into processed food, who sell to restaurants, institutions, or grocery stores all over the world, which provide food to consumers, who might finally throw food waste into a landfill. Small-scale farmers might contribute to different systems than large-scale farmers, and urban food systems will look very different than rural ones.

A community food system is that process of food production, processing, distribution, consumption, and waste management at the local level: which individuals, local businesses, and organizations engage in each of these processes within the community? Just as importantly, how is this system integrated to develop the economic, social, nutritional, educational, and environmental health of a community?

Define “resiliency”

A resilient food system pushes the question of a community food system beyond simply what exists toward how well does it work? Resiliency in a community food system means that the system is adaptable to change, benefits from diversity, and is collaborative across the community. A resilient food system looks different in every community, because resources vary with people and place. In all cases, though, working toward a resilient food system should include diverse stakeholders working cooperatively to support diverse, healthy, and locally-appropriate food within a community.

Define “local”

But just what does “locally-appropriate” mean? Again, we run into another oft-used word that is rarely assessed. The geographic range of “local” might be completely different for a farmer who sells food throughout the Willamette Valley than for an eater who gets food from a nearby CSA farm. Local grain might come from farther away than local produce. Working toward a resilient community food system means identifying and prioritizing that range of “local,” and realizing that even communities don’t operate in isolation. Historically, rural towns in the Southern Willamette Valley were built to work together to provide a complete economic and food system. What does – and can – local look like today?

Despite the farmers’ markets and food culture in the Southern Willamette Valley, hunger still exists. In
one of the most agriculturally-productive regions in the world, families still struggle to put food on the table. In April 2016, 3,955 households in the Cottage Grove district used Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits to afford food. Cottage Grove was identified as a High Poverty Hotspot, or a geographic concentration of poverty, by the Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) in 2015. The Yoncalla region of Douglas County was also identified as a Hotspot.

At the same time, many of our farmers rely on off-farm income and cannot grow to their full potential because they aren’t able to sell the food they produce. Instead of supporting local food economies and business owners, community members drive to Eugene to purchase groceries.

A community food assessment (CFA) is a collaborative, participatory project that looks at the big picture of the food system and then dives deep to discover some of the unique resources and challenges that exist within our communities. This CFA will use quantitative data from surveys, the census, and other reports when necessary, but will emphasize the stories told by the people living inside this community food system. The priority of this CFA is to build from the grassroots energy of the rural communities in the Southern Willamette Valley to develop existing community resources; engage with diverse groups of the community through participatory processes; and identify tools and opportunities for creating positive change.

Development of Assessment

The information in this CFA was gathered, written, and disseminated over an 11-month period from September 2015 through July 2016. Throughout the course of these 11 months, a variety of methods were used to engage with and understand the local food system: observation, community meetings, focus groups, surveys, workshops, formal interviews, and informal conversations. This wholistic approach emphasized qualitative information because the goal of the Community Food Assessment is to tell the stories of the people who live within the food system. Although quantitative data is useful, numbers and statistics do not always reflect the reality of the food system. This food assessment aims to present that reality.
Primary Data

Diverse community stakeholders were engaged in these conversations, including (but not limited to): food producers and processors, local grocery store and restaurant owners, emergency food service directors and participants, community food and nutrition educators and students, school district staff, health care providers, OSU Extension agents, Watershed Council members, community non-profit directors, local agriculture “experts,” and engaged community members. The quotes, profiles, and most of the information presented in this CFA resulted from these conversations.

In Cottage Grove, cgFEAST meetings were invaluable in providing directed food systems conversations with a variety of stakeholders. Three cgFEAST meetings over the course of the 11 months were used to identify current projects and focus areas of community food activists, as well as opportunities for improvement in these efforts.

A special emphasis on conversing with the local farming, ranching, and food producing community underlies this CFA. A variety of food producers were interviewed for the assessment. Farms varied in size and scope and markets: from local farm stands to regional wholesale, from diverse operations to single-product systems. One-on-one interviews, local food events, and engaging in market activities were all used to obtain information on local food challenges and opportunities. The organization of the South Valley Farmers Network in January 2016 in particular helped generate information, new ideas, and new leadership surrounding food production and farmer organizing.

Secondary Data

Secondary data was used to provide context or support for the qualitative information collected. Data sources included the US Department of Agriculture 2012 Census of Agriculture; the US Census; Natural Resources Conservation Services soil surveys; the Oregon Department of Education; Northwest Health Foundation health needs assessments; and Lane County economic development reports.

Geographic Area

The geographic area of this Community Food Assessment is identified as the Southern Willamette Valley. It encompasses the southern tip of the Willamette River Basin, the Calapooya Mountains, and a northern section of the Umpqua River Basin. The Cascade Mountain Range rises to the east and the Coastal Range borders the region to the west.

Spanning both southern-central Lane County and a small portion of northern Douglas County, the Southern Willamette Valley (SWV) study area includes the incorporated cities of Creswell, Cottage Grove, Drain, Yoncalla, and Elkton. Unincorporated communities in the SWV include Lorane, Dorena, London, and Curtin. Interstate 5 cuts through the service area, as does Highway 99, providing connectivity to the Eugene metro area and the City of Roseburg to the south.
Other major roadways include Territorial Highway, Cottage Grove – Lorane Road, Row River Road, and Highway 38 in North Douglas.

Although the Southern Willamette Valley is not contained by a single county, watershed, or economy, the region can be identified as a whole by its potential for rural agricultural production; by both the resources provided and challenges posed by its proximity to Eugene; and because, as the largest community in the area, Cottage Grove is the rural economic and social service center for many of the outlying communities.

Further, a number of food and agricultural assessments have already been published for Lane County. Many of these assessments are written about Willamette Valley agriculture, but are oriented toward Eugene’s urban food system. Another Rural Community Food Assessment for Lane County was published in 2012, but focused on the communities of Florence, Oakridge, and the McKenzie River Valley – none of which are agriculturally-based communities.

Additional Resources

- “Rural Lane County Community Food Assessment: Featuring Florence, Oakridge, and the McKenzie River Valley” - Oregon Food Bank (www.oregonfoodbank.org)
- “Lane County Local Food Market Analysis” - Community Planning Workshop, University of Oregon (www.lanecounty.org)
- “Lane County Community Health Assessment” - Lane County Public Health et al (www.livehealthylane.org)
- “Oregon State University Extension Service of Lane County: Needs Assessment” - Community Planning Workshop, University of Oregon (www.extension.oregonstate.edu)
“We sell plants to others so they can grow their own food,” says Devon of Fern Hill Nursery. Devon and her husband Brian cultivate a variety of culinary, medicinal, and native plants in their nursery just outside Cottage Grove. Most of their land falls on a steep hillside - a common problem for many growers in the area as the Willamette Valley meets the Calapooya Mountains - so the nursery space is confined to just a few acres of flat land. “We’re actually fighting against the traditional “growth” business model,” explains Devon. “We want to keep our business small but manageable, partly because we don’t have enough space to expand, but also because we want to keep doing most things ourselves.”

In fact, almost every plant sold at Fern Hill Nursery is propagated by Devon and Brian. Many nurseries might ship in seedlings from across the state or country. At Fern Hill Nursery, priority is placed on plants that are bred locally and well-adapted to the environment. Caring for the entire food-plant cycle is time-intensive, which means that Devon and Brian are often unable to sell at local farmers’ markets. Instead, they have a stand at the Lane County Farmers’ Market in the spring, but sell the majority of what they grow at special plant sales and on-site open houses a few times a year.

Besides managing their nursery, Devon and Brian also tend to a large, permaculture-style garden where they grow much of their own produce. Neither the nursery nor the garden is certified organic, yet Fern Hill Nursery follows the practices. Since they only sell to Cottage Grove and Eugene-area markets, they are able to market themselves through word-of-mouth. Fern Hill Nursery holds educational workshops to share these practices with their customers.
Background

Geography of Southern Willamette Valley

Although identified as the Southern Willamette Valley, the region for this Community Food Assessment comprises a greater geographic area than the Willamette Valley south of Eugene. Included in the study area is a section of the north-central Umpqua River Basin in north Douglas County, the Cascade Mountains to the east, the Central Coast Range to the west, and the Calapooya Mountains divide that intersects Lane and Douglas County – all of which offer unique environmental resources and agricultural opportunities. The name “Southern Willamette Valley” is not so much an indicator of the geographic structure of the area, but more so a nod toward the economic and social characteristics of this rural region.

Willamette Valley Soils & Watersheds

Much of the Southern Willamette Valley study area, with the exception of Elkton, exists within the Willamette Valley ecoregion. This ecoregion is known for its fertile soil, moderate climate, and highly productive agricultural land. Historically the ecosystems of the rolling Southern Valley were oak savannahs, riparian forests, and Douglas Fir coniferous forests. Today the Willamette River Valley is the most populous region in Oregon. Much of this land, including the more rural area south of Eugene, is in development for agriculture, industry, or housing.

Unfortunately, these development and population pressures have led to the drastic decline of traditional ecosystems in the Willamette Valley. The oak savannah and Willamette Valley prairie are some of the most endangered ecosystems in North America. According to The Nature Conservancy, less than 8% of historic oak savannah and woodlands remain. Less than 1% of original wetland prairies exist today.

To the north of our study area, the City of Creswell lies within the Coast Fork Watershed, the “Southern Fringe” of the Willamette River Valley. From level floodplains to moderately undulating topography, the rural land surrounding Creswell (especially to the north, in closer proximity to Eugene) is well-suited for large-scale agriculture. The soils in this area are typically deep and well-drained to moderately well-drained silty clay loam and clay loam. Occasional flooding and soil compaction are the major farm limitations here. Vegetable production, orchards, pasture, and grass seed operations are typically successful.

As the foothills close in on the Valley and terrain starts sloping more dramatically east and west of Creswell and toward the City of Cottage Grove, soils are moderately deep to shallow and largely well-drained. In general, land in the “margins of the Willamette Valley” is used for small-scale vegetable operations, pasture, orchards and vineyards, and timber productions. Agricultural development here is mostly limited by terrain and lack of irrigation water.
Dorena, and the lesser known community of Disston, are located even deeper in the Cascade foothills. With steep slopes and generally stony loam soils, this area is not well suited to agriculture. One farmer described the “lightness of the soil,” referring to the difficulty in growing vegetables in gravelly soil.

Lorane, an unincorporated community northwest of Cottage Grove, lies nestled in the foothills of the Coast Range and is the only community in the South Willamette Valley study area that is contained in the Siuslaw Watershed. The heavy, clay soils of this region are not conducive to vegetable production, but very well-suited for viticulture and orchards as well as pastures for livestock.9

Much of the land in this southern tip of the Willamette Valley is classified as Prime Farmland and Farmland of Statewide Importance by the USDA Soil Rating system.

**Calapooya Mountains Soils & Watersheds**

Just south of the City of Cottage Grove, the Calapooya Mountains divide the major watersheds of the Willamette River and Umpqua River, separating the populous Willamette River Valley from rural Southern Oregon. Traveling southwest through this region, toward Drain, Yoncalla, and Elkton of northern Douglas County, agricultural production shifts noticeably from a diversity of agricultural in the Willamette River Valley to primarily ranching operations and timber extraction. Limitations to agriculture include erosion, steep terrain, shallowness of soil, and occasional flooding alongside Umpqua tributaries.10

**Climate**

Typically the Southern Willamette Valley observes rainy, moderate winters and hot, dry summers. Because of the convergence of three mountain ranges and two major watersheds in this study area, the diversity of microclimates means that no two places experience the same specific weather. For example, Dorena lies at about 920’ above sea level, a relatively higher elevation than nearby Cottage Grove at 640’, yet lower than its close neighbor Disston at 1200’ elevation. Only a few miles from Dorena, Disston receives less direct sunlight and experiences cooler temperatures.
The Willamette River Valley is renowned for its agricultural richness – a quality that stems from the natural resource cultivation of indigenous tribes over tens of thousands of years. The Kalapuya people historically occupied the Willamette River Valley and northern parts of the Umpqua River Valley. Just as the Calapooya Divide separates the Willamette River Valley from Southern Oregon today, this mountain range also divided the Central Kalapuya tribe (modern day Eugene-area) from the Yoncalla tribe (also known as the Southern Kalapuyas).

Kalapuya Food Cultivation

By the time European fur traders settled into indigenous territory, the Kalapuyas had developed a sophisticated food system, although it did not include agriculture as we know it today. Rather, this society relied on an integrated system of landscape management to support the growth of specific plant foods important to their diet. As local ecologist Matt Hall explains, the river valley was “annually burned by the Kalapuya Indians to favor their staple food source, the Camas lily.” These burns cleared shrubs and trees from the environment, adding organic matter to the soil from the ash of the trees and creating more room for the Camas root to thrive.

Controlled fires cleared the landscape of small trees and shrubs, yet allowed the fire-resistant Oregon white oak to thrive. Over centuries the Kalapuyas effectively created the oak savannah ecosystems of the Willamette Valley. Not only did these frequent fires encourage Camas lily production, the oak savannahs made room for growing populations of elk and deer and the edge habitats became an ideal environment for berries, another staple food of the Kalapuyas.

Fatefully, the very process of landscape management that supported the Kalapuya peoples for thousands of years also shaped the fertile, open landscape that so attracted the white settlers in the 18th and 19th centuries. The intentional burning that allowed the Kalapuyas to thrive ultimately led to their destruction.

Fort Umpqua: Roots of Cultivated Agriculture

Roots of modern-day agriculture in the region go back to the fur traders. The Hudson Bay Company established the Fort Umpqua trading center in modern-day Elkton in 1846. The location, chosen because it sat at the confluence of Elk Creek and the Umpqua River, became the first site of agriculture. Jean Baptiste-Gardiner, manager of the fort, planted a diverse garden over 80 acres, growing wheat, corn, potatoes, garden vegetables, and a large orchard. He also incorporated domestic livestock into the system to feed the fur traders.
Mining & Timber

The fur traders lived alongside the Kalapuya tribe in relatively harmony, but introduced new diseases that began to decimate the population. In the 1840’s and ’50s, mining emerged as a new industry in the Southern Willamette Valley. Settlers flocked to the region, setting up mining camps and driving the Kalapuyas off their land. Between 1847-1849, the communities of Drain, Cottage Grove, and Yoncalla were settled. In 1850 the Oregon Donation Land Act encouraged even more white settlement of the area. The act entitled 160 acres of public land to any white male citizen who came to Oregon after 1850, and another 160 acres if he was married. This piece of legislature is “arguably the most generous federal land sale to the public in American history.” Today the grid pattern of the donated land is still visible throughout much of the valley.

To officially force Kalapuyas off their land, Congress passed the Kalapuya Treaty of 1855, which designated the native people to a reservation (today the Grand Ronde Reservation) and ceded the fertile Willamette Valley to the government. Before white settlers came to Oregon, the population of the Kalapuyas was in the thousands – at the time of the treaty, there were only 400 left.

Mining and logging industries grew substantially during the late 1800s and were the first mainstays of economy in the area. Agricultural development in this region was largely a response to the population boom from these two industries which created a local demand for food.

Agriculture

The average farm size in the late 1800s was 388 acres. These large-scale farms, a result of the Donation Land Act, fostered industrial agriculture. Wheat was a major crop and grist mills for grain processing were a common site in the region. In 1880, over 39,000 acres of farmland were in wheat production. Canneries, packing plants, and community fruit dryers were also commonplace. The rail line that runs north-south through the Valley allowed agricultural products, especially grain, to be sold on the national market. In the early 1900s the national grain market busted, and agriculture trends shifted away from national markets. The average size of farms decreased, mostly due to splitting land among families. Large-scale wheat and cattle operations gained traction in Eastern Oregon, forcing farm diversification in the Willamette Valley.
Branch Road Farm, located just west of Cottage Grove, is not just a diversified organic farm. With an on-farm licensed commercial kitchen, Branch Road Farm is also a small-business incubator and educational facility for local Farm to Table classes. Farmer Andhi Reyna established the farm in 2011 with large-scale visions. Beyond growing food for her family and local consumers, she wanted to create a space that generates community support and growth within the food system.

The 73 acres that comprise Branch Road Farm is of diverse topography, from forest land to meadows, pastures, and wetlands. The primary growing ground is in pasture for rotational grazing. Andhi raises goats, sheep, and chickens. She operates a herdshare, where community members invest in the livestock and then receive a portion of their dairy products (milk and cheese). Branch Road Farm is also home to diversified orchards and gardens, some of which is sold at local growers’ markets and the Coast Fork Farm Stand.

A good amount of Branch Road Farm’s products, however, are used during Andhi’s Farm to Table cooking classes. Not only are these classes unique because they are located on the specific farm where the food was grown, but they are designed especially for kids. “I wanted to put kids in a fun farm scene so they can feel inspired to do things for themselves,” she explains. She hopes to go beyond Farm to School curriculum (where most of the learning takes place in the classroom) by inviting children into the farm environment, “so they can learn what it’s like to be on a farm, and maybe even inspire some to grow food themselves someday.”

Andhi incorporates lessons on agriculture, cooking and nutrition, and supporting local businesses. Classes are limited to 12 students, ages 6-13, and currently run in 4-week series throughout the year, with summer farm camps and after school programs in development. Branch Road Farm is working toward grant funding through its newly-received non-profit status and a strategic partnership with the Opal Center for Arts and Education in Cottage Grove.

Besides providing space for cooking classes, the Branch Road Farm commercial kitchen is also available to be rented out by local food businesses. This opportunity for small-scale businesses is a unique resource in rural communities. However, as Andhi points out, “we need to support continued growth in the Cottage Grove community about connecting local foods to local businesses. We need to support a space and place for farmers to be able to provide.” Branch Road Farm is one strong step toward offering that space for local food in Cottage Grove.
Background

According to U.S. Census Data, in 1900 there were 2,370 farms in Lane County with an average of 212 acres per farm. In 1920, that number increased to 3,279 farms with an average of 151 acres per farm.  

The 1986 report “The Cultural and Historic Landscapes of Lane County,” by Thomas B. Forster et al, provides an in-depth look into the history of agriculture in the area. According to this report:

“The diversified farming of the early twentieth century was stimulated by influxes of farmers experienced in new agricultural practices utilizing crop rotations to maintain fertility and introducing new crops. Among these were row crops and orchard fruits and nuts for regional urban markets and a growing cannery industry. As ‘market roads’ throughout the county were improved and new rail spurs were completed, the agriculture commerce of Lane County was greatly increased.”

Fruit production flourished, with cherries, walnuts, filberts, prunes, and apples becoming important market crops. As populations in Western Oregon continued to grow and road networks improved, local and regional markets became the focus of many farms.

Dairies and specialized livestock (cattle, sheep, chickens) farms developed in the Willamette Valley area in the early 1900’s as well. Improved farm technology and the spread of electricity to rural areas aided this growth.

After World War II the local agricultural industry lost ground. Many small-scale grist mills, canneries, and other processing facilities disappeared as agricultural industrialization increased and global markets expanded. The few facilities that stayed in the area reorganized to better support large-scale operations instead of small farms. Suburban sprawl grew through the 20th century, encroaching on rural agricultural land until land use laws were put into effect in the 1970’s.

Hops were historically an important crop in the Southern Willamette Valley. The hop industry grew to industrial size in the late 1800’s for international brewery markets, and in the early 1900’s Oregon led the nation in hop exports. Early hop harvests also marked the first use of migrant workers in Oregon by employing native Indians for seasonal work.
Agricultural Resources

Current State of Agriculture

Agriculture in the Southern Willamette Valley was transformed over the course of the 20th century. In the early 1900’s, medium-size farms and local processing facilities produced food for local and regional markets. Development of industrial agriculture in the middle of the century created large-scale farms and regional production facilities for a national market. Over the past few decades, agricultural production has again shifted toward small farms that produce for local markets. However, much of the local infrastructure that historically supported agricultural operations – grist mills, canneries, packing plants, industrial dryers – has disappeared.

Timber

Discussions of agriculture and environmental resources in the Southern Willamette Valley should recognize the timber industry. As John Punches, OSU Extension Regional Administrator of Oregon’s Southwest Region, reminds us, “timber is the number one crop in Lane and Douglas counties.” These two counties are Oregon’s top timber-producing counties, largely due to the number of non-industrial private lands harvesting timber. Ninety percent of all land in Lane County is forested – mostly in federally-owned land in the eastern and western parts of the county. Private businesses own 23% of forestland and small private entities own another 12%, including lands in the Southern Willamette Valley. This small private ownership could have major implications for agriculture: what is the potential of agroforestry, or the integration of agricultural systems within forest systems, in the Southern Willamette Valley?

USDA Census of Agriculture

Every five years the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) publishes a Census of Agriculture, which provides extensive data on the state of agriculture throughout the United States. The latest USDA Ag Census was published in 2012 – four years old at the time of this assessment, but still the most recent farm data for Lane County.

Unfortunately, USDA Ag Census is aggregated to the county level and not at a more local scale. The farm-scape in Lane County varies greatly with geography: north of Eugene, the Willamette River Valley is much wider and terrain more suitable for large-scale farm operations. Central Lane County boasts a higher concentration of farms of all sizes due to the market demands and resources of the Eugene/Springfield metro area. As explored earlier, farmland in the Southern Willamette Valley is delimited by terrain, reducing capacity for the number of farms and individual farm size. So although the USDA Ag Census can help
provide an overview of agriculture in the region, it does not sufficiently describe the farm environment in our rural study area. Below are a few key statistics to provide background for this community food assessment; the information should be considered within the greater context of Lane County agriculture. Secondary data are important, but above all, the stories and experiences from farmers and communities in the Southern Willamette Valley are vital.

In 2012, the USDA Ag Census reported 2,660 total farms in Lane County. This total was less than the 3,335 farms recorded in 2007 (year of the previous Census of Agriculture), a 20% overall decrease in the number of farms in the county. The amount of land in farms decreased by 11% from 245,531 acres in 2007 to 219,625 acres in 2012. During the same five-year interval, the median size of a farm in Lane County increased from 17 to 18 acres.

So from 2007 to 2012, Lane County experienced the loss of farms and farmland, but saw an increase in average farm size. One explanation is that more medium and small farms went out of business over the course of the recession than large farms. Another possibility is that farms merged together or large farms incorporated more land during this time.

The median size of the 2,660 farms in Lane County is 18 acres. Almost three-quarters of all farms in Lane County are less than 50 acres, taking up a total of 29,017 acres in small-scale farmland. Still, that acreage represents only 13% of the land in farms in Lane County.

What does local agriculture look like in the Southern Willamette Valley?

Fourteen local farmers were interviewed for this community food assessment. A number of local agriculture “experts,” including affiliates with OSU Small Farms program, the Coast Fork Watershed Council, NRCS, and the local Soil & Water Conservation District, also provided valuable information. This section describes what agriculture looks like in the SWV today. Some of the major challenges involved with this picture are described later in the food assessment.

Dave Downing, of the North Willamette Soil and Water Conservation District, describes a general trend in farming around the Eugene area. He describes the fragmentation of farms as farm businesses close, because “it’s harder to maintain a profit margin” in today’s local and regional food economy. Then, as land fragments are sold, urban residents move to rural areas but maintain their lives in the city. This trend has increased the number of hobby farmers who produce food on a few acres but who do not contribute to the local food economy.

Farm Scale

The USDA defines small farms as operations with an annual farm income between $1,000 and $250,000.23 A farm bringing in less than $1,000 in gross cash farm income is often described as a “micro-farm.” Within this community food assessment, small farms are not defined by income but rather by market activity.

Farms in the Southern Willamette Valley can be divided into several broad categories on the basis of the scale and sophistication of operations. As noted above, hobby farms or homesteads produce a variety of foods that may be shared with family or the community but are not sold at a market level.
“I’d rather feed people,” says Andi Saxon. Much of the land where Tangled Orchard Farm currently resides is leased by a regional grass-seed grower, but Andi has plans to transition out of the lease and convert that land to grazing pasture for her laying hens. Andi, along with her husband and son, operates a commercial egg operation outside Creswell, producing high quality eggs for local markets.

At the moment Andi raises 650 Red Star chickens on 3 pastures. She uses feed from UniPoint Custom Feeds in Brownsville: “They’ve been an amazing resource,” she says, because they are able to support small farmers with custom-milled feed, including the non-GMO, corn- and soy-free feed that Andi chooses to feed her chickens.

Eventually she’d like to grow the flock size to a maximum of 1200 hens and have enough pasture space for 4 active laying flocks. Andi explains why she will limit farm growth to four active flocks: “that’s what the land can support and all I can support. I always want to be a good steward of the land.” Andi currently collects eggs daily by hand, and doesn’t want to lose that intimacy with her flock through farm expansion and mechanization. “I like that I touch the eggs at least twice a day.”

To sell eggs to retail stores, the Oregon Department of Agriculture requires egg producers to carry an egg handler license. The license, which costs $25.00 every year, includes regulations on grading and washing the eggs. Andi invested in a mechanized washer and grader to meet these regulations as well as local demand for her eggs. During the time period when her hens produced eggs but before the mechanized washer was ready, Andi donated her eggs to Creswell’s local food pantry – an estimated donation value of $18,000 over the course of 8 months!

Now Andi sells primarily to retail markets in Eugene, including Kiva and Sundance grocery stores, partly because Eugene is where she can sell her product at a price that reflect the true cost of feeding her hens high-quality feed. Besides, another local farm sells eggs to Creswell’s grocery store, and Andi isn’t interested in competing for market share. “I want to be collaborative.”

Beyond eggs, Tangled Orchard Farm also supports 6 bee hives and an orchard. Future visions for the farm include developing the orchard into a food forest, and possible raising a small flock of laying hens specifically for donation to Creswell’s food pantry. “That’s who we are now. We want to continue supporting the land and our community.”

Tangled Orchard Farm

[Photo courtesy of Andi Saxon]
“It’s basically an experimental farm,” says Farmer Mike Satterstrom of Coast Fork Vineyard and Berry Farm. Located in the heart of Saginaw overlooking the Coast Fork of the Willamette River, the farm produces table grapes, blueberries, raspberries, blackberries, and even cherries. “There are a lot of people growing wine grapes around here,” remarks Mike, “but I seem to be the only one growing table grapes.” He currently experiments with thirteen table grape varieties, including the Einset Grape which, according to Mike, tastes exactly like fruit punch. “Every one of the varieties tastes different,” and the diversity of product that Mike offers to local and regional markets is a boon to the local food system.

When Mike moved to Saginaw in the late 2000’s to establish Coast Fork Vineyard and Berry Farm, he brought with him decades of successful experience on a diversified farm in California. That long-term knowledge of markets and resources has helped Mike develop his current business. He currently operates on a few dozen acres – a downsize from his California days – and decided to specialize in a few crops that would grow well and maintain profit. “And I just like to grow ‘em,” he adds. Mike employs one worker year-round to manage the plants and together they harvest all grapes and berries by hand.

The perennial grape varieties grow along wooden trellises covered with organic-approved vinyl post sleeves to prevent wood-rot. Mike generally uses organic practices, including minimal spraying (“It’s just too expensive to do anything else”), although the farm is not certified. However, Mike notes that organic grapes hold a much higher market value in retail stores like Whole Foods, so organic certification may be a business move in the future.

Coast Fork Vineyard and Berry Farm has received USDA support, including infrastructure support through the NRCS High Tunnel System program. Mike grows cherries in the hoop house provided through this program. He currently sells at Coast Fork Farm Stand in Cottage Grove and is partnering with the South Lane School District to supply local grapes to the schools.
Agricultural Resources

For the purpose of this assessment, *small-scale farms* are defined as engaging primarily in direct-to-consumer market activities. Many small farms diversify markets and also sell in to local retail stores.

There are a few homestead-small farm hybrids, where the first priority is self-sufficiency of the farm but “extra” farm products may be sold to local markets. *Local markets* typically refer to Cottage Grove, Creswell, and Eugene, although some small farmers travel to Portland to engage in direct-to-consumer activities. Of the small-scale farmers interviewed for this assessment, many consider the Eugene/Springfield metro as their primary local market.

Farmers across the SWV, from Creswell, Lorane, Cottage Grove, and even Yoncalla, depend predominantly on Eugene. From the Eugene Saturday Market to local restaurants and retail stores to Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) shares, the metropolitan area of 350,000 people significantly supports our small farmers. Most of these small farmers have off-farm jobs and no full-time employees, as well as limited farm infrastructure.

The next step up in scale are the *mid-size farms* that have increased capacity to further diversify markets, including direct-to-consumer, regional wholesale, and retail. SWV farmers of this scale often sell to Eugene, Salem, Bend, and Portland markets, as well as regional distributors like Organically Grown Company (OGC). More on-farm infrastructure and labor are needed to supply these markets.

*Large-scale farming and ranching operations* in the region include the cattle ranches near Lorane and Yoncalla and the grass-seed fields and hazelnut orchards around Creswell. Agricultural products from these operations are rarely seen in local markets and generally do not drive local food economies. For example, many large hazelnut farms in the region sell to George Packing Company, Inc, one of the largest processors of hazelnuts in the U.S. Once processed, those hazelnuts are then sold at the national and global scale. These large operations rely on agricultural infrastructure in the Eugene metro area, including cold storage facilities, large-scale processing equipment, and national distributors. However, most of this infrastructure is not available to small farmers.

The goal of this community food assessment is to determine the capacity of the Southern Willamette Valley to build stronger community food systems. Large-scale farms rarely contribute to local markets or support small-scale infrastructure, and so are not analyzed in this document.

**Agricultural Products & Practices**

A wide range of food products are generated in the SWV specifically for local consumption: mixed vegetables and root crops; legumes and grains; fruit including berries, grapes, and apples; a variety of meat including beef, pork, lamb, chicken, turkey, and bison; dairy and eggs; value-added items such as sauerkraut, pickled vegetables, cheese, and yogurt; herbs and plant starts; and honey.
Most farmers chose farm location based on price and availability of land: good land for sale is very hard to find in the Willamette Valley. Dorena is close enough to consider Eugene a local market (about 40 miles away), but far enough outside the valley so that land is cheaper. Another common reason for location of a farm is simply that the farmland already belonged to the family, or is owned by an acquaintance and rented for the farm business.

“You can’t buy land anymore, unless you inherit it.” - South Valley Farmer

Production practices around the region vary. Many small-scale farmers working within local food systems use organic agriculture practices, though not all have organic certification. The expense of the certification process is a barrier for some, but some farmers simply prefer to rely on word-of-mouth to explain their practices to consumers. Other farmers, however, describe the usefulness of an organic certification: “It helps with people from out-of-town,” says one farmer, because the organic label conveys a certain message about the farm right away, and farmers don’t need to invest extra energy into an explanation. Some local farmers are also certified with biodynamic growing, which adds ethical and spiritual elements to conservationist farming practices.

Typically, these small-scale farms use on-farm composting to create a closed-loop system of farm products. Labor on farms is also quite varied, depending on farm scale and market venues. Most of the farmers who focus on local markets do not hire additional labor and rely on family and friends for farm help. A handful use seasonal farm interns during the high production season, and only two used year-round workers. Size of farm, farm income, and Oregon labor regulations limit what kind of on-farm help farmers can obtain. For example, Oregon labor laws mandate agricultural employers to pay full-time employees minimum wage. Exemptions are provided in certain cases, e.g., if employees worked fewer than thirteen weeks in agriculture during the previous year.

Other farmers have designed their farm around the U-Pick system. A U-Pick farm invites consumers onto the farm during harvest season to pick their own produce for themselves. Many U-Pick operations are berry farms. Farmer Jerry of Eden Valley Farm initially chose the U-Pick system as a way to invite community members to experience the farm and ease some of the picking responsibilities during the summer season. He’s noticed, though, a decline in U-Pick popularity over the last few decades. Within the past few years, the challenges of U-Pick systems became clear: that it relies on volunteer labor, and that not all customers understand how to pick appropriately or take care of the plants.
Settled on a hillside in the Coastal Range, a few miles northeast of Cottage Grove, the Aprovecho Sustainability Education Center is a non-profit organization established in 1981 with a commitment to education and demonstration of sustainable living practices. It is known worldwide for its Permaculture Design Certificate (PDC) and Natural Building and Design courses. These courses bring students from all over the world to Cottage Grove, many of whom stay in the community. “I fell in love with Cottage Grove,” says Maggie, a current resident, “so I plan to be here a while.” Aprovecho is not a for-profit farm business, yet it still offers invaluable resources to the local food system through education, research, and community building.

The gardens at Aprovecho provide both educational opportunities and meals for the Center. Students enrolled in the PDC course learn permaculture growing practices within the diverse landscapes at Aprovecho, including the perennial garden beds, the green houses, and the forest ecosystems. The Farmer Incubator Program aims to foster the personal and professional growth of beginning farmers and entrepreneurs. Through this program, beginning farmers and professionals have access to land and tools at Aprovecho as well as guidance in starting an Individual Development Account (IDA). “The idea is for farmers to use our resources to build their brand here, and then take that out into the community,” says Justin, a current participant in the Incubator Program.

Other entrepreneurship ideas include building the capacity of the gardens at Aprovecho to host educational workshops. “My main goal for this program is community outreach, specifically to veterans and students,” Justin explains.

The majority of the produce grown in the garden will be harvested for meals at the Center. Much of the other food consumed at Aprovecho is purchased from local farmers. Although the people and programs at Aprovecho have changed throughout the decades, its partnership with Cottage Grove and investment in the local food system has endured.
Community Resources

Community of Creswell

Demographic information from the U.S. Census and the Oregon Department of Education for the Creswell School District geographic area provides information for the Creswell community.

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<th>Area</th>
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<td>% Hispanic</td>
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<tr>
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Economy

Historically, Creswell was an agricultural community. As miners and loggers moved to the region in the last half of the 19th century, the need for a local food system grew. Settlers in the Creswell area responded to that need. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, Creswell thrived with local grist mills, fruit dryers, canneries, and other processing facilities. Ultimately, this local agricultural processing infrastructure died out. The industrialization of agriculture in the 20th century led to the growth of large farms outside Creswell city limits, which now sell to large-scale processors and distributors who sell to the global agricultural market.

Logging also remains a major industry in Creswell. One local lumber mill, the Baldknob Mill, operated in Creswell until it burned down in 2008. Currently, the City of Creswell is involved in the process of redeveloping the Baldknob lot, which sits on half of the land within city limits that has been zoned for industrial use. The redevelopment of that lot will hold major implications for Creswell’s local economy.

Other primary economic activities in Creswell include retail and dining services and construction. One of the largest employers is the Creswell School District. Creswell is a bedroom community to Eugene and many new housing developments on the east side of the Interstate were built recently for metro-area commuters.

Local Food Economy

Local food markets in Creswell include the following.

- Farmlands Market is an independently-owned rural grocery store located in downtown Creswell. The grocery store opened in May 2014, after Ray’s Grocery closed earlier that year. Farmlands Market sells local food whenever possible, including locally-grown produce and meat, grains from Camas Country Mill, bread from Cottage Grove Farmhouse Bakery, wines from nearby vineyards, local beer, hazelnuts, value-added foods.

- Creswell Coffee Company and Creswell Bakery purchase local produce when possible to use with their cafe offerings.

- The Creswell Farmers Market, currently located outside the Creswell Public Library on Tuesday afternoons, provides an opportunity for local farmers to sell direct to consumers.

Health

Creswell residents must travel to Eugene or Cottage Grove for most health services. The regional DHS office is located in Cottage Grove, as is the Family Relief Nursery that provides support and resource assistance for families in south Lane and north Douglas counties. Because many residents work in Eugene or Springfield, the metro area is also a destination for healthcare.
Emergency Food Services

In any given month, Creswell’s local food pantry serves about 190 households or around 550 individuals – this amounts to around 11,000 pounds of food distributed every month. Most food pantry clients who visit Community Food for Creswell live in Creswell and Cottage Grove, though some may travel from the Eugene area. The food pantry receives donated food from Feeding America, a national hunger relief organization; the Oregon Food Bank; and the regional food bank Food for Lane County (FFLC).

Food is also donated from the Creswell community in food drives or individual donations. Local farmers have donated produce and eggs in the past, although most of these donations are sporadic and seasonal. Susan Blachnik, the food pantry director, estimated that one local egg farmer donated over $18,000 worth of eggs throughout 2015.

The pantry is shopping-style, which means that clients are able to choose which items they prefer in their box. Shopping style is encouraged for most food pantries because the method helps provide families with food that they know how to use and so reduces food waste. All pantries in the Southern Willamette Valley use the shopping-style method.

Beyond providing monthly food boxes, Community Food for Creswell has worked with other organizations to increase community food security. Last year the food pantry partnered with Food for Lane County and the Creswell Church of the Nazarene to provide Cooking Matters classes. With program support from FFLC, the food pantry and Nazarene Church invited low-income community members to food and nutrition education classes in the church. Participants learned basic cooking skills and received recipes throughout this multi-week course. This year, Community Food for Creswell is partnering with FFLC to provide gardening courses.

FFLC also offers a Summer Food Program in Creswell from mid-June through late August. The program provides free lunches to children ages 2 – 18. This Summer Food Program aims to mitigate the challenges of providing food to young children when school is not in session. This program is also offered in Cottage Grove and Dorena.

Although not specifically identified as an emergency food resource, community dinners provide free warm meals and a welcoming space to food insecure individuals in the area. New Hope Baptist Church in Creswell provides community dinners along with community cooking classes. Cresview Villa, a senior housing development, also offers warm meals on a donation basis.

Community & Culture

When talking about the community of Creswell, residents often refer to the “two different sides” of the city. I-5 cuts through the center of town and distinct social stratification exists between the “east side” of 1-5 and the “west side.” To the West lies Main Street, City Hall, and the schools. To the east of the interstate are noticeably newer developments, including new housing and businesses.

Growth and history do exist on both sides of the interstate. However, there is a growing trend of Eugene-oriented families moving to the new housing developments on the east side for cheaper rent and an easy commute into the city. This side of the City is largely a bedroom community for Eugene. Residents spend their money and obtain food and services in Eugene, and may not be as involved within the Creswell community. Other community members have voiced the need for a Creswell community gathering space – a place for the community to have its own identity, separate from Eugene or Cottage Grove.
Cottage Grove was originally settled as a mining town, but its growth and prosperity as a community is historically tied to timber. The two major lumber companies that still operate today, Starfire and Weyerhaeuser, are some of the largest employers in the area. With the decline of the timber industry over the last thirty years, Cottage Grove has diversified its economy.

According to the Cottage Grove Chamber of Commerce, in 2016 the city’s top employers based on full-time equivalent jobs include: South Lane School District (295.5 employees), Weyerhaeuser (236 employees), PeaceHealth Cottage Grove (115 employees), Wal-Mart (111 employees), City of Cottage Grove (75 employees), and Starfire Lumber (70 employees).

Tourism is a major focus of economic development. The City of Cottage Grove’s Economic Opportunities Analysis, published in 2009, identifies recreation and tourism as a top strategy for a building a sustainable economy. Local music venues, covered-bridge tours, and Bohemia Mining Days invite visitors to spend time in the Grove. While agriculture as an industry has never been a driving economic force for the town, food businesses and community food events are capitalizing on the growth of tourism.

Cottage Grove: Local Food Economy

Cottage Grove is the regional center for services and commerce, and offers more local food markets and general food availability than the surrounding towns.

- The Coast Fork Farm Stand sells produce from local and regional growers.
- The Old Mill Farm Store supplies a limited amount of local produce.
- Sunshine General Store supplies a variety of local and regional products, as well as bulk food from Hummingbird Wholesale located in Eugene.
- Grocery stores include Wal-Mart, Safeway, and Grocery Outlet.
- Backstage Bakery purchases all of its produce from local farmers or the Coast Fork Farm Stand.
“I envision a community hub for meeting and eating good food.” Kim Johnson, local chef and owner of Real Live Food, currently operates her local food business out of a large cinderblock building in Cottage Grove. Through Real Live Food, Kim sells healthy grab-and-go food products made from organic and, when possible, locally-sourced ingredients. Although most of these food products are sold in Eugene and Portland, throughout the summer Real Live Food offers food during the Cottage Grove Concerts in the Park events.

Beyond this food business, Kim plans to develop the cinderblock building space into an “olde world” community market, complete with local bakery and butcher shop. “The goal is to increase this community’s access to high quality foods.” Partnerships with a local meat processor, an egg producer, and a baker are underway. Kim also plans to feature the local business Rally Coffee Roasters.

Although Kim has laid down a lot of groundwork already, this Olde World Market is still a long-term vision. Beyond providing a storefront for local food businesses, the space will ideally provide cold storage space for local farmers. “I want to help connect farmers to this community,” says Kim. A community cooler and freezer will help maximize shelf-life of local produce, creating a longer window for selling opportunities and yielding greater financial returns to local farmers.

Above all, the market will provide an opportunity for the community of Cottage Grove to come together over food. The building has already started to provide such a space: in October 2015 and April 2016, it cohosted the Celebrate Our Farmers and Meet My Farmer events along with Sustainable Cottage Grove and Cottage Grove First Presbyterian Church. These events invite the Grove community to meet and learn from local growers and producers and celebrate local food together.
Community Resources

- **Cottage Grove: Health**

In the spring of 2015, the South Lane School District gave 8th and 11th graders an extensive survey to identify students’ current health and safety habits. Selected results that relate to food and nutrition follow:

- 18.7% of 8th graders and 19.1% of 11th graders responded that they had eaten less than they felt they should because there wasn’t enough money to buy food.
- Less than 20% of both 8th and 11th graders eat 5 or more servings of fruits and vegetables each day.
- 34.7% of 8th graders and 25.9% of 11th graders are overweight or obese.
- Only 58.7% of 8th graders and 56.5% of 11th graders regard their own general physical health as “excellent” or “very good.”

Krista Parent, the South Lane School District superintendent, describes the challenge of student health as “not just an education issue,” but a food access issue. Students learn about nutrition and healthy habits in the school room, but may not have access to healthy food at home. The school district serves around 3,000 students.

**Cottage Grove: Emergency Food Services**

Community Sharing of Cottage Grove is open Monday-Friday from 11:00 AM to 3:30 PM. The only rural food pantry that is open every weekday in the Southern Willamette Valley, Community Sharing provides services to a wide reach of the southern Lane County community: around 80 food boxes are served each day, which amounts to supplying 4,000-5,000 individuals each year with emergency food relief.

Community Sharing’s open availability is exceptional for rural resource access. Often the question of access is limited to whether a resource or service exists within a community. Yet if the services are only available on an occasional basis (once a week or month), then that accessibility is severely compromised. Especially in rural areas, where people commute longer distances and where public transportation is limited, resource access can be a major issue. Because Community Sharing is open every day, emergency food support for clients aren’t as impacted by scheduling conflicts.

Additionally, since food is moved so quickly through the food pantry every week, Community Sharing uses the Rural Delivery Program through Food for Lane County. Through the program, the pantry receives about 75% of FFLC’s weekly supply of produce for rural food pantries, which ensures fresher fruits and vegetables in greater quantity to clients every month.

Another major success within the food pantry has been the Latino Food Box program. Lise Colgan began the program in 2011, after observing that Latino families did not receive as much food in their boxes because they would pass on the food they didn’t recognize or didn’t know how to use. “I saw how important it was to provide them with culturally appropriate food,” Lise explains, especially because 13% of Community Sharing’s client population is Latino — “and that number grows every year.”

The program began as a Christmas box special in 2011, when Lise received a grant from the Cow Creek Umpqua Indian Foundation. With grant funding, she was able to supply Latino Christmas boxes with hojas and rajas for making tamales, dried chiles, and...
Community Resources

Community members gather at a cgFEAST meeting

chicken instead of turkey. Continued grant support and additional funding from Community Sharing enabled Lise to supply these boxes every month. “I try to make sure the box has five basic foods and as many smaller items as possible,” including masa (corn flour), beans, white rice, corn tortillas, and dried chilies. Lise received input from pantry clients to determine what to offer in each box.

Warm-meal sites are another important part of a community’s emergency food system. Sharon Jean started Soup’s On, a weekly community meal program, with the intention of feeding the homeless youth in Cottage Grove. Over the past five years, though, the program has expanded to welcome anyone and everyone who needs a free meal or simply wants to share a meal with their community. Every Sunday at 5 PM at the Community Center, Sharon coordinates a restaurant-style meal, where diners sit at tables and are served by volunteers. This year, anywhere from 50 to 70 people dine together each week. “There’s a great focus on community, and building relationships,” says Sharon. “We always have a friendly atmosphere.” The Soup’s On community dinner is supported by individual donations of both food and money, and by grants including the Community Foundation grant through the City.

Other community meals are offered throughout the week, such as at Trinity Lutheran Church on Tuesdays & Thursdays and at Church of the Nazarene on Wednesdays. The regular availability of these free meals is an important food system resource. For example, one of the most common complaints about SNAP benefits (food stamps) is that food insecure families do not receive enough financial support to last through the month. Free community dinners help stretch food budgets over the course of the month.

Cottage Grove: Community & Culture

In April 2014, local nonprofit Sustainable Cottage Grove assembled a diverse group of community members in a community FEAST event. FEAST stands for Food – Education – Agriculture - Solutions Together, and is a community organizing model created by the Oregon Food Bank to identify challenges and develop action plans for the community’s food system. At that FEAST, farmers, nutritionists, gardeners, educators, local business owners, emergency food service providers, and elected officials, to name a few, shared personal stories and provided insight on how the community can work together to strengthen Cottage Grove’s food system.

Four working groups were created from the first cgFEAST event, each with a unique focus; Working with Food (supporting local agriculture), Growing Food (community and school gardens), Eating Food (food and nutrition education), and Advocating for Food (local food advocacy and policy work). The groups continued with their own action plan, including implementing community food preservation classes
One of South Lane’s greatest health resources is the South Lane Mental Health (SLMH) community non-profit. SLMH offers services for mental illnesses and emotional problems, including counseling, crisis services, medication management, and supported living. From its beginning in 1988, over the last couple years SLMH has grown from a small nonprofit with four employees to now employing over 90 health care professionals and staff. The organization serves around 2,000 adults and children in the Cottage Grove area, which extends to Creswell, Lorane, and Dorena, and includes a partnership in Oakridge.

The primary mission of South Lane Mental Health is to support members of the community with mental illness by treating them with dignity and respect. A great deal of this work relates to food and hunger within the community. “Health and nutrition are a part of your mental health,” explains Tom Wheeler, Executive Director. Hunger is often described as a “symptom” of other underlying issues – whether that be poverty, housing insecurity, mental illness, or a combination of many factors. Offering food and diet assistance is often an important part of working with someone with mental health challenges.

Kerstin Britz, a counselor and case manager with SLMH, helped to identify some of the barriers to accessing healthy food that many of her clients face:

1) Transitioning from large-family meals to single-person cooking: many senior community members or widow(er)s who are used to cooking for large families find meal planning for one or two people very challenging

2) Limited cooking skills: often, individuals are most familiar with processed food or cooking from boxes, and have little knowledge of how to prepare meals from raw ingredients. This habit tends to result in lower-level nutritional meals, which contributes to diabetes and diet-related illnesses. Processed/pre-packaged food also tends to be more expensive, which consumes limited SNAP budgets before the end of the month.

3) More time & energy involved in cooking from scratch: Kerstin pointed out that for some seniors, simple processes of bending down to lift heavy pots and pans can actually be quite painful. The time necessary to cook healthy meals can also be restrictive for individuals who work multiple jobs or have a long commute after work.

Both Tom and Kerstin pointed to the support of the Cottage Grove community for SLMH’s success. For one, a fundraising drive provided financial support to buy current office buildings, which helped the nonprofit expand its services. Kerstin also points out the “natural supports” inherent to this community: that people in this town are more connected than in Eugene. Even though Eugene might have more programs for the mentally ill, they tend to be more disconnected from their communities. Individuals in Cottage Grove can rely much more on family, friends, and neighbors for support. This sentiment is common in many of the rural communities around the Southern Willamette Valley.
Dorena: Economy

Dorena is a small, unincorporated community of about 1,000 that lies along Row River Road east of Dorena Lake reservoir. The town was built around the timber industry and logging trucks driving from the forested foothills to the Valley floor are still a common sight.

More recently, tourism is an asset to the local economy. Mountain bikers and hikers travel through Dorena on their way to Willamette National Forest trails. Dorena Lake and the Row River bicycle trail, connecting Dorena to Cottage Grove, brings recreationalists from Eugene and all over the South Valley region. In the winter, mushroom hunters come through to forage in the Cascades. Tourists may stop at the Kirk and Family Mercantile local grocery for a quick snack or six-pack of beer, but unfortunately there aren’t many other stops or attractions in the town.

Many Dorena residents are employed in Cottage Grove and Eugene and enjoy the social/cultural activities that these communities offer.

Dorena: Local Food Economy

The Kirk and Family Mercantile store is the only grocery storefront in town. Local community members Teresa and John have owned the business for twelve years. “We sell food to finish up the meal,” explains Teresa, pointing to the potatoes, onions, flour, and beans that line that shelves. Most people in Dorena shop for groceries in Cottage Grove or Eugene but might run to the local store if they need a last-minute item. More often, the grocery is treated as a convenience store.

Dorena: Emergency Food Services

In 2014, Food for Lane County’s mobile food pantry found a permanent home in Child’s Way Charter School in Disston (just east of Dorena). Food for Lane County previously would send a truck to Dorena once a month to provide emergency food boxes and then packed the remaining food to take back to Eugene. Through a partnership with Child’s Way, the UpRiver Food Pantry has a permanent storage space in the school gym which means less volunteer labor every week and more food retained by the pantry.

“It helps that we’re all neighbors,” says the food pantry coordinator on welcoming new clients to the food pantry. The pantry is still relatively small, serving between ten and twenty clients every month. Yet the growing participation proves UpRiver
In January 2016, the South Lane School District (SLSD) implemented a Farm to School program with funding support from the 2016 USDA Farm to School Grant Program and the ODE Farm to School program. There is no single definition for what a Farm to School program looks like. Rather, Farm to School activities are intended to encourage schools connect with local producers to provide local food to students, and to develop educational activities around growing and eating local food. In Cottage Grove the South Lane School District has prioritized procuring fresh produce from local farmers through the Harvest of the Month program as well as creating educational activities around school gardens and farm visits.

The Harvest of the Month Program facilitates local food procurement by featuring an Oregon-grown fruit or vegetable every month. This produce-of-the-month is featured in tasting tables in the elementary schools, offered on the hot lunch line to all schools, and highlighted in educational classroom activities and school announcements. This past semester, the SLSD featured Oregon-grown pears, cabbage, strawberries, and radishes farmed in Cottage Grove.

This program is successful in many ways. Students are introduced to new fruits and vegetables, or reminded that familiar foods come from a farm in Oregon (instead of the grocery store). The tasting tables and educational opportunities provide space for a conversation about the benefits of buying local and fresh. Additionally, the funding support from the USDA grant allows schools more flexibility to purchase directly from local farms. Purchasing local is often more expensive than buying from a large-scale distributor like Sysco, and creating those direct relationships can be time-consuming to a school district already pressed for resources. This Harvest of the Month program cushions the process of procuring locally by focusing on one fruit or vegetable a month at a time. Ideally, the relationships created with local farmers through this program will last beyond the duration of the Farm to School grant.

Of course, there have been hiccups within the local procurement process. One of the greatest challenges that schools face is the need to purchase in bulk. Many of the small local farmers in Lane County are not able to supply produce to quantity, which has forced the school district to look regionally or state-wide. Another challenge is consistency: a school is responsible for feeding students every day regardless of the weather conditions or success of a local harvest.

Farm to School has been a great learning process not just for the students, but also for the school district and local farmers. The USDA Farm to School Grant support lasts through the end of the 2016-2017 school year, so there is more time to strengthen the Farm to School program and create long-lasting success.
Economy

Like so many other small rural towns in the Southern Valley, Lorane was formed as a logging community. Although much of the Douglas fir forest is still intensively managed for logging, gone are the lumber mills that once drove the local economy. Today most jobs are found in agriculture and tourism, although some individuals travel to Eugene and Cottage Grove for work.

Cows and sheep graze in the pastures of the Coast Range foothills. These ranches, often multi-generational farms, vary in size and scale. Some ranchers have thousand-head herds, with thousands of acres scattered across the region. Other local ranchers manage much smaller operations, with just a few hundred head of cattle on one plot of land. For the most part the ranchers ship their cattle to auction in Eugene or Roseburg. “These cattle aren’t going to the farmers’ markets,” remarks one rancher. Rather, they are shipped on to the next stage of the meat-processing industry for a national or international market.

The tourism economy stems from nearby vineyards and wineries. According to local historian Pat Edwards, Chateau Lorane was the first winery to establish itself in the region in 1984. King Estate Winery and Iris Vineyards are located immediately outside Lorane. South Willamette Wineries Association is dedicated to promoting tourism among the wineries in the region, many of which lie along Territorial Highway.

Local Food Economy

“Take what you want and leave what you can.” That’s the way Lorane community member Marissa McNutt-Cooper describes the Lorane Growers Market, a project of the Lorane Community Organization. The Growers Market is open from late spring into the fall on a table right outside the Lorane general store. Most of the produce donated is excess food from individual gardens. Community members and drop off and pick up produce as they please, and leave either a cash donation or exchange their own produce in return. “A lot of people around here don’t have access to fresh produce,” explains Marissa, especially if they aren’t able to grow their own garden. Sometime fresh bread will appear on the table, a donation from a community member who works at a local bakery in Eugene.

The Grower’s Market helps provide some of the fresh food that the Lorane General Store can’t. As the only food market in town, the general store is a hotbed of local commerce. Shelves are stocked with canned and dried goods, dairy, snacks, and soda, as well as home appliances, toiletries, and tools. While some Lorane residents will do their major grocery shopping in Eugene or Cottage Grove, the general store provides a

Community Resources

Community of Lorane

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Households</td>
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<td>56.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>% White</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Hispanic</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
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Demographic information from the U.S. Census for the Lorane Census Block Group geographic area provides information for the community of Lorane.

Data for Free and Reduced Lunch from the Crow-Applegate-Lorane School District

Per capita income $30,347
Median household income $44,609
% Below poverty level N/A
% Children below poverty level N/A
High school graduates 93%
% Free & Reduced Lunch 44.1%

The geographic boundaries of the Lorane Census Block Group, highlighted in green. Lorane is part of the Crow-Applegate-Lorane SD, which extends out of the CFA geographic study area.

Image courtesy of Oregon Rural Explorer.
Located on over 1,000 acres in the foothills of the Coastal Range, King Estate Winery is currently the largest organic vineyard in Oregon. The vineyard was established in 1991 by the King family and specializes in growing Pinot Gris and Pinot Noir grapes. King Estate wines are nationally recognized and the tasting room and restaurant brings tourists from all over the country to the Lorane countryside.

The attention given to environmental stewardship at King Estate sets this winery apart from others in the area. As a part of the organic system, King Estate does not spray pesticides but rather integrates pest management systems, such as introducing raptors to the fields. Further, the root stocks of the grapes are selected for their resistance to regional blights and select Pinot Gris and Pinot Noir varieties are grafted to those rootstocks. This particular viticulture system does not use irrigation and all grapes are harvested by hand. King Estate Winery has also invested in solar panels on four acres, producing some (but not all) of the energy used in wine production. A portion of the energy is sold back to Lane County.

The restaurant at King Estate Winery is marketed as Farm-to-Table. When possible, produce, herbs, and local honey harvested from the winery’s gardens and orchards are used in restaurant meals. Other food is sourced locally, including local beef and seafood from the Pacific Northwest. Excess food from the gardens is donated to Food for Lane County.

This winery employees 250 “skeleton crew,” or year-round employees, many of whom live in Eugene or Lorane. Another 500 seasonal employees, typically migrant workers, tend to the vineyards during the summer months. When asked how King Estate Winery supports nearby rural economies, one employee pointed to the number of tourists who drive or bike through these towns. Jim Edwards, of Lorane General store, agreed wholly: “[King Estate Winery] is great for this town. I get lots of their visitors coming in the store for lunch.”
Community Resources

daily-accessible market for food. Fresh produce includes storage crops (onions, potatoes, garlic), apples and bananas, avocados, and maybe a few bell peppers. Jim, the store owner, doesn’t buy local. There aren’t many local produce growers around, and the few farms that do grow food concentrate on Eugene markets. However, Jim will be quick to point out this his food “is the cheapest food in town!”

The Lorane Family Store is a seasonal restaurant offering breakfast and lunch to the Lorane community.

Health

“Lorane as a whole is an aging community,” one community member observes. Elderly populations typically face their own unique challenges in accessing healthy food and health care. In rural communities where transportation is limited, isolation is heightened for senior community members who cannot drive. It is not uncommon for house-bound seniors to rely on neighbors and family for home food deliveries.

Emergency Food Services

“There’s probably more need out there. We’re in a very rural area, and occasionally we hear of people tucked away in the trees.” - Lorane Community Member

The Lorane Bread Basket is a local emergency food program located in the Lorane Christian Church. “It’s a small little bread basket,” says Kathy, the coordinator of the program. The program operates on a budget of $50 per month and the occasional community donation. The Bread Basket is not shopping-style – instead, community members call the pantry to request a food box. “We’re open anytime,” explains Kathy, because there are enough volunteers to put together a food box any time of the week.

Due to lack of refrigeration facilities, the Bread Basket isn’t able to keep perishable goods like fresh produce or dairy. Instead they focus on stocking dried and canned goods, and keep donated day-old bread in a volunteer’s home freezer. When a food box is requested, it will be filled with canned goods, including protein, and household items like toilet paper and toothpaste. “If someone has a special need, then we try to help them out with that too,” Kathy says.

Kathy supposes a mixture of pride and lack of accessibility (like transportation) keeps these individuals from taking advantage of community resources in Lorane.

The closest Food for Lane County-sponsored pantry is located in the Crow-Applegate Church of the Nazarene, about fifteen minutes to the north. This pantry is open twice a month and offers perishable food and a free clothing program. Community Sharing in Cottage Grove is located about the same distance southeast of the community.

In the past, the Lorane Community Association has helped provide food boxes in December to the community through a separate initiative. In partnership with the local IOOF (Independent Order of Odd Fellows), the LCA held a canned food drive and distributed food to local families in need.

Community & Culture

“Lorane was here even before Cottage Grove,” says Jim Edwards, owner of Lorane General Store. “There’s a lot of history here.” Thirteen miles northwest of Cottage Grove, Lorane sits on what was once the Applegate Trail. The Lorane General Store is marked with history as well: Jim’s grandfather opened the store in the 1920’s, and since then the general store has been a central point in the Lorane Community.

Although the average age of Lorane is markedly older than nearby rural communities, local organizations like the Lorane Grange and the Lorane Community Association ("We don’t meet regularly," admits Marissa, “but we do get things done”) have built a strong and active community base. Because of limited social services and the isolation of living rurally, poverty and hunger do exist in the area. Yet Facebook groups organizing around Health and Fitness and a local community-update blog entitled “All Things Lorane” proves that this small community benefits from social resources and connectivity.
Community Resources

Community of Drain & Curtin

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<td>Households</td>
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<td>% White</td>
<td>89%</td>
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<td>% Hispanic</td>
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Demographic information from the U.S. Census for the North Douglas School District geographic area provides information for the communities of Drain and Curtin.

<table>
<thead>
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<tr>
<td>% Children below poverty level</td>
<td>26%</td>
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<tr>
<td>High school graduates</td>
<td>84.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>% Free &amp; Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>54.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Drain: Economy

The Drain community has retained its historic ties to timber. The largest industry in the town today is Emerald Forest Products. At the outset of the 21st century there were three other lumber mills driving the town’s economy. Those closed due to the 2008 recession, leaving many Drain residents without jobs. With an incorporated population of 1200, Drain has few other economic opportunities. Other major employers include the Drain School District and the City of Drain.

One community member notes that “50% of would-be economic activity in this area is all underground.” She remarks that many Drain residents do not have steady jobs and lack cash flow, instead relying on trading goods and services with family, friends, and neighbors. “There are about 3,000 people here in the valley,” she explains, “and this valley is a population of self-sustaining, long-term families.”

Drain: Local Food Economy

Drain is home to the only full grocery store in North Douglas County. Ray’s Grocery in downtown Drain is part of a small Oregon-based chain with headquarters in Roseburg. Despite its regional base, the store
in Drain does not offer much local food and has a limited general selection.

Many Drain residents travel to nearby cities for weekly grocery trips. Wal-Mart and Safeway in Cottage Grove and Thunderbird Grocery in Roseburg carry a wide range of cheap food.

In 2009 a group of community members, farmers, and local artisans opened the North Umpqua Farmers and Artisans Market (NUFARM) with a goal of providing a market outlet for the many small farmers in the area. NUFARM was very successful in its first year, with up to eleven vendors, educational events, and music. However, the market struggled to keep up its momentum over the next three years and ultimately closed in 2012. Laurie Fox, one of the coordinators of NUFARM, identified the local economic recession as one reason for the decline of the market. A local farmer also noted the lack of support from the city government and Chamber of Commerce. Without these partnerships, the market was not recognized fully as a community-supported event.

There are many small-scale homesteads and hobby farms around Drain and North Douglas County. Davie Crawford, a farmer herself, explains, “there’s tons of small farmers out here, growing all kinds of things.” Davie and her husband have owned land near Drain for twenty-five years. She raises laying hens and cattle, and tends to four different orchards “with apples, pears, peaches, and plums.” She was known as the “egg lady” the NuFarm Market in Drain. Once the market closed, the community went to her directly for eggs. Now Davie sells her eggs to a woman in Reedport, or trades them to family and friends for other goods.

Many of the growers in the area do not sell their food at a market level. When asked where locals could look for the local, healthy food produced by Drain’s farmers, Davie mentioned feed stores in Cottage Grove and Roseburg. Farmers will often trade eggs for chicken feed – again, the “underground” bartering system that Drain’s economy relies on. So while there are no formalized markets for local food, local products are still available if you know where to look for them.

Health

The Drain DHS office provides WIC and SNAP services for all of North Douglas County. The office is open on Fridays from 9:00-11:00 AM and 1:00-3:00 PM. Dr. Joanne Holland runs the only doctor’s office in town. Another rural health clinic in Drain closed in 2015.

Access to health services, including nutrition services, is a major challenge in North Douglas County. Residents of the region traditionally rely on services in Roseburg or Cottage Grove. The Oregon Health Plan dictates where members can receive healthcare through the Coordinated Care Organization (CCO) process. Recipients of OHP are assigned to a CCO within Douglas County and typically can only access healthcare at Douglas County locations, although Cottage Grove is closer and may be more accessible for Drain residents. The Open Card Access program theoretically allows a participant to travel anywhere for health services. However, Drain residents who have applied to this program – with the intention of receiving healthcare closer to home – described the process as prohibitively long and challenging.

Emergency Food Services

Two food pantries are located in Drain. The Fish Food Pantry operates out of the United Hope Methodist Church on Tuesday mornings. Living Hope Outreach, supported by the Gateway Family Fellowship Church of the Nazarene, provides a warm lunch on Wednesdays while the food pantry is open.

In March 2016 the Fish Pantry provided 112 emergency food boxes to a total of 337 people in the Drain community, including 75 children. That number may vary every month, explains food pantry coordinator
Curtin is an unincorporated community that lies just off I-5 between Cottage Grove and Drain. The population is “maybe 100 or less,” estimates a local resident who moved to Curtin in 1994. “When I moved here,” he says, “this was a thriving little town. It used to be an active community, with a post office, a general store, and two restaurants.” Now all but one “Mom and Pop” corner store is gone.

Curtin’s economy used to rely on income from its fueling stations. Its proximity to I-5 made it an important stop for truckers, who might also stop for a meal or snack. When state regulations changed “relating to DEQ,” Curtin’s fueling stations were forced to close. The general store followed soon after.

Today some of the remaining residents in Curtin have jobs in Cottage Grove and Eugene. Poverty and drug abuse are significant challenges within the community.
Community Resources

Community of Elkton

Demographic information from the U.S. Census for the Elkton School District geographic area provides information for the community of Elkton

<table>
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<td>% Children below poverty level</td>
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<td>High school graduates</td>
<td>91.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Free &amp; Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Economy

Elkton’s primary economy is based on tourism. In this incorporated city of less than five hundred, there are four unique and award-winning wineries. The city lies along Highway 38, and is a pleasant stop for tourists going to the coast. Its position at the confluence of Elk Creek with the Umpqua River makes the community a destination for fishing.

Orchards, vineyards, and ranching are the major agricultural industries. Most farmers and ranchers sell their produce in Roseburg, Eugene or regional markets including Portland. The type of agriculture found near Elkton is in part due to the soil and topography, but also in part determined by the long history of logging and ranching in the area.

The Elkton Community and Education Center, or ECEC, is a wonderful resource for the community and visitors to the region. The ECEC is home to a large butterfly exhibit, which invites researchers and butterfly enthusiasts to the center. ECEC also hosts a variety of community events throughout the summer months.

Local Food Economy

There are no full grocery stores in Elkton. Community members drive a minimum of twenty minutes to the limited Ray’s Grocery Store in Drain, or forty-five minutes to major grocery stores in Roseburg and Reedsport. Food outlets in the community include the Elkton Cash Market, a convenience store, and the ECEC, which sells fresh produce harvested from the community garden in the summer. Local restaurants include Tomasell’s Pastry Mill and Café, Arlene’s Diner, and the food cart El Guerrero Aztec.

While there are very few – if any – vegetable farmers growing produce for retail or local markets, many residents of Elkton tend their own community gardens.

Health

Without a DHS office or health clinic, Elkton residents drive to Roseburg or Cottage Grove (when applicable) for most health services.

Emergency Food Services

There are no food pantries in Elkton. The nearest emergency food providers are in Drain and Sutherlin – both of which are open on a very limited basis.

The Elkton Community and Education Center operates a weekly senior lunch program on Tuesdays from 11:00 – 12:00. Each week, between 20 and 30 senior community members gather in the center to share a hot meal and a sense of community. Diners come from all over the region, including the nearby unincorporated town of Scottsburg. Each lunch costs $5, which helps pay for the food and the salary for the cook. “We try to help out when needed,” says Margaret Waldrope, one of the weekly lunch coordinators, remarking that sometime the $5 cover charge can be expensive for some members.
Most participants don’t come to the lunch for a free meal, but rather for the company. “A lot of it is social,” says Margaret, and she explains the importance of community for widows/widowers who live on their own in the country. Occasionally during the summer people who camp out on the river fishing will stop in, looking for a hot meal. “We don’t care if they’re old enough to be here, we just take ‘em!”

**Community & Culture**

Elkton has that strong sense of community so common in more isolated rural towns. Many community members remarked on the way residents take care of each other. “If there’s someone who needs a meal, we take one to them,” says one local resident. “Most people here are used to providing for themselves,” but they know they can rely on their friends and neighbors for support when needed.

The community also has a rich sense of history, and the people there take pride in their roots. The tradition of sourcing one’s own food remains vibrant. Hunting, fishing, and gathering are common among many families.
In February 2016, community members from Drain, Yoncalla, and Elkton gathered together over lasagna and salad to discuss the health needs of northern Douglas County. This meeting was the first step toward a Health Needs Assessment for the area. The conversation around healthy communities was facilitated by leaders from the non-profit organization the Children’s Institute and public health professionals from Portland State University, in partnership with the local initiative Yoncalla Early Works.

By bringing community members together from all over northern Douglas County, the Community Health Assessment will provide an inclusive picture of the specific health challenges and resources that these rural communities face – including food and nutrition challenges. During that first meeting group discussions identified some of the indicators that affect health in rural communities: socioeconomic status, job availability, access to healthcare and health resources, access to transportation and housing, limited education opportunities, limited understandings of health, and the reality of living in isolation.

The health assessment is a multi-step process. It began with a community visioning session (What does a healthy community look like to you?), followed by collection of secondary health data. Next, community conversations and workshops will collect more information and help identify a few primary focus points for health needs in the region. Finally, with contribution from community members, the Health Needs Assessment organization team will identify community solutions to address those specific health needs.

Already within the first few months of this project, the Health Needs Assessment is already successful in bringing three rural communities together. “We need these solutions to be regional,” offered one participant at a meeting, “because we’re all facing the same challenges together.” Another community member echoed, “our strongest resource here is our connection with each other.”
Community Resources

Community of Yoncalla

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<td>Median Age</td>
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<tr>
<td>% White</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Hispanic</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Demographic information from the U.S. Census for the Yoncalla School District geographic area provides information for the community of Yoncalla

Economy

The top employers in Yoncalla are the Yoncalla School District and a nearby lumber mill.

Local Food Economy

There are no full-service grocery stores in Yoncalla, although the Yoncalla Food Center and Deli provides a variety of canned and packaged goods, snacks, limited produce, and some hot foods. Yoncalla residents generally travel to Roseburg for groceries and other services.

Commercial agriculture near Yoncalla is primarily ranching of cattle and sheep.

Emergency Food Services

The Assembly of God Food Pantry in Yoncalla provides emergency food boxes on the last Monday of every month.

Community & Culture

“There’s a deep heritage and sense of culture here,” observes another local resident, “and that can be very complex and affect the decisions that are made.” This community member, sitting in on a North Douglas Health Needs Assessment committee meeting, refers to decisions about healthcare or community development.
Prospective farmers need access to affordable land. This issue demands attention especially because of the aging farming population across the nation. According to the U.S. Census of Agriculture, the average age of a farmer in Lane County in 2012 was 60.1 years. Young and emerging farmers need to take the place of retiring farmers, but first they need access to land. Growing urban populations and expanding industrial development in the Willamette Valley ensures affordable arable land is difficult to find. Additionally, environmental concerns in the Willamette Valley make land access and stewardship a critical issue. Water pollution from chemical contamination and elimination of native ecosystems like the oak savannah are a few examples of these concerns. In order to protect existing environmental resources, small farmers need support in access to land.

**Challenge:** “Land access is the biggest hurdle for beginning farms,” confirms one Cottage Grove grower. As population pressure increases and industry continues to develop, prime farmland in the Willamette Valley is exceptionally hard to come by. Often farmers inherit land from their parents or relatives. This challenge is exacerbated by the high cost of land near urban areas.

**Land**

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**Food Production and Local Agriculture**

Despite the many agricultural and community food resources in the Southern Willamette Valley, holes still exist that challenge the strength of our food system. Local farmers face barriers to supplying food to local markets. Financial or educational obstacles hinder many community members from making healthy food choices. The first step in strengthening our food system is to identify the specific challenges that exist. The second step is to identify realistic opportunities, resources, and partnerships that can overcome those challenges and work toward a more resilient food system.
practice goes back to the Donation Land Claim Act of 1850, when the U.S. government allotted white settlers with 320-acre parcels of land. A few farmers interviewed for this CFA used family land or resources to develop their farm, and all acknowledged how fortunate they were to have that resource. “I wouldn’t have been able to do anything [related to farming] without my parents,” remarks one farmer. “I was lucky to have support from my family to help with the down payment [for the land],” says another.

Most of the farmers interviewed did not have access to family land in the Southern Willamette Valley. In general, small farmers discussed buying land where it was affordable, even if that meant the soil wasn’t as well suited for farming or most of the land was on a steep hill grade. One farmer mentioned hoping to buy land close to Eugene for market availability, but the cost was too high and she needed to look farther out in the valley.

Opportunity:

“We need the community to support us.”

– South Valley farmer and rancher

One local farmer in the Southern Willamette Valley is able to farm on land that was bought by an “angel investor,” or a community member who committed to supporting that farmer’s vision by purchasing land for the farmer to lease at a subsidized cost.

The South Valley Farmers Network could provide potential community investors with a formal platform to communicate with emerging farmers looking for land. This network offers an opportunity to engage new farmers and encourage them to farm in the area, and a formal platform with outreach to the larger Cottage Grove and SWV community can help facilitate land partnerships.

The Hatch Oregon Network offers one kind of infrastructure for community investment. This statewide organization provides an online platform for listing and exploring different community investment opportunities. Hatch Oregon capitalizes on Oregon’s statewide law, the Oregon Intrastate Offering Exemption, which allows Oregon businesses to crowdfunding up to $250,000 from their communities.

Opportunity: The National Young Farmers Coalition (NYFC) is a non-profit organization dedicated to supporting and mobilizing emerging farmers through advocacy and education. One major focus area is making affordable, high-quality farmland more accessible to farmers. “Finding Farmland: A Farmer’s Guide to Working with Land Trusts” provides a toolbox and potential partnerships for working with land trusts. NYFC also pushes a policy platform advocating for land-access policy changes, including prioritizing conservation easements and providing tax incentives for land rented to farmers. Local farmer participation in the NYFC can strengthen the group’s voice on a national level.

Water

Legal rights to water access is arguably the most important resource for specialty crop farmers. (Live-stock watering is exempt from requiring a water right.) However, many farmers do not buy land based on water supply or water rights: “We chose this land because it was affordable, and just got lucky that we had access to ground and surface water,” says one small farmer in Cottage Grove.

A sprinkler irrigation system for a blueberry field
**Challenges & Opportunities**

**Challenge:** As droughts during Oregon’s summers are now more common and more severe, water scarcity is a growing concern among farmers. “[Last year] was a scary year. Even though we have irrigation rights, it’s still scary to see the river get lower and lower throughout the season,” remarks one farmer located in the Willamette River watershed. Another farmer in the foothills of the Coast Range comments, “In the Coast Range wells go dry by mid-summer, so I have to buy water [to irrigate my crops].”

**Opportunity:** The NRCS and certain USDA programs provide financial support for on-farm water management and conservation programs. The Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) provides technical and financial assistance in irrigation water management efficiency projects, and certain programs prioritize small organic farms. Other programs include the Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA) program and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). Already a few SWV farmers are taking advantage of these resources to improve water management and quality on their farms.

**Partnerships:** NRCS – Eugene Service Center (Wallace Jennings); Upper Willamette SWCD (Dave Downing)

**Opportunity:** Certain dry farming practices allow for production of some traditionally-irrigated crop varieties, such as tomatoes, zucchini, potatoes, and melons. The OSU Extension Small Farms program is currently collaborating with small-scale farmers on field trials throughout the Willamette Valley. Additionally, use of alternative cropping systems that do not rely as heavily on irrigation water, including small grains and dried beans, may be an opportunity to take advantage of changing weather patterns, diversify product for local markets, implement crop rotation, and reduce irrigation water use.

**Local Markets: Direct to Consumer**

Farms’ markets can be a practical and valuable venue for small producers. They don’t require production-to-scale, and for many products Oregon Department of Agriculture processing requirements are exempt in a direct-to-consumer market. Many of the farmers in the Southern Willamette Valley prefer to only sell at farmers’ markets to establish that close connection to the consumer. To be successful, though, these markets often need to be intentionally managed with a community outreach strategy.

**Challenge:** Local farmers’ markets in the Southern Willamette Valley traditionally struggle to be successful. Drain opened a farmer and artisan market in the late 2000’s, but it closed after a few years. “There were too many artisans and not enough farmers,” remarks one Drain resident. An ex-vendor of the market, a
local farmer, remembers, “You need to have community support, and the people around Drain didn’t support the market.”

The Creswell Farmer’s Market and the Cottage Grove Growers’ Market are relatively small rural markets, but within the past year both markets have grown and adapted to challenges. Vendors at both markets cited the location as one major pitfall of the markets. In Creswell, vendors were located behind the public library. This season, the market has moved to the front parking lot, which is easily seen from main street by passing traffic. The Cottage Grove market recently moved from the parking lot of the Coast Fork Farm Stand, a retail business selling local produce, to a street right in the downtown area. “I think it’s confusing, because it’s not clear where the farmers’ market ends and the Farm Stand begins,” observed one Cottage Grove grower before the move took place. By working with the City of Cottage Grove, farmers are now able to rope off a section of downtown to set up stands in the street in a much more visible location.

Advantages of the Creswell Farmers’ Market, as defined by local producers, include that this market has a board of directors. Quite a few farmers remarked that a board is necessary for strategic planning of the market. “Markets need to be developed and managed. They’re a business,” comments Farmer Richard of Hayhurst Farms.

Opportunity: Although one stand-alone strategy might not boost local market success on its own, a variety of different strategies working together could potentially build up a local rural growers’ market. These solutions might include:

1. Improved market location: A local farmers’ market should be clearly visible from main community roads and easily accessible by car and foot. Ideally the market will be out of direct sunlight for both the comfort of the consumer/farmer, and the quality of the produce.

2. A board of directors: A growers’ market looking to scale up could benefit from a committed group of community members involved with strategic decision-making for the market. Other tasks could include fundraising, creating community partnerships, and public marketing/community outreach.

3. Advertising campaigns and community outreach: These are vital for the survival of a growers’ market. Collaborating with other local economic development organizations, like the Chamber of Commerce, will extend the reach of the growers’ market into the community. Outreach to diverse community groups, including schools, churches, and health/fitness clubs, might include promotional events.

Partnerships: Oregon Farmers Market Association (OFMA); Farmers Market Fund (FMF)
Local Markets: Retail

A few retail markets in the Southern Willamette Valley sell local food products. Sunshine General Store in Cottage Grove sells some local produce, eggs, and meat among its other primary products (bulk goods, natural medicines, vitamins and supplements). Farmlands Market in Creswell offers some local produce and eggs, as well as variety of regionally-produced items including: bread, grain, coffee, preservatives and pickled goods, and meat. The Coast Fork Farm Stand’s primary goal is to sell healthy food year round, and whenever possible features local farm products. Although farmer-direct markets (CSA’s, meet-your-farmer events) are a popular way to support and buy local, not all consumers or farmers thrive in those spaces. Traditional retail stores that procure from local farmers could increase a community’s capacity to support and buy local, healthy food.

Challenge: Not all locally-oriented farmers prioritize selling to local retail markets. Many farmers prefer the direct-to-consumer market, or sell wholesale to markets in Eugene and even Portland. Small-scale farmers in the SWV who are interested in selling to retail markets need to have the capacity (farm infrastructure, delivery ability, quantity of product) to supply these retail markets year-round. High tunnels (aka hoop houses), for example, are especially important for growing produce year-round. According to one local grocery store owner, only the farmers who have invested in a year-round growing season and grow specifically for local retail markets are truly able to support these retail stores, which add so much to a local food economy.

Opportunity: For farmers who prioritize selling to local retail stores, farm infrastructure grants are available through the USDA. One grant, the NRCS High Tunnel System Initiative, offers financial support for building high tunnel systems to extend growing seasons.

Opportunity: Farmers and retail store managers need to form strategic partnerships to streamline communication and plan long-term for product procurement. Retail stores may also be able to boost these sales by promoting the locally and regionally produced items through targeted advertising.
Challenges & Opportunities

Expanding the Farm Business

Introduction

Selling directly to consumers, whether in a farmers’ market setting, through Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) shares, or via on-farm pick-up, is often the first step for small and/or beginning farmers. However, these markets tend to lack consistency: they rely on consumers visiting the market or signing up for CSA shares each season for sales. To approach more reliable wholesale markets, like schools, restaurants, or local distributors, farms need to reach a certain capacity for production.

“Scaling-up requires investing in more farm equipment,” explains Taylor of My Brothers’ Farm. “You need the efficiency to sell in quantity,” including harvesting, washing, packing, and distributing the farm product. Taylor, who farms and ranches on over 100 acres, needs to look to wholesale and regional markets for his products. “A couple-hundred-acre farm makes it difficult to rely on direct sales 100% of the time], especially for what we’re trying to grow,” which includes hops and cider apples, both niche-market crops.

Distribution

Many small- to mid-size producers rely on diverse markets to sell their products. Small-scale farmers will sell at multiple farmers’ markets throughout the week to maximize their profit margin, or sell to different restaurants and retail stores. Market diversity can be an important tool in maximizing profit margin; the more opportunities to sell your product, the better. However, the time and resources needed to distribute goods to multiple markets can be a major challenge for small producers. “It’s got to be worth my time,” explains one farmer on his view of distribution. “I don’t want to take the time off my farm to deliver only one flat of product.”

Challenge: Beyond the physical demand of delivering product to a market location, one farmer noted an interesting obstacle in the distribution process: “A lot of it comes down to communication. There isn’t one easy communication platform that we all use. I’ve tried online marketplaces to connect with buyers, but not everyone wants to use the internet.” Navigating the emails, websites, phone-calls, and in-person visits with potential buyers can be a huge burden to small farmers, who are the primary marketers as well as laborers on their farm.

Opportunity: In response to the challenges of communication between farmer and local businesses, some communities have formed Downtown Dining Alliances. Within these alliances, local restaurants and grocery stores work with farmers to discuss procurement and distribution needs. Direct communication through email listserves and quarterly in-person meetings help these stakeholders meet the diverse needs of farmers and local business owners.
Farmer Annette, from River Bend Farm near Pleasant Hill, is a mid-size hazelnut producer. She sells most of her hazelnuts wholesale to regional processors, which is a guaranteed market. A small quantity, however, is saved for retail markets and processed by hand on the farm. “If we ever wanted to hold back more [to sell retail], we’d need to go to another company to help with processing,” she acknowledges.

Hazelnuts are just one product for which holes exist in local processing infrastructure. University of Oregon’s Community Planning Workshop published a 2010 report, “Market Analysis for Local Food Products in Lane County.” The report identifies the same challenges for local processing: “In the past fifty years, many processing and canning facilities in Lane County closed down. Some facilities still exist in Lane County, however few of them source locally grown ingredients. Farms smaller than 50 acres…generally do not have the volume or revenue stream to support on-site processing facilities.”

Opportunity: There are very limited options for local processing equipment that allow farmers – especially organic farmers – to purchase back their products for retail sales. Building small-scale processing infrastructure for the variety of products available in the SWV would allow farmers to maintain a higher profit-margin and keep these products in the region. Various USDA-level grants can be used to build community-oriented processing facilities, including the Local Food Promotion Program grant, the Community Facilities Direct Loan and Grant Program, and the Value-Added Producer grant.

Food Processing

Food processing at its most basic is changing a raw farm product into another form of food. Historically, community food processing played a much bigger role in the Southern Willamette Valley’s local food systems than it does today. Creswell, for example, was home to local dryers and canneries. Multiple grist mills operated all over the region. Community food culture also relied heavily on home processing: canning, drying, pickling, and other forms of preserving food after the harvest were commonplace.

Within the last few decades, commercial processing operations and home processing practices have waned. Various processing facilities are located in the Eugene metro area, but these are often inaccessible for small-scale producers. In addition, a growing cultural expectation of convenient food access and year-round fresh produce has resulted in a loss of food preservation knowledge and practice.

Challenge: Most hazelnuts grown in the Southern Willamette Valley are produced for national and global markets. Growers traditionally sell hazelnuts to regional processors, which buy from all over Oregon and sell to national distributors. There is no opportunity to buy back the product because these facilities intermingle all of the incoming hazelnuts and process them together.

For any direct-to-consumer sales of hazelnuts, farms need to be able to wash, clean, and dry the product on-farm. Direct sales are much more profitable than wholesales (around $10/lb more for hazelnuts), but on-farm processing can be time and labor intensive.

At Tangled Orchard Farm, Farmer Andi Saxon invested egg processing infrastructure, including an egg candler and grader, that would allow her to process eggs in quantity for larger retail markets.
Cold Storage

Cold storage facilities allow farmers to keep their products at high quality for days or weeks at a time. Access to coolers or freezers is often vital for rural and/or small farmers, who must travel longer distance to markets and may only sell at markets a few days out of the week.

**Challenge:** As with processing, there is limited storage infrastructure that meets the needs of small producers. A few cold-storage facilities are located in Eugene but are directed toward large-scale farms. There are no cold-storage facilities in rural Southern Willamette Valley. The Community Planning Workshop’s “Market Analysis” report also pointed to food storage limitations: “Significant food storage capacity existed during the first part of the 20th century… [Today] most storage occurs on a short-term basis within the structure of food processors or distributors.” The document continues, “Improved processing and storage facilities are needed to allow local food products to be available year round, meet the needs of large institutional buyers, and increase value-added food products in the local economy.”

**Opportunity:** Locally-based cold storage facilities would allow small farmers to improve their capacity to sell to institutions and local retail markets, ensuring more reliable markets for producers and allowing a greater portion of the community to have access to local food. This infrastructure would make food production, especially fruit and vegetable production, more accessible and profitable, and could encourage more farmers to establish in the area. Off-farm storage facilities would also reduce overall food waste.

An emerging development in some communities across the nation are not-for-profit storage facilities. These facilities are often managed by a local cooperative. Grant resources for developing these facilities include the USDA Community Facilities Direct Loan and Grant Program, the USDA Farm Storage Facility Loan Program, and the USDA Community Food Projects Competitive Grants Program.

**Labor**

“In order to meet that price point and be competitive in regional markets, you need to increase efficiency,” explains Farmer Taylor of My Brothers’ Farm. “And that means more labor, among other things.”

**Challenge:** Labor affordability is one of the primary factors that inhibits small-scale producers from expanding their farm business. Quality of labor is another consideration: prospective farmers who find seasonal work on farms are often unskilled and unaware of the real challenges of farm life. Additionally, the farming population is aging throughout Oregon. More and more farmers are looking to outside help for completing the responsibilities of maintaining a farm.

**Opportunity:** A few farms in the SWV have worked with seasonal interns through Rogue Farm Corps, a state-wide nonprofit with the mission of “training the
next generation of farmers and ranchers.” Through the internship program provided by Rogue Farm Corps, established farms can sign up to become “mentors” of farm students. Students will live on farm, learn farm chores, and engage in educational trainings to learn how to build a successful farm.

Community Education

“There’s a movement to become healthier in Cottage Grove – just look at Anytime Fitness, which moved to a bigger building earlier this year. How can we tap into that with food?”

South Valley farmer

Opportunity: The Willamette Food and Farm Coalition (WFFC) is a regional non-profit organization with the mission of developing a sustainable food system in Lane County. One of WFFC’s major initiatives is the Lane County Locally Grown Guide: an extensive list of local farms, farm stands, markets, CSA’s, local food events, restaurants, and other resources found throughout the county. Community organizers in the Southern Willamette Valley could distribute this guide or create a Southern Valley guide that specifically highlights where to buy local food.

Opportunity: A partnership with the Cottage Grove Sentinel to feature articles on the local food movement would reach much of the Cottage Grove community. A series of articles could feature local farmers, upcoming community events, and educational pieces on our local food system.

Opportunity: Continued support for the bi-annual “Celebrate Our Farmers” and “Meet My Farmer” events will grow the local food movement. These events offer a chance for the community to connect with farmers in an informal and educational setting. With support from Sustainable Cottage Grove and the First Presbyterian Church, among other community partners, the events invite in new connections and strengthen existing relationships between community and local farmers.

Community Education

“As a state, Oregon undoubtedly surpasses much of the nation in support of local food. “We’re pretty far ahead of the rest of the country,” acknowledges one farmer, and says she’s seen growth of interest and support in buying local food since establishing her farm 15 years ago. “It’s been really cool to watch.” However, much of this support is located in urban areas, and less so in rural communities. Farmers interviewed for this community food assessment voiced over and over again that community education and support is one of the biggest hurdles to overcome in selling their product.

Challenge: In general, consumer behavior of purchasing of local food is the largest obstacle that rural retail outlets face. “We’re only scratching the surface [of what we could be doing],” says Scott of the Coast Fork Farm Stand. He estimates that less than 10% of the Cottage Grove population has shopped at the Farm Stand, located only a few blocks from Main Street and Safeway in either direction. Many Cottage Grove residents prefer to shop at Safeway or even travel north to Eugene for weekly produce.

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Community Education

“Local food is superior in quality and freshness. People don’t understand that when you buy old produce [from supermarkets] that goes bad sooner, you’re actually paying more for it.”

North Douglas farmer

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Challenges & Opportunities

Agricultural Resource Development

Water, land, equipment, knowledge: all are indispensable resources for building local agricultural and food systems. These resources may be natural or built, physical or social. Within strong community food systems, these resources are identified and upheld. Access to these resources may look like land affordability, agricultural education, or stakeholder communication.

**Resource Sharing**

“There’s always something to learn,” says Farmer Mike Satterstrom of Coast Fork Vineyard and Berries, who moved to Oregon after thirty-five years of farming in California. New and experienced farmers alike benefit from sharing information and resources. Since so much agricultural knowledge is place-based, connecting with other farmers within the community is especially valuable.

**Challenge:** Although many farmers in the Southern Willamette Valley expressed a desire to connect with other local food producers, there are different obstacles to communicating through a formalized platform. For one, individuals have varying preferences for and access to different forms of communication. Not all farmers have internet at home or on-farm cellular networks. Another challenge is simply finding the time to commit to structured communication and networking opportunities. Many small farmers hold off-farm jobs and do not have additional on-farm labor, so they need to plan their time carefully.

**Opportunity:** “We can always use being busy as an excuse,” challenges one farmer at a Farmer Network meeting. “If we want to work together, we need to make that a priority.” The South Valley Farmers Network was formalized in February 2016 as a solution to the need for a community and communication platform for rural farmers in the Southern Willamette Valley. Farmers from south Lane and north Douglas counties determined goals for this network, which including creating a common voice for rural commercial farmers, building community and support among these farmers, increasing both buying and selling power through collaboration, and better meeting the needs of the Southern Willamette Valley’s rural communities.

Currently the South Valley Farmers Network meets once per month in Cottage Grove to network and share updates. Monthly emails and a private Facebook page facilitate ongoing communication. Continued organizational support and farmer outreach is necessary for long-term success of the South Valley Farmers Network.
Challenges & Opportunities

Natural Resource Knowledge

The diversity of soils, elevation, watersheds, and natural flora and fauna in the Southern Willamette Valley can be a unique advantage to local farmers – or a distinct challenge. The residents of the Southern Willamette Valley hold a wealth of knowledge about these natural resources, but that knowledge is rarely documented for public use.

**Challenge:** Efforts to attract more farmers to the area would benefit from a clear documentation of local natural resources. General knowledge already exists about the geographic areas that are conducive for farming, the watersheds, and the seasons, but that knowledge isn’t easy to find for an outsider.

**Opportunity:** “Can we map the region by its limitations or opportunities for agriculture?” – Dave Downing, NRCS. By providing a public-use map of agricultural resources (soils, vegetation, zoning/farm use, etc), we can better share opportunities for land stewardship with beginning farmers and current land owners. Potential partnerships include the NRCS Eugene Service Center; Lane Council of Governments (LCOG); Oregon State Water Resources Department.

Navigating Agricultural Support

Agricultural resource support is available to farmers in the South Willamette Valley from many federal, state, county, and local agencies and non-profit organizations. From the USDA to the ODA to the FSA, from Natural Resources Conservation Service to Soil and Water Conservation Districts to Watershed Councils, from OSU Extension to Friends of Family Farmers to the Willamette Food and Farm Coalition, not to mention the myriad farmer networks: the list is exhaustive (and exhausting!). This list represents the significant agricultural support available to farmers in the Southern Willamette Valley. However, many farmers are not aware of the support, or don’t understand how to access it.

**Challenge:** Farmers need better access to this web of organizational support. “These organizations are set up to help farmers but usually I have no idea where to start,” admits a local producer. How does a farmer find a specific resource? Who does one talk to? Can these programs be used in tandem with one another?

**Opportunity:** Developing a resource guide specifically for farmers in the Southern Willamette Valley will greatly improve access to these existing resources and opportunities. A guide that delineates key representatives and local, state, and national programs will strengthen the Cottage Grove community as a center for agricultural support.

Vocational Training

Although the economies of the rural communities in the Southern Willamette Valley rely heavily on agriculture and natural resource development, children are not taught agricultural or business skills in schools.

“Most of our kids don’t go to college. They aren’t learning the skills they need to get a job.” – Drain resident

**Challenge:** Residents in almost every community in the Southern Willamette Valley identified the need for strong vocational training either within the public school system or in collaboration with it.

To the left is a screenshot from the NRCS’s Web Soil Survey interactive website. Through this website, users can access a multitude of soil data. However, the maps can be difficult to read and the data overwhelming for a typical user. Can Southern Willamette Valley communities create user-friendly resources to share this information with the wider public? (www.websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov)
Opportunity: With support from an Oregon Department of Education Farm to School grant, implementation of a Garden Club is underway at the Cottage Grove High School. Through this after-school club, students will have the opportunity to learn about plant propagation and growing and harvesting produce, maintaining a garden, and entrepreneurship. Funding support includes a stipend for a club advisor and supplies. The intention of this after school club is to gauge student interest and build capacity to bring Horticulture Science back to CGHS. Other schools in the South Willamette Valley, including the North Douglas School District and Yoncalla School District, could benefit from a similar program.

Opportunity: Support for vocational programs doesn’t just come from inside the schools. Collective community voice can help encourage school district boards to invest in students by providing more vocational science classes. A political opportunity exists for parents, future employers, and the greater community to come together and voice these opinions.

Opportunity: The OSU Extension 4-H program is a traditional venue for agricultural education in rural communities. In southern Lane County, the 4-H program has seen significant growth and investment within the past year. OSU Extension funding for 4-H is limited, so persistent community support is necessary to continue this program.
Challenges & Opportunities

Individual and Community Food Security

Introduction

Food security is defined as continued access to healthy, culturally appropriate, and affordable food. Food security is not the only way to measure the health of a food system, but it can be evaluated on both a large-scale community level and an individual or family level. Does the community as a whole have access to healthy food? Does each family get the food they need to live healthfully? Nutrition education may be most important to individual food security, while insistence on healthy food in grocery stores may be more necessary for community food security.

Cooking & Nutrition Education

The physical presence of healthy food in a community is futile if local residents do not know how to use that food. A huge barrier in creating healthier communities is that people simply do not know how to use a wide variety of fruits, vegetables, grains, and meats.

Challenge:

“People don’t always know what to do with fresh food.” – South Valley produce farmer

Kerstin Britz, a mental health therapist through South Lane Mental Health, described the knowledge barrier of cooking with raw ingredients in many of her clients and the low-income community in general.

At Community Food for Creswell, food pantry clients were asked about their greatest challenges to cooking healthy food. Among a wide range of answers, a common response was that clients don’t know how to plan for meals: “I never seem to have all the needed ingredients at once.”

Opportunity: A growing practice in food pantries throughout Oregon is the inclusion of recipes within food boxes. These recipes show pantry clients how to use unfamiliar food items, and may include ideas for meal planning as the clients move through the pantry. This practice is just one example of the movement toward client empowerment to learn more about healthy food consumption.

Opportunity: In the past, Sustainable Cottage Grove has sponsored Cooking Matters classes in the Cottage Grove community. These classes take place over a series of weeks and provide hands-on education on meal preparation, grocery shopping, budgeting, and nutrition.

The Seed to Supper: Gardening on a Budget class series offers a curriculum that teaches the basics of gardening so that families have the confidence to grow some of their own fresh produce. This curriculum was developed by OSU Extension and the Oregon Food Bank. The 6-week series was offered in Cottage Grove this spring and will be offered in Spanish for English as a Second Language families in partnership with Peggy’s Primary Connection and the SLSD Farm to School Program. Continued support and expansion of these programs will provide more families with the tools and knowledge to increase their own food security.

Home Processing & Preservation

“People don’t preserve their own food like they used to,” says one berry farmer in Cottage Grove. He’s noticed a decline in his farm’s berry sales over the past few decades, as home preservation of berries and other fruit into jams and preservatives becomes less common. Home processing not only increases the availability of nutrients from autumn’s abundance harvest throughout the winter months, it also reduces waste within our food stream.
Challenges & Opportunities

Challenge: Knowledge of home processing was once passed down from generation to generation, but within the past few decades that generational knowledge has been lost. “Most of our younger families are more food insecure than the older ones,” says one Drain resident, “because they don’t know how to grow or preserve their own food.”

Opportunity: Food preservation was identified as a priority for food system growth at the first cgFEAST meeting in April 2014. Since then, Beth Pool from Sustainable Cottage Grove has hosted a series of OSU Extension Master Food Preserver classes throughout the year in Cottage Grove. These courses cover a variety of home processing techniques. Continued support for the Master Food Preserver course in Cottage Grove and outlying communities will not only educate individuals about the importance of home processing, but also help build a community of home preservers that can share resources and information.

Community Gardens

Growing your own food increases awareness of healthy food, promotes individual and family food security, and often leads to higher qualities of life through time spent working in nature.

Challenge: A number of Creswell food pantry clients remarked that they would be interested in growing their own food if they had room for a home garden. Community members who live in low-income housing or apartment buildings often don’t have backyards or space for planting. While community gardens may provide the space that apartments lack, transportation to these community gardens can also be an inhibitor to growing one’s own food.

Opportunity: Barrel gardens have been used successfully in the past by a few clients of South Lane Mental Health. Donated barrels can provide space for growing herbs or limited vegetables on porches or under-neath windows.

Opportunity: Community gardens at local food pantries can increase access to food growing opportunities. Food pantries tend to be familiar places for low-income community members, and are visited weekly or monthly. Community Sharing in Cottage Grove has a large garden space, complete with an herb garden, fruit trees, and raised beds. Currently the garden is managed by community volunteers. If Community Sharing developed a client garden program, retired patrons and local community members who do not work during the day would be able to grow food that is appropriate for their lifestyle and culture.

Opportunity: Selling high quality seeds all over the world, Territorial Seed Company is a long-standing and valuable resource in Cottage Grove. Every year Territorial Seed Co. donates seeds to schools and community organizations all over the country. Southern Willamette Valley schools, food pantries, or community garden organizations could capitalize on local connections to this donation program by coordinating efforts to write donation requests.

Challenge: Bill at Community Sharing stands next to the pantry garden
Challenges & Opportunities

Food Access

Introduction
Is healthy, local food accessible in our rural communities? This question of access incorporates many layers. When asked about the greatest challenges to cooking healthy food, Creswell food pantry clients identified several that are related to food access:

1. Limited availability of affordable grocery stores
2. Lack of transportation to groceries and/or pantries
3. Healthy food is too expensive
4. Not enough time to cook from scratch
5. No kitchen and/or appliances to cook from scratch

As identified in the community profiles, many communities in the Southern Willamette Valley lack full grocery stores and have limited public transportation. Resources that do exist are not always obtainable: hours of operation, language spoken, and inclusive environments all affect the availability of resources.

Rural Grocery Stores
Rural, independently-owned grocery stores at one time were centers of commerce for rural communities. Today they are no longer the primary food access point for most Southern Willamette Valley residents. High prices and low food variety at corner stores push rural residents to Wal-Mart, Safeway, Eugene or Roseburg to purchase the bulk of their groceries. Independent rural grocery stores are well-positioned to strengthen the food resiliency of rural towns: theoretically they can provide a much shorter distance from farm to consumer than large-scale chain grocers who buy from large distribution companies. Without enough support from farmers and consumers, though, rural groceries typically operate as convenience stores.

Challenge:
“I’d like to sell more produce, but perishable items are expensive to keep on the shelves.”
Rural Grocery Owner

Rural grocery stores in southern Lane County in general fall short in providing high-quality fresh produce to rural communities. Rural grocery store owners interviewed for this food assessment named a variety of challenges to stocking fresh food in their stores:

1. Fresh produce has a shortened shelf life. If fruits and vegetables don’t move off the shelf fast enough, they go bad and cost the grocery store money.

2. Many rural grocery stores buy foodstuffs from regional or statewide distribution companies. These distributors typically limit deliveries to rural stores to once or twice a week. With fewer deliveries to rural stores, owners tend to choose products with longer shelf-lives.

3. Not enough residents in rural towns shop at the local grocery store. Many consumers shop for groceries in the same town where they work. Other consumers prefer to travel longer distances for higher-quality or cheaper food.
Opportunity: Community LendingWorks is a community development financial institution, an affiliate nonprofit with the NEDCO corporation. This organization provides educational support and loan programs to small businesses in need of capital to grow specifically in Lane County. Community LendingWorks partners with small markets, microenterprises, and small businesses like rural grocery stores.

Transportation

Within a strong food system, consumers are able to physically get to markets to buy healthy food. Transportation to markets and other resources can be a barrier to accessing good food. In general, distances between resources are greater in rural areas and public transportation is not nearly as comprehensive as in urban centers. Low-income community members and seniors are generally more dependent on shared transportation.

Challenge: The North Douglas Health Needs Assessment steering committee identified transportation as one of the biggest challenges to community members in northern Douglas County. The public transportation system that services central Douglas County does not extend to Yoncalla, Drain, or Elkton. In southern Lane County, the Lane Transit District provides service between Creswell and Cottage Grove, but does not reach Lorane or Dorena. Many residents of the Southern Willamette Valley depend on grocery stores in Eugene, Roseburg, or Cottage Grove for food. Residents without reliable transportation to those cities,
Challenges & Opportunities

though, may rely more heavily on local grocery stores that do not provide the same quality of food.

Opportunity: Mobile farmers markets have been able to provide rural and low-income communities with fresh produce on a weekly basis around the country. These operations, often based out of the back of a refrigerated storage container, do not require the start-up infrastructure of a permanent grocery store. However, they can be expensive to maintain long-term and do require continued funding support. The USDA Farmers Market Promotion Program grant has supported mobile market implementation in the past, and state-wide economic development programs may also provide financial support.

Opportunity: A volunteer-based produce delivery service within Cottage Grove or the greater Southern Willamette Valley is another solution for transportation barriers. The Community Sharing food pantry receives large quantities of fresh produce every day of the week from regional food bank Food for Lane County. If that produce is not redistributed to pantry clients before the weekend, the produce is often donated as farm animal feed.

To ensure that any leftover fresh produce reaches pantry clients, a few committed volunteers with their own transportation could pick up produce from Community Sharing on Friday afternoon and drop it off at selected points throughout the community. With basic volunteer organization, a partnership with the local food pantry, and a few hours of commitment every week, a produce delivery program could bring very tangible results to improving food security within a community.

Financial Obstacles to Healthy Food Access

If local food is not affordable for all members of the community, then it is not truly accessible. The higher cost of healthy food prohibits some people from selecting it instead of cheaper processed foods. One way to encourage healthy food consumption in the Southern Willamette Valley is to maximize the use of resources that are already available to low-income community members, such as SNAP benefits.

Challenge: Many fixed-income community members identified affording food as a major challenge to eating healthfully, and cooking from scratch is often perceived as more expensive than buying pre-packaged or fast food. When clients at Creswell’s food pantry were surveyed about challenges to cooking healthy food, over 60% thought healthy food is too expensive. Although many rural farmers’ markets accept SNAP benefits as well as a growing number of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs, not all residents know about this opportunity to spend their SNAP dollars on local fruits and vegetables.
**Opportunity:** Every year more programs develop to engage SNAP users with local food systems. Local farmers can use Oregon-specific guides on accepting SNAP benefits for CSA's, which would allow them to market to a much wider section of the community. More farmers markets now accept SNAP, thanks to a few different statewide farmers market organizations. Community-wide promotional campaigns need to advertise these resources, both to farmers and SNAP users. One potential partnership is the Farmers Market Fund, which provides educational and promotional materials for SNAP outreach.

Additionally, SNAP Match programs provide a dollar match when consumers use SNAP dollars at local markets. For example, by spending $5 in SNAP money, the consumer is given an extra $5 to spend from a matching fund. This matching fund is often fundraised by the market or greater community, or donated by a local business. SNAP Match programs increase the purchasing power of low-income individuals, provide financial incentive to purchase local food, and support local farmers by expanding cash flow at a market.

**Opportunity:** Local/organic/healthy food is often perceived as more expensive than other food items, yet the reality is that fresh fruits and vegetables at a farmers market are often cheaper than store-bought produce. The fresh produce offered at market may also last longer, further extending food dollars. A local price comparison of fresh produce at farm stands or farmers markets and the cost of produce at various grocery stores may help dispel some of these myths about buying local food.

**Opportunity:** In 2016 the South Lane School District implemented the Farm to School program with funding support from the USDA Farm to School Grant Program and the ODE Farm to School program. Programs like Farm to School can help provide all students, regardless of family income, with healthy food options throughout the day. For schools with high rates of Free and Reduced Lunch participants, where more students eat school lunches, this program can have an especially great impact to increase daily healthy food access.

**Emergency Food Services**

“Just because we are having a bad time doesn’t mean we don’t want to eat fresh food.”

Creswell food pantry client

Although food pantry providers typically identify their programs as “emergency” food services, the reality of hunger in Oregon means that some families rely on food boxes every month to meet their basic food needs. Dependency on food pantries is an indicator of larger challenges in rural communities, such as a lack...
of economic opportunities, mental health needs, and housing insecurity. Whether food pantries are a last resort or a constant supply of food, clients receiving food boxes deserve access to healthy food.

**Challenge:** Many food pantry volunteers identified two hurdles to providing healthy, high-quality food to clients. The first barrier is that food pantries rely on food donations, whether from community members and organizations, regional food banks, or private businesses. Some pantries are able to buy food to supplement these donations, but rarely have enough money to choose the high-quality food they might prefer. “All of our shopping is done at UCAN [the regional food bank in Roseburg] because we can’t afford to go anywhere else,” explains a food pantry coordinator in Drain.

The other major barrier is unfamiliarity with healthy food. As pantry volunteers in Creswell and Dorena both pointed out, some clients are “set in their ways” and don’t want to try the different kinds of healthy food that come through the pantry. “If I talk to them about it, even though they might not try it the first time around, after a few months they might put it in their box,” says one volunteer from Dorena on how she gets clients to select the new foods that are donated to the pantry.

**Opportunity:** Food for Lane County (FFLC) is the regional food bank for the partnering food pantries in Lane County, meaning that they collect and redistribute large food donations from the Oregon Food Bank and other partners. FFLC initiated a Farm-to-Table program, through which the food bank partners with farms to provide higher quality food to local food pantries. Currently FFLC provides a variety of dried goods and shelf-stable foods, like lentils, barley, and applesauce, through this Farm-to-Table program.

“What if our food pantries operated more like food hubs?” asks Kara Smith of Food for Lane County. Within the past decade, food pantries have already shifted toward empowering low-income clients who depend on their services by, for example, implementing shopping-style pantries, offering culturally-diverse food, and including nutrition and cooking information alongside food products. The next step, suggests Kara, is that food pantries start connecting consumers to local producers by procuring local food. Small rural food pantries have very limited resources for purchasing food, so community partnerships may be essential for assisting in funding for local food purchases.

**Opportunity:** The South Lane Food Project was a successful community food drive initiative with the intent to support Community Sharing with locally-donated food. Although the Food Project was initially very successful, bringing in thousands of pounds of food for the pantry, ultimately it faltered due to lack of continued organizational support. Volunteer time is needed to collect donated food, deliver to the pantry, and maintain community outreach and interest in the program (in the past, social media were successful in involving the community). One of the greatest benefits of this program is that the community can respond directly to the needs of the food pantry, which may vary from month to month.
A resilient food system is collaborative, diverse, and adaptable to changing circumstances. Strong community food systems capitalize on their own resources to build capacity among all community members.

Over the past two years, the cgFEAST local food movement has facilitated community workshops and educational events that promote our local food system. Successful completed and ongoing projects include community garden volunteering, food preservation workshops, local food and agriculture advocacy, and revitalizing the local Dorena Grange. To continue to grow this movement in Cottage Grove and throughout the Southern Willamette Valley, the next step is to include more voices from the community in the local food discussion.

Challenge: The overarching challenge to including more voices, especially the underserved populations in rural communities, is that many community members do not identify with the local food movement.

“When someone’s daily struggle is affording their own food, they probably don’t care where it comes from,” reasons one Cottage Grove resident who works with low-income populations.

Minority populations may feel disconnected because of the language used at meetings. Lisa Colgan with A Primary Connection in Cottage Grove also points out, “our Latino families aren’t really ‘event-goers’. “It’s not in their culture to go to a formal meeting during the week.” Lisa also explains that while some Latino families have lived in Cottage Grove for many years, they still perceive themselves as “unwelcome” to the rest of the town. “We need to bring these families out of their homes and into their community!”

Interviews with low-income community members and workers identified a few specific factors that inhibit attendance to community meetings, including timing, location and/or transportation to the event, and childcare availability.

Opportunity: As the local food movement gains momentum in Cottage Grove and the Southern Willamette Valley, local community organizations must respond to these specific needs to be more inclusive. For example, food movement meetings could be held in the food pantry to be more accessible to low-income participants and help reduce stigmas about food pantry clients. A Spanish interpreter at a community food meeting would reduce both the language barrier and perceptions of exclusion within the Latino community. Providing childcare would make meetings more accessible for young parents. Regardless of how intensively these resources have been used at past meetings, they need to be available as often as possible throughout the year. Inclusivity needs to be an enduring conversation.
Conclusion

What can a healthy food system do for our community?

After moving to the Southern Willamette Valley, I was first struck and then heartened by the strong rural identities of each community. Prior to this community food assessment, I conducted food system work in a more urban area of Oregon, where I saw so many towns struggle to determine their unique sense of community. The communities here already have an awareness of their own resources: “There’s a deep heritage and sense of culture here” said one long-time resident of northern Douglas County. Lorane is so clearly a vastly different place than Dorena or Drain. Cottage Grove often seems to have two strong, sometimes opposing personalities. From what I’ve seen, that sense of identity comes from pride of place, and it is one of the greatest resources I’ve found in the Southern Willamette Valley.

This Community Food Assessment addresses three central questions. First, we ask Why? The process of writing a CFA is important because it can be a community organizing tool; a strong local food system is essential because it leads to heathier individuals, economies, and environments. A second question, “What can we do to strengthen our local food systems?” was answered in the Challenges and Opportunities section. Finally, we must ask ourselves a third question to help guide our local food organizing: What can a strong and resilient local food system do for our community?

The answer to that question will be different for everyone. My answer is also, in my view, the greatest challenge to food system development in the Southern Willamette Valley. A strong food system can bring communities together. Everyone eats. Gathering together over food is an age-old tradition. A strong food system can build an inclusive community, one that celebrates our diversity of people and food. The challenge is to consistently ask ourselves, “Who’s voice is not at this table? How can we change that?”

I see the Farm to School movement as a huge step and success in this direction. This program is already capitalizing on many resources in Cottage Grove (community connections, local food producers, dedication and leadership from many individuals) to extend the reach of our local food system into our schools. I hope our community uses the momentum from Farm to School to look for what can come next. Perhaps other institutions will be inspired to purchase locally from farmers who are now better equipped to work on a wholesale level. Maybe students can be encouraged to bring their parents to the farmers’ market to look for the foods they tried in school. Farm to School is just one example of an opportunity to pull more people into the local food conversation. Whether we build on Farm to School or any other of the incredible movements already taking place, the future of our community food system is bright and bountiful.
Executive Summary

Opportunities for Strengthening our Local Food System

Land
- Create formal platform to connect emerging farmers with landowners
- Local farmer participation in the National Young Farmers Coalition

Water
- NRCS and USDA water management and conservation programs
- Implement dry farming practices through OSU Extension Small Farms program

Local Markets: Direct to Consumer
- Increase farmers’ market participation through strategic market planning (location, board of directors) and advertising campaigns

Local Markets: Retail
- Build farm infrastructure to lengthen growing season and increase farm capacity through NRCS programs
- Form strategic partnerships between farmers and retail stores

Distribution
- Establish a communication platform between farmers and local businesses

Food Processing
- Build small-scale processing infrastructure for small-scale producers

Cold Storage
- Build community cold storage facilities for small-scale producers

Labor
- Rogue Farm Corps connects farm interns with established farmers

Community Education
- Publish a locally-grown guide specifically for the Southern Willamette Valley to highlight local food markets, producers, and organizations
- Continued support for community education projects like Celebrate Our Farmers and Meet My Farmer
- Support ongoing partnership with local news outlets, like the Cottage Grove Sentinel, to feature local food system events and educational pieces

Resource Sharing
- Continued outreach to maintain and grow the South Valley Farmers Network

Natural Resource Knowledge
- Create a map of the South Willamette Valley’s agricultural resources (soils, vegetation, zoning, etc)

Navigating Agricultural Support Systems
- Develop a resource guide for farmers specific to the South Willamette Valley to facilitate access to agricultural resources

Vocational Training
- Advocate for vocational classes and local 4-H programs
Executive Summary

Cooking and Nutrition Education
- Provide recipes for new or unfamiliar food items in local food pantries
- Implement and support local educational opportunities, including Cooking Matters and OSU Extension Seed to Supper classes

Home Processing and Preservation
- Support and grow OSU Extension Master Food Preserver classes

Community Gardens
- Provide barrel gardens to community members without home garden space
- Increase community garden activity at local food pantries, including the opportunity for pantry clients to work in the garden
- Coordinate an annual request from Territorial Seed Co. for local seed donations to schools, food pantries, etc.

Rural Grocery Stores
- Coordination with tourism activities for increased outreach
- Resources through the Rural Grocery Store Initiative & local community development organizations like Community LendingWorks

Transportation
- Implement mobile farmers’ markets
- Produce-delivery service to move excess produce from food pantries

Financial Obstacles to Healthy Food Access
- SNAP Outreach for local food markets
- Local price comparison of fresh food to dispel myths about buying local

Emergency Food Services
- Develop a Farm-to-Pantry program to connect local farmers with pantry clients
- Re-organize the South Lane Food Project to collect food items from community food drives

Community Resilience
- Encourage greater inclusivity in through local food movement
Appendix A

Community Food for Creswell Food Pantry Client Survey

1. What food do you most like receiving from the pantry? ______________________________

2. What two foods would help you better prepare meals or do you need more of? _____________________
____________________________________________________________________________

3. What do you use to cook your food? Check all that apply:

  □ Stove
  □ Oven
  □ Microwave
  □ Stove
  □ Oven
  □ Microwave
  □ Crockpot
  □ Other
  □ No appliance

4. Are you interested in growing your own food? ____________________________________

5. What is your biggest challenge to cooking healthy food? Check all that apply:

  □ No grocery stores in town
  □ Healthy food is too expensive
  □ I don’t have time to cook healthy food
  □ I don’t have access to cooking appliances
  □ I don’t have access to a kitchen
  □ I’m unsure how to prepare healthy food
  □ Other ____________________________________________________________

6. Where else do you normally get food? Check all that apply:

  □ Community meal sites
  □ Convenience stores
  □ Hunt/Fish
  □ Grow my own food
  □ Farmers Market
  □ Eugene Grocery Store
  □ Grocery Outlet
  □ Wal-Mart
  □ Safeway
  □ Farmlands Market

7. How many times each month do you get fresh produce or bread through the weekly Produce and Bread pro-
gram? If you don’t use the program, why?

  □ Once / Month
  □ Twice / Month
  □ Three times / Month
  □ Every week
  □ None

8. How else could the Creswell food pantry better serve you and your family?


5. ibid.


7. ibid.

8. ibid.

9. ibid.


14. ibid.


18. ibid

19. ibid

21. ibid.

