Rural Lane County
Community Food Assessment

The Assessment Team

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Cover Photo: Farmers at Alpha Farm.
Small photos (left to right): Chantrelle mushrooms from the Siuslaw forest; piglets from Porter Acres; volunteer at the Oakridge Food Box.
This assessment would not have been possible without support from Florence, Oakridge, and the McKenzie River. Thank you for opening your churches, schools, farms, restaurants, grocery stores, and food pantries to share the stories that have informed 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.

Four years ago 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
Community Resource Developer
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Purpose:
The Rural Lane County Community Food Assessment identifies the needs and assets of three rural food systems in order to increase awareness among community members. This process has laid a foundation for building food security in rural Lane County.

Regions:
While many assessments have been completed for Lane County as a whole, this document focuses particularly on rural communities, specifically those that are at the three furthest corners of the county.
1. The City of Florence and the coastal region
2. The City of Oakridge
3. The communities along the McKenzie River Valley, east of Springfield

What We Are Seeking:
- How do rural populations access food and what barriers do they face?
- What kind of organizing efforts can build food security?

What We Found:
- Each rural food system is unique, yet many of their challenges and assets are shared.
- Existing rural resources, including food retail outlets, emergency food programs, and community food efforts, are limited in scope and need more support.
- Community organizing is rural areas has the potential to be truly impactful.

Outcomes and Goals:
1. Increase local food production and food distribution in rural areas.
2. Create alternative models for purchasing food cooperatively.
3. Develop educational opportunities related to gardening, nutrition, and cooking.
4. Facilitate discussions and workshops to build food literacy and food security.
The Language of Food Security

A food system represents the sum of activities required to make food available to people.

- **Food Production** involves livestock, agriculture, fisheries, foraging, and ranches and exists at many different scales. Seeds, starts, sustainable land use, certifications, urban agriculture (including community gardens and home gardens) are also involved in food production.

- **Processing** includes all activities involved in preparing and storing food, including chopping, grinding, freezing, packaging, canning, and transporting food. Commercial kitchens, processing plants (such as canneries), value-added food facilities, home kitchens, and restaurants are different facilities used to process food.

- **Distribution** involves transportation and food retail. Food retail occurs in many different forms including grocery stores, wholesale, institutional cafeterias, restaurants, direct markets (ie. farmers’ markets, CSA’s, and farm stands), and food assistance programs (ie. food pantries, meal sites, and government programs).

- **Consumption** of food depends on many factors related to access and ability. Cooking food requires knowledge, ability, and equipment. Healthy consumption depends on lifestyle, income, and disease prevention. Education and awareness campaigns can promote healthier lifestyles.

- **Waste** occurs throughout the whole food system, and includes unharvested food, food packaging, pre and post consumer food waste, and food recovery (past sell by dates). Food waste goes into composts and landfills, or is used as animal feed.

Community Foods Organizing is the process of bringing together a variety of stakeholders to reshape a local food system that is more responsive to the needs and assets of a community. The goal of that organizing is to respect, promote and celebrate the culture of that community as well as seek to improve its economic well-being. These values are at the heart of this food assessment.

Community food security articulates a vision in which a defined geographical region is able to feed its residents while simultaneously addressing a range of factors related to employment, environmental stewardship, and individual health.¹

A Community Food Assessment is a collaborative and participatory process that systematically examines a broad range of community food issues and assets, so as to inform change actions to make the community more food secure.²

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Lane County houses a total population of 351,715\(^1\). While the majority of people are concentrated in the Eugene/Springfield area, roughly one fifth of the population lives in rural areas at varying distance from the urban core. The communities addressed in this assessment were selected for further study because they lie in the three furthest corners of the county.

Florence sits on the coast with the Coastal Range separating it from the urban core of the county. Quickly becoming a destination for recent retirees, the city of roughly 8,466 people holds a vibrant sense of community organizing. The first section of the assessment will look at food production occurring in Lane County’s coast, as well as different community efforts around local food distribution.

Oakridge sits in stark contrast to the quaint coastal town of Florence. Situated in the foothills of the Cascades, the town is struggling to redefine its lost identity since the fall of the logging boom. With alarmingly high levels of unemployment and a population of 3,191, the city possesses an emergency food system that feeds roughly one third of its constituency. The assessment will analyze the biggest barriers in accessing food for residents of Oakridge and the surrounding communities, and potential opportunities for networking with the eastern part of the valley.

The communities along the McKenzie River face very different challenges. Despite a high number of food producers in the region, a string of unincorporated communities that house 4,427 people rely only on small convenience stores for a 50-mile stretch. The section of the assessment will explore the biggest challenges for the region and analyze some opportunities to increase access to food producers in the lower river valley.

In the 2010-2011 fiscal year which ended in June of 2011, a total of 68,048 individuals in Lane County accessed an Emergency Food Box, an increase of 8% over the prior fiscal year. In rural areas, the numbers are even more dramatic, with a significant portion of the population relying permanently on the local food pantry. This high level of community food insecurity is alarming in a region with a lush valley as the Willamette. This document will analyze the paradox at hand in the context of Florence, Oakridge, and Blue River, and assess the ability for these regions to become more food secure.

Food Insecurity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Oregon</th>
<th>Lane County</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment Rate</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Insecurity Rate</td>
<td>16.8%</td>
<td>18.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Local Agriculture

The county expands from the Pacific Ocean to the Cascades and includes parts of the Siuslaw, Willamette, and Umpqua National Forests. The Willamette Valley, home to prime agricultural land, runs through the center of Lane County and provides numerous opportunities for agriculture in the area. As a whole, agriculture in Lane County includes a great diversity of crops, with major crops being grass seed, grain and hay, filberts, and Christmas trees. In 2007, Lane County had a total of 3,335 farms, with over 1300 between 10-49 acres.

While the average market value of products sold per farm is $39,307, most of this money is respent to cover overhead and operation costs.

Through interviews conducted with Lane County farmers, trends were noticed in terms of the challenges that they face. These challenges are shared by many small to mid size farmers and relate to their own production

Census of Agriculture, USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service, 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># of Farms</th>
<th>3,335</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Land in Farms (acres)</td>
<td>245,531</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Size of Farm (acres)</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Size of Farm (acres)</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Acres in Organic Production</td>
<td>1995 (107 farms)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Census of Agriculture, USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service, 2007

Top ten agriculture commodities in Lane County, 2011. Oregon State University Extension Service.
practices as well as distribution efforts. Addressing these challenges are important for supporting our regional food producers as well as for meeting the demands for food in rural areas.

**Cost of Labor:** All of the food producers interviewed for this assessment agree that their biggest cost is hiring labor. As is widely known, agriculture requires lots of physical labor, especially in order to operate at a commercial scale. Without the promise of a lucrative harvest and labor laws around minimum wage and insurance, farm owners often struggle to make ends meet. Many farms are supplemented by off-farm income to have greater cash flow.

**Certifications and Regulations:** Certifications set important standards for production practices and often help food producers with marketing. Organically certified produce can sell for sometimes as much as double the price, even if uncertified producers farm organically. Getting certified can be both expensive and time consuming. In order to ensure that all farmers get the full price of the products they produce, the certification process must remain simple.

**Rising Age of Food Producers:** The average age of farmers in Lane county is 57.6\textsuperscript{2}. With many of them operating small to mid size farms that have been in the family for years, it is not always certain that new generations will want to take over. Internship and apprentice programs can help train future generations of food producers.

**Distribution in Rural Areas:** In rural areas there is less demand for local food because there of a smaller population. With less certainty that they will sell their products, distributing rurally does not always make financial sense. More often than not, this reality pushes food producers in Lane County to sell through markets in Eugene, where there is a guaranteed customer base. CSA’s, food buying clubs, and farm stands can all be adapted for distributing food in rural areas.

\textsuperscript{2} Census of Agriculture, USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service, 2007
Florence, OR sits on the western most edge of Lane County on the Pacific Ocean, at the mouth of the Siuslaw River. Located roughly one hour out of Eugene, the incorporated city of Florence houses a population of 8,466 people. Farther inland from the coast, several unincorporated cities, including Mapleton, Deadwood, and Swisshorne, speckle the region. This area is located on the opposite side of the Coastal Range Mountains to the Willamette Valley and thus farther removed from the agriculturally productive regions of the county. At one point Florence was a thriving fishing and logging community, yet the demise of both of these industries has led to the emergence of tourism as an economic driver. The coastal geography creates inherent barriers for food access, but at the same time opportunities for building food security.

**Total Population:** 8,466  
**Median Age:** 58  
**Unemployment Rate:** 7.26%  
**Median Household Income:** $33,586

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### History

The Siuslaw Indians were the first inhabitants of Lane County’s coastal region and survived by means of fishing, hunting, and gathering. The first white settlers arrived to Florence in 1836, and migration to the area quickly expanded once gold and coal deposits were discovered in Oregon around 1850.

At the turn of the 20th century, fishing was a major economic industry. The Port of Siuslaw was established in 1909 and facilitated the expansion of commercial fishing in the River. A number of canneries thrived, processing upwards of 1000 fish per day in 1892. By 1915, fish were moving to Eugene by the ton for shipment north and south. However, conservation efforts and price conflicts limited the continual growth.

Logging was also once a major source of employment for the town. Passing through the Siuslaw National Forest, the Siuslaw River became an important timber transportation site. Five saw mills were in operation in the Florence vicinity in 1892. The sawmills were located along the Siuslaw River, where logs could be gathered easily and then shipped down river to the ocean for transport to San Francisco.

The economic drivers that kept Florence afloat throughout the 19th and 20th centuries deteriorated for several reasons and left many unemployed. New conservation policies marked the end of the logging industry in the late 1980’s, and the commercial fishing industry was gradually outsourced to larger coastal cities like Newport and Coos Bay.

Today, Florence is advertised as a retirement community, with almost 40% of the population over the age of 65. Warehouses have been converted into senior retirement centers and many younger folks seek work in nearby hospitals or as live-in caregivers to the elderly population. To boost tourism and help with high unemployment rates, the Three Rivers Casino opened in 2008 and currently employs over 500 people. Other efforts include opening up the Oregon Dunes National Recreation Area to visitors, which stretch in a long narrow band along the central Oregon coast, passing through Florence.

This history provides a backdrop for understanding the food system region on Lane County’s coast. Though this area’s economy has historically been fueled by food production in commercial fishing, it now places faith in tourism to restore economic prosperity. As a result, the way that residents feed themselves have drastically changed. While these changes have made it difficult to capitalize on locally produced food, new community food efforts have emerged that can help build greater food security in the region.
A food system often stretches beyond the boundaries of a single community where the majority of residents live, and can encompass an entire geographical region from which food can be gleaned. Sources of food around and outside of Florence include agriculture on the old flood plains, fish that swim in the flowing waters, wildlife in the National Forest, and animals in open pasture. This section explores sources of food in the coastal region of Lane County and expand on their potential to be viable sources of food for local residents.

**Agriculture**

On its western edge, just beyond the coast range, Lane County’s climate changes dramatically leading to a general decline in the number of farms and agricultural businesses. With cooler temperatures and more rainfall, the growing season on the coast is much shorter, generally running from May through September and is limited in terms of what can be grown here. Billy Burruss, a home gardener located in Deadwood, OR, explains, “We can’t grow a lot of things here, like tomatoes, eggplant, and peppers... but cool weather crops do well here, such as berries, brassicas, and fruit trees.”

While commercial farms are an uncommon sight immediately off the coast, several do exist a bit farther inland. There are also a growing number of home gardeners growing food for personal consumption or for neighbors. Commercial farms sell their products within the region to small grocery stores, restaurant businesses, the Florence Organic Farmer’s Market, and through CSA shares. Like many small farmers in Oregon, they face many challenges.

Geography and climate are important factors when it comes to growing food. When these factors present limitations, modifications must be made. Directly off the coast the soil is too sandy to grow food without adding new soil or building raised beds. The wetter climate also requires farmers to rely on greenhouses if they intend to grow certain crops or grow year round. These equipment investments are expensive, making it difficult for many farms to get established and nearly impossible for them to become profitable.

**Sourcing Organic Seed**

A diversity of products in our food system depends on the availability of diverse plant seeds. Breeding and selection of seeds is a highly controlled business regulated by government, corporations, universities, and plant breeders. More often than not, their practices determine what options we as cooks, gardeners, farmers, and eaters have access to. For organic growers, finding organic seeds is a challenge. Because of the commercial unavailability of organic seeds, many organic certifiers, such as Oregon Tilth, do not necessarily require organic growers to use organic seed. Growers can justify the use of nonorganic seed if the plant variety that they want to grow is not found to be available in organic seed or if up to three sources do not offer that variety. This means that not all certified organic farmers are necessarily using organic seeds due to lack of availability.

More efforts are currently happening by Oregon Tilth and other organizations to increase the commercial availability of organic seeds. The power truly rests with growers who create a demand for organic seed depending on who they buy from. Major distributors of organic seed include Seeds of Change and Hi Mowing. Additionally, the farmers at Open Oak Farm in Linn County have set up a seed-saving operation called Adaptive Seeds to protect and propagate varieties that grow well in the Pacific Northwest. They will receive their organic certification at the end of the year. Many organic growers choose these seed companies because buying in bulk from a single entity is often the most cost-effective.
Whiskey Creek Organics is located just across the Siuslaw River from Highway 126 between Mapleton and Florence. Roughly eight miles inland from the coast, the climate and farming conditions are a bit more forgiving than those immediately off the coast. Still, the farm’s proximity to the Siuslaw River creates challenges during the flood season. With three to four acres in production at a time, Whiskey Creek follows organic practices and is certified by Oregon Tilth and USDA. Their major crops are fruits, berries, vegetables, and legumes.

Whiskey Creek’s strict 50-mile radius means that for these farmers, even selling to Eugene isn’t local enough. They previously sold at the farmers’ markets in Florence, the Real Food Coop (see Feature on p.14), and other local food businesses, but now have turned their efforts to marketing through Community Supported Agriculture (CSA). This will increase direct sales to consumers and get additional money at the beginning of the season when it is needed most.

The presence of an organic farm on the coast run and managed by young farmers represents a huge asset for the coastal region. Also, with increasing pressure to develop open land for housing or tourist purposes, it is extremely valuable for this land to be farmed, and even better that it is done so with a focus on sustainability and environmental stewardship.

With their first year doing a CSA, the farm is meeting a steadily increasing demand for local food in the Florence region. Still, establishing organic practices, maintaining soil health, and growing such a diversity of crops is both labor intensive and expensive. As a start-up farm they have had many upfront investments, yet to be offset by the profit generated through distribution. Their debt will take many years to pay off and require significant off-farm income. However, their environmentally conscious approach and emphasis on supplying food to the local area are invaluable assets for the region.

“Our vision is to supply food that was grown with the land in mind. Land that gets better with time rather than weaker. Land that produces healthy, disease resistant plants that in turn produce healthy nutrient rich food.”
Greenfield Farm resides at the end of a winding dirt road about 15 miles outside of Florence. There lies a 172-acre property of which ten acres are used for food production. Greenfield Farm grows over 100 different species of apples, as well as a variety of other fruits and vegetables. Not only do farmers John and Maria Yager grow foods that have traditionally thrived in Oregon, like brassicas, nuts, and berries, they are experimenting with growing non-native plants to see what can be adapted to the wet climate of coastal Oregon. The Yagers have experimented with a variety of herbal, edible, and medicinal plants. Gumai, pineapple guavas, sea berries, aronia, and romulus thrive here. John Yager says, “By growing these exotic plants, the knowledge of how to grow these plants is retained as well as the medicinal and edible uses of the plants. We save our seeds so that we can continue to grow them. We also plan to share these with other farmers so that they can grow them too.”

John and Maria want to increase people’s access to nutritional food, while making it affordable for those on low-incomes. In addition to selling food commercially through the Florence Organic Farmers’ Market and the Real Food Coop, he also opens up his farm to anyone struggling to put food on the table, and makes frequent donations to Florence Food Share, the community’s food pantry. One obstacle to donating food is a lack of time to harvest the food and drive it into town. He encourages gleaners to harvest his fields at the end of the season to reap any unsellable produce. The Yagers have shown that growing more food is one solution to ending hunger.

A major challenge faced by Greenfield and many farms in Oregon is the increasing age of farmers. The average age of farmers in Lane County is 57. This poses a real threat to the future of agriculture in Oregon, when the next generation is not necessarily interested or trained to take on the family farm. These mid-sized farms have the potential to simply disappear from one generation to the next. As John and Maria near retirement, their ability to stay involved in the community and continue to grow food is becoming limited. This reality is a statewide concern and it is important to start developing opportunities for educating the next generation of farmers.

“I grow food because I can share food with people.” —John Yager
In addition to agriculture, fishing represents a source of local food in the region. However, despite its location on the coast, commercial fisheries in Florence are not a significant industry for the town. While other commercial fisheries along Oregon’s coast, particularly Astoria, Newport, and Charleston, are part of a global industry, this section will explain some of the reasons that commercial fishing in Florence has not been as successful as elsewhere.

Sitting at the junction between the Siuslaw River and the Pacific Ocean, Florence’s geography has historically provided it with fishing as a protein-rich food source. The river drains an area of approximately 4,500 sq. miles, and is swimming with halibut, salmon, rockfish, clams, and crab. The Siuslaw Indians were the first to harvest the fish in this area, who occupied a majority of the land until 1850.

In 1909, the Port of Siuslaw was established on Bay Street in Florence to open the river for commercial fishing. Multiple canneries were built around this time as well, and Florence also provided Oregon’s larger ports with fishing supplies. Commercial fishing was at its peak in the early 1900’s. Today, Florence is a more attractive place for sports fishing. There are many reasons why large-scale commercial fishing is no longer successful, and why it is assumed by many that commercial fishing in Florence will never again flourish as it once did, nor as it does in other Oregon ports.

Oregon Fisheries

In 2011, all of Oregon’s commercial fisheries caught 285.1 million lbs of fish, with a total value of $145.5 million. About one third was distributed domestically, with two thirds sold through foreign markets. Much of this seafood is distributed through three major processors: Pacific Seafood Group, Trident Seafood Corporation and Bornstein Seafoods. Ironically, in 2010, the US imported 86% of its seafood consumption.

Prices paid to harvesters vary from year to year, and are determined by processors and distributors who pay harvesters the price that their wholesale customers are willing to pay. In 2011, prices paid to harvesters showed an increase from 2010.

While looking at commercial fisheries based on their harvest values is important, the health of the industry also depends on the well-being of harvesters, and that those involved in the industry are aware that there are many variations from year to year, including weather conditions, regulations, changes in abundances, and prices. Families and businesses must be flexible.

The table below shows the landings (the term used for the total fish/seafood caught in a given year) for each port in Oregon and depicts the landing amounts in Oregon’s three biggest ports: Astoria, Newport, and

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Charleston. Florence makes a small dent in the Oregon fishing business, with its presence decreasing even further. In 2004, total landings in Florence were 208,270 lbs, but by 2011 decreased to 46,303 lbs. Albacore Tuna and Dungeness Crab represent the two major fishery categories in Florence.

Challenges for Florence Fisheries

Florence’s Geography and Climate: One major challenge for fisheries in Florence is the geography of the port, located on the Siuslaw River with a dangerous bar crossing out to the open ocean. While the river is accessible, its size can only healthily support a small number of fishers. Inclement weather causes dangerous and abnormal sea conditions, and makes it difficult for fishermen to get from the Port out to the open ocean. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has historically dredged the waterway every few years, but this is costly and will most likely not continue.

Regulations around commercial distribution: Tight regulations exist in order to sell fish commercially. For example, a fisherman can only sell a fish to a consumer or institution if it has been processed in a USDA certified kitchen, unless the fish is whole (unprocessed) and sold directly off the docks or fishing vessel. In this case, the customers would need to process the fish themselves. Currently, one market in Florence sells local fish, although the majority of his product is fished out of the Newport area.

An absence of processing facilities: There are no processing facilities for commercial fishermen to store and process their catch in the Florence area. The absence of facilities such as an ice machine or a cannery makes it difficult for fishermen to preserve their catch before it is sold.

Organizing Efforts

Currently, several community groups have organized themselves around different causes. The Port of the Siuslaw is currently working on making the area more amenable to sports fishers and tourists by investing money in campgrounds and re-designing downtown.

The Siuslaw Fishermen’s Association represents the needs and concerns of commercial and sports fishermen. With tight regulations around storage and consumption of fish, commercial fishermen need processing facilities such as ice machines and kitchens, in order to store the fish once it is caught and process it for consumption. They are currently raising funds to purchase an ice machine, which would allow them to store larger quantities of fish more easily.

With or without an ice machine, the return of commercial fishing to Florence seems unlikely. Justin Yager, who fished in Florence in the 1990’s before moving to Newport, says “Commercial fishing isn’t happening because it is tough to fish there. The geography of the harbor just can’t support fishing on a commercial scale.” Still, there are several opportunities to capitalize on this rich protein source swimming around the town. More
education is needed to teach people how to fish and how to process the fish themselves. Cynthia Chandler, who runs a commercial fishing business out of Alaska but distributes in Florence sees other opportunities. She believes there could be better coordination with the processing facilities that exist along Oregon’s coast for transport and storage of locally caught fish. Growing oysters also represents an untapped market.

One opportunity to work around the processing regulations is to sell fish (whole and unprocessed) directly off the docks to consumers. If the consumer processes the fish him/herself, the regulations do not apply. While many individuals may not know how to process whole fish, education opportunities can help teach this skill. Perhaps restaurants can purchase whole fish off the docks as well and process the fish in their kitchens.
Mushroom hunting is a popular activity for both hobbyists and those seeking lucrative rewards. The Siuslaw National Forest is full of all kinds of mushrooms—most are poisonous, but many are edible. Edible mushrooms include chanterelles, lobsters, matsutakes, pines, and morels. Finding official statistics about this industry is challenging, even though a number of residents in Florence hunt mushrooms regularly during the peak season in the Fall.

Chanterelle mushrooms, the most common mushroom in this area, are bought from pickers for 2.75$/lb but sell in markets for as much as 18$/lb. Many of the mushrooms picked in the Siuslaw National Forest are sold through a chain of buyers, eventually bought by consumers as local as the Florence Farmers’ Market, but as distant at Portland, and even Europe.

The maximum amount a person is allowed to pick is 1 gallon per day, up to 6 of these mushrooms can be matsutake; anything more requires a permit obtainable through the National Forest Service. Without a permit fines range up to $5,000. There are several challenges present in foraging. First, it can often be difficult to distinguish between poisonous and edible mushrooms. Only the very experienced should harvest wild edibles. Secondly, defending one’s territory from hobbyists can prove conflict-prone. The potential for profit that these mushrooms yield has pushed searchers to mark out their territory and often protect it at extreme costs. Finally, there are sustainable and unsustainable ways to forage mushrooms. Raking the forest floor is the easiest way to find mushrooms, but this activity also irreparably harms a mushroom harvest by destroying the mycelium that forms the mushroom. It is better to cut the stems and leave a small portion of the mushroom so that the fungi will regrow over time.

Mushroom collection is not a common source of food, yet increasing interest by foraging enthusiasts has transformed the fungi into a lucrative food commodity.

### Commercial Use Permits

For those collecting more than a gallon per day of mushrooms or for those with commercial interests, a permit must be obtained from the Forest Service. Quantities under this permit are unlimited. Each person picking mushrooms commercially must have a valid permit and be at least 18 years of age.

Only the following edible mushrooms are included in this commercial use permit: Chanterelles, Boletus, Oyster, Sulfer Shelf Fungus, Slipper Jack, Imperial, Hedgehog, Shaggy Mane, Lobster, Cauliflower, Pigs Ear, and Coral Fungus.

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With small-scale agriculture, an abundance of fish, and foraging in the forest, there exist many opportunities for local food in the western region of Lane County. In addition to direct marketing opportunities that allow consumers to purchase local food, the 101 corridor has made it simple for large grocery stores to locate in Florence, which helps create access to affordable food options. Florence is home to a number of large chain grocery stores, as well as small convenience stores, and two natural food stores, both of which offer local products. Farmer’s markets and CSA’s are opportunities for local food producers to sell their products directly to consumers.

Where do you primarily get your food from?

**2012 Rural Lane County Access to Food Survey**

**Rural Food Outlets in Florence**

David Richey, LCOG, 2012.
Discount Grocery Stores

From Access to Food Surveys that were distributed in Florence, 56.7% of respondents said that a majority of their food comes from discount grocery stores. In Oakridge, 74.5% rely on these discount stores. While these stores make it difficult for local food producers and smaller food retail outlets to compete, they provide a large variety of food at affordable costs to rural populations.

Feature

Florence Grocery Outlet

With costs of food rising even in large grocery chain stores, discount grocery stores have become a popular choice for many consumers, not only those living on limited incomes. Located all over the west coast, Grocery Outlet owns store leases and heavy equipment, which is then independently operated by different franchises. Stores that are a part of the Grocery Outlet network order products from the chain on consignment out of a major distribution center in Clackamas, OR. Each store is required to present and sell their inventory in a certain way, splitting profits with the chain.

Prices at Grocery Outlet and other discount grocery stores are sometimes up to 40% underneath chain stores due to buying manufactured overruns, label changes, package changes, and overstock items from big chains. One challenge is that inventory can be inconsistent, so shoppers cannot always rely on getting the same products.

“We buy all manufactured overruns, label changes, package changes, and overstock items. Because we get big savings, our prices are sometimes up to 40% lower than chain stores.”
-Woody Woodbury, Florence Grocery Outlet

Natural Food Stores

Several natural food stores exist in Florence, selling mostly locally sourced, organic food at wholesale prices. These markets stay in business because they carry products that cannot necessarily be purchased at traditional chain groceries, especially those in rural areas. For those with special dietary needs or for those concerned with food safety and quality, these stores provide more alternatives. While food is generally more expensive at these stores, consumers that are concerned with quality and local production are willing to pay higher prices.

Nature’s Corner is a natural food store and café located off of Highway 101. The owner, Diane Raybould is an avid believer in natural food and opened her store to provide alternatives to large scale grocery stores. The café, open for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, offers natural, organic, gluten-free, and vegetarian options. It also provides additional revenue for the store. The market offers organic dairy products, bulk foods, gluten free baking products, and organic produce. Customers looking for a specific product can place special orders.
Food Cooperatives

Different models exist for cutting costs, including allowing customers to buy in bulk (choose the quantity they want to buy), and cooperative models of ownership. A food cooperative is a member-owned business, where money is pooled together to cover start-up and operations costs and profits are shared collectively. The benefit to running a business under this model is that with the increased buying power, a group of people can get more variety and better prices. Many models exist around rural Lane County, but the overarching concept of a food-buying club proves to be a good way for rural residents to increase their food options.

The Real Food Co-op

The Real Food Co-op is a small food cooperative located right off of the 101 in Florence. It is democratically owned, meaning all members pay annual membership fees and the profit is split evenly between members. Jen Nelson, the manager of the co-op, adds, “As a cooperative, all members have a voice in how the business operates.” Active members volunteer for different operating tasks around the co-op, including cashiering, stocking, cleaning, and other tasks.

As an independently run store (meaning not part of a larger grocery chain), the co-op is not limited by regulations and has more flexibility in stocking invento-

Mission: To sell healthful and nutritious food at affordable prices, with a focus on locally and sustainably grown products.
Quality and local production are two of the biggest factors when it comes to stock. Often however, these food items come with a higher cost. Jen agrees that while demand for this type of food is not exceptionally high, the people who do care about quality and local production are willing to pay higher prices.

Accordingly, all produce is sourced from local farms including Greenfield Farm and Whiskey Creek Organics (see features). What local farms cannot provide is sourced through Organically Grown Company (OGC), the largest wholesaler of organic produce that is grown in the Pacific Northwest. OGC is located in Eugene and distributes around the Pacific Northwest. OGC helps make organic food more affordable to the consumer, but often at the expense of small farmers who cannot afford to sell their crops at wholesale cost. Real Food Co-op also sells dry goods in bulk at wholesale cost, from large distributors including UNFI and Hummingbird Wholesale. The food co-op regularly place orders with local food producers and distributors. If there’s a food item that someone wants from a distributor, the item will be bought as long as it is cost effective.

Challenges

As a grocery store, the Real Food Co-op faces some significant challenges due to its size, location, and the nature of its inventory.

*Meeting minimum order requirements:* Because they purchase such a wide variety of food items and from many different distributors, meeting minimum order requirements is a serious challenge. Nelson says, “Sometimes we have trouble filling the minimum requirement. As a solution we’ll combine our orders with other small businesses, such as the Shed Bakery and Nature’s Corner.”

*Higher cost of food:* The cost of high quality food is generally higher than what is sold in large chain grocery stores. Jen explains, “Because we are a specialty store selling local and organic food, that generally costs a bit more than food at chain grocery stores, and a lot of people aren’t willing to pay that difference.

*Low overall demand:* There is low demand for natural, organic, and locally produced food, which leads to falling overall sales. With a mere 220 members in a town of 8,000, the Real Food Co-op must constantly educate people on why supporting local food is important. Jen explains, “We are trying to increase community education about buying local through hosting presentations at the store, doing press releases, and sharing information between members.” The Real Food Co-op accepts food stamps and sometimes waives membership fees for those living on limited incomes.

*Delivery to a rural town:* A final challenge is their location in a rural area. Coastal delivery is expensive or non-existent, in which case we ship orders via UPS. Sometimes smaller distributors help us out by waiving delivery fees.

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**Oceana Natural Food Cooperative**

Oceana Natural Food Cooperative is located outside of Newport and has coordinated a small alliance between rural grocery stores to address the problem of delivery fees. They organize a delivery route with many other food cooperatives and natural food stores that have similar distributors. Oceana has purchased a refrigerated truck and picks up food from a number of different distributors in Eugene and Portland. They pick up orders for other natural food stores and deliver them along a number of routes. There are routes between Eugene and the southern Oregon coast, between North Bend and Lincoln City, and between Eugene, Salem and Lincoln City.

This type of alliance is a creative solution for increasing access to higher quality food in rural areas. It is one step towards making this food more affordable. Rural stores can get better deals on orders when they order as a larger group. They also avoid paying expensive delivery fees. Finally, the environment also is a beneficiary because only one truck makes the trip to town rather than each store requiring individual transportation.
Farmers’ Markets

Farmers’ markets are places for food producers to come together to sell their goods directly to consumers. By eliminating the middleman, food producers receive the full cost of the value of their goods and customers receive a product that is at its freshest. The concept of local is central to the idea of a farmers’ market, by directly supporting local food producers and educating shoppers about what grows well in their region.

Farmers’ markets are generally perceived to be more expensive than grocery stores. This perception is tainted by seasonality especially in the Willamette Valley, with higher prices at the beginning of the season when a majority of crops are grown in greenhouses. However, it is also true that small diversified farmers have a higher cost of production than mono-crop farms that sell to grocery stores. Despite higher prices, shopping at farmers’ markets directly supports local producers.

Feature

Florence Organic Farmers’ Market

Having recently begun its 16th season, the Florence Organic Farmers’ Market brings together local food producers and local food enthusiasts together. For the 2012 season, all of the vendors are within 60 miles of Florence. John and Maria Yager from Greenfield farm helped to get the market started back in 1997, and have seen it grow into a fun community event, drawing a diversity of vendors and customers.

While there is some competition among vendors, it is the intention of the market for prices to be affordable. Several vendors have branched off to set up farm stands on different days of the week in order to avoid competition. It has been especially challenging to attract young farmers. Also, this year proved to be a difficult one for some local food producers, with unpredictable weather destroying a lot of their capital.

The market is a great community asset. In addition to attracting tourists traveling down 101, many loyal customers shop on a regular basis for their weekly produce. It is a fun event that helps build community by providing a space for families and friends to come together around food. The market accepts debit, credit, SNAP benefits, WIC, and senior coupons.

2012 Florence Organic Farmer’s Market:
Vendors: Greenfield Farm, Waters Edge Farm, Consignment Booth from Hummingbird Wholesale, Wacoca Farm
When: Saturdays 10am-2pm, thru October 27th.
Contact: 541-268-4712
Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)

In general, farming involves a significant number of risks, including high upfront investments, erratic weather, and potential for a small harvest. The burden of risk falls on the farmer who has little certainty that they will be rewarded when the harvest comes in. Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) has emerged as one solution to this risky business. In the CSA model, customers interested in supporting local farms purchase a share of the harvest at the beginning of the growing season. In a highly productive year, customers share in the bounty, but in a bad year, they reap a smaller supply of vegetables. Either way, farmers are provided with financial support upfront and are guaranteed a market for the food they will grow.

Generally, CSA members receive a weekly share that contains a variety of items throughout the course of the season. Different size shares can be purchased or split between members, and each share will usually last through the week. The CSA model is ideal for many small to mid-sized farms. Farmers can work exclusively on their farms instead of leaving to sell at farmers’ markets or make deliveries to restaurants and grocery stores. They also avoid waste by knowing exactly how much to pick for their consumers.

It is usually best to start a CSA after the first few years of producing food on a piece of land. Once a producer is more familiar with the growing season of an area, then he or she can better ensure CSA members of a bountiful harvest.

What’s in a CSA Box?
Every week is different! But here is an example of what Whiskey Creek offered in their third week of the season.

Fresh Herbs (Oregano and Sage)
Swiss Chard
Two Types of Kale
Zucchini
Green onions
Spinach
Broccoli
Beans
Peas
Strawberries

Feature

Union of Deadwood Independent Growers (UDIG)

A slight variation of the CSA model exists in Deadwood, a small community outside of Mapleton with a friendly feel and strong sense of identity. A small group of home gardeners organized themselves under the Union of Deadwood Independent Growers (UDIG), in order to share locally grown food with neighbors who don’t have gardens. Instead of a single farm selling shares of the harvest to CSA members, 6-8 home gardeners each contribute items to create CSA boxes. It serves 12 members a box once a week for ten weeks. All of the home gardeners have gardens of varying size, ranging from as small as 20x20’ to a couple acres. The main purpose of UDIG is to promote local gardening. Gardeners share resources with each other, often swap equipment and plants, and promote local gardening by sharing food with neighbors who don’t have gardens.

The same group of gardeners also runs a small farmers’ market at the Deadwood Market once a week on Sundays during the summer.

UDIG CSA Information

5-6 items per week, depending on the season, will include berries, lettuces, greens, tomatoes, green beans, corn. 10 boxes: $150; Add-on 1 dozen eggs/week for $35.
A healthy community food system provides access to affordable and nutritious food to everyone regardless of income, age, race, or gender. Unfortunately, many barriers prevent people from accessing the food they need such as cost of food, dietary needs, medical costs, or a lack of transportation. People living on low incomes are even more harshly impacted by these factors. After paying fixed bills such as housing, medical care, and schooling, food is often the first to go. The emergency food system is important for filling in the gaps when a budget runs out. It is a Band-Aid, at best, and it helps people meet immediate, emergency needs. Ultimately, building community food security consists of finding more long-term solutions that solve the root causes of hunger.

While Florence has a plethora of distribution options for food, the reality is such that certain populations face more challenges than others in putting food on the table. The food assistance safety net is an important crutch for families living on limited incomes. Currently with the economic downturn and fewer employment opportunities, a greater number of middle-income families are now turning to public assistance and emergency food programs to feed their families.

The recipients of federal assistance programs are determined based on the federal poverty guidelines. People who are living at or below 150% of the federal poverty level qualify to receive SNAP benefits, or “food stamps”. However, there are many people just above this income level who still face barriers in accessing food. Emergency food boxes, meant to be a 3-5 day supply of food, are distributed through food pantries and are meant for those living at or below 185% of the federal poverty level. Recipients of food boxes are self-declared, meaning they are not required to show proof of income as they are with SNAP benefits. Public assistance programs help families put food on the table and provide federal revenue to local businesses and agriculture. By promoting these programs and encouraging all those eligible to apply, Lane County can improve community food security and strengthen the local economy.

In Florence, 33.87% of individuals have an income that is at or less than 185% of the federal poverty line and qualify for an emergency food box. Many of these individuals do not qualify to receive SNAP benefits though still face barriers in accessing food. With 40% of the population above retirement age, it is clear that new challenges will arise for those facing old age, especially in preparing food that fits their dietary needs.

FOOD for Lane County (FFLC) is part of the Oregon Food Bank and a regional food bank that distributes food in Lane County through 114 partner agencies. A food bank coordinates the collection, storage, and transportation of food. Clients can access the food distributed from FOOD for Lane County through partner agencies, which include food pantries, free meal sites, supplemental food programs, and youth meal programs such as Snack Pack and Cereal for Youth.

Food in the Oregon Food Bank and FOOD for Lane County network comes from a variety of sources. Through The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), USDA provides FFLC with commodity foods including fruit, vegetables, grains, and protein. FFLC also receives food through the Fresh Alliance program with grocery stores, in which all food that is past the sell-by date but still perfectly edible is donated for distribution to partner agencies. A large volume of food in the FFLC network is non-perishable, however in recent years efforts have been made to bring more fresh food into the network. FFLC has started new gardens and is partnering with local farms. Initiatives are also being made to increase the quality of food that gets distributed.

High-protein food, such as meat, beans, and peanut butter, are in high demand. Many families access food from a food pantry because they can get these high-protein items, which tend to be more expensive in grocery stores. With costs of food rising, it has also become more challenging to elicit these high demand items. FFLC has recently partnered with Hunton’s Farm, a farmer in the Willamette valley that was historically grown grass-seed, to grow a lentil-barley soup mix that is high in protein. This “intentional production” not only guarantees a steady supply of high-protein food for the food bank but also promotes statewide food security by converting grass-seed growers to beans and grains.

How to Become a Partner Agency:

In the rural communities discussed in this assessment, a variety of organizations and volunteer groups provide food to the low-income. These entities may or may not be partner agencies. A partner agency can receive USDA food from FFLC and have access to more support resources. Organizations that have a 501c3 status, charitable organizations, or churches can partner with FFLC. All food received through FFLC cannot be redistributed or sold to other agencies. All organizations that meet eligibility requirements can fill out an application online and complete orientation sessions with the Agency Relations Coordinator. http://www.foodforlanecounty.org/en/programs_services/partner_agencies/become_a_partner_agency/.

Where does the food come from?

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<th>Source</th>
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<tr>
<td>Local Businesses</td>
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<tr>
<td>United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oregon Food Bank</td>
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<td>Local Food Drives</td>
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<tr>
<td>Summer Food Programs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other purchased</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>FFLC Gardens</td>
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Florence Food Share is a food pantry and partner agency of FOOD for Lane County. Initially operating out of peoples’ garages and car trunks, the agency has grown exponentially with the construction of its own warehouse and building on the property of the New Life Lutheran Church in 1994. In addition to ordering food through FFLC, Florence Food Share solicits their own donations from Safeway, Fred Meyers, Grocery Outlet, and other local stores. The pantry grows its own food as well through a community garden that is located behind the warehouse.

In the 2010-2011 fiscal year, 3912 individuals accessed a food box at Florence Food Share on an average of 4 times per year, a number that has been rising steadily in recent years. According to the pantry’s manager, Karen Lyn, the demographic of clients has changed a lot since the economic downturn. The elderly population is roughly 20% of the clients that are served, almost double of what it used to be. Florence Food Share also serves more individuals but less households, suggesting that a lot of families are combining households to save funds.

### How many people have accessed an emergency food box in Florence? (numbers are unduplicated)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2010-2011</th>
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<td>4022</td>
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<tr>
<td>Households</td>
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### Free Meal Site: The Methodist Free Lunch

At first glance, this site appears to be a traditional free meal site, yet this lunch is a unique adaptation of such. Rather, it is a collaborative response from a number of different church groups with members who have food handler’s licenses. The groups take turns preparing the meals on a rotating basis. Twice a week, anyone wanting a hot meal is invited to join fellow community members. The event is a great way to socialize with neighbors and interact with diverse people including the elderly and homeless.

**When and Where?** Tuesdays and Thursdays 11:30am-12:30pm at the Florence United Methodist Church.
Across the county, collaborations between school districts, non-profits, local businesses, small farms, and home gardeners have sparked new dialogue for building community food security. A variety of community organizing efforts have sprung up recently in Florence to increase local food production, develop food literacy among youth, encourage healthier lifestyles, and build community. These efforts have the potential to transform dietary habits and improve the local economy by creating jobs and keeping dollars local.

In the Fall of 2012 a group of home gardeners and small farmers around the Florence area formed G.R.O.W. in order to increase the amount of edible landscapes in town. With monthly meetings this group organizes educational workshops, places cooperative-style orders for supplies including fertilizer and compost, and interfaces with the city to convert local parks into community gardens. With two community gardens in town already (at the Florence Food Share and next to the United Methodist Church), G.R.O.W. is looking to establish another one at the Singing Pines Park. By sharing knowledge and resources among each other they have made it easy for people to start their own gardens at home. Having formalized themselves into a recognized organization, G.R.O.W. can apply for grants and other sources of funding.

Food Education Agriculture Solutions Together (FEAST)

Under a model developed by the Oregon Food Bank, a Community FEAST engages a variety of participants in a facilitated discussion to talk about building a more resilient and equitable local food system. It focuses on identifying major challenges and opportunities within the community and works towards creating an action plan. Attendance can vary from a dozen to over 50 people and ideally consists of broad representation from a community’s food system. During a FEAST community members tell the story of their local food system. Participants envision their food security future and write it down. Based on the ideas that are generated, participants split up into working groups to state their goals develop organizing plans, identify potential partners, and agree upon areas of responsibility or leadership to follow up and continue to the work. The Oregon Food Bank has conducted FEAST workshops with the help of RARE participants, a University of Oregon AmeriCorps program with participants doing community development and resource management projects in rural areas. Farmers markets, community gardens, and Food Policy Councils are some results from past FEAST workshops.
With 75 participants in attendance at the FEAST in Florence on December 10, the event brought together a diversity of people each with a wide range of interests related to food. Health practitioners, local farmers, food retail owners, school board members, and others gathered for a facilitated discussion on food security.

The Local Panel:
- Joan Tabor (Peace Health) provided insight about school lunches and highlighted the importance of feeding youth nutritious food.
- Karen Lyn (Florence Food Share) gave a description of anti-hunger programs for the low-income.
- Todd Bandiagara (Alpha Farm) voiced the challenges faced by local farmers.
- Cynthia Chandler (Chandler Fisheries Inc.) explained reasons for the absence of a fishing industry in Florence and shared her ideas for opportunities.
- Marianne Brisbane (The Waterfront Depot Restaurant) explained the challenges confronting local food businesses.
- Ken Gaylord (The Boys and Girls Club) talked about youth opportunities.
- Dan Armstrong (Rotary First Harvest) described opportunities/barriers for more community gardens.

Following the panel, a locally sourced meal was served, featuring fruits and vegetables donated from Greenfield Farm, Alpha Farm, and Whiskey Creek Organics. UDIG farmers donated butternut squash. Fish from the Alaskan coast was brought by Chandler Fisheries Inc. Bread was donated from the Shed Bakery.

Participants broke out into seven groups:
- Community Education and Food Literacy
- School Gardens
- Community Gardens
- Food Processing
- Accessibility/Food Distribution
- Local Production and Farming
- Policy/Land Use.

Groups made varying degrees of progress, but within each, community members were given a chance to share their ideas with others. The school garden group promptly scheduled to meet again the following month. They have since made significant progress in collaborating with the school board, master gardeners/recyclers, and others to design a school garden and programs for waste reduction. The community education and food literacy group discussed organizing community events such as discussion sessions and movie nights around nutrition and food literacy. The food-processing group suggested identifying all existing USDA certified kitchens for food processing. At the FEAST, N.E.D.C.O. partnered with managers of the Florence Organic Farmer’s Market to assist them in accepting SNAP benefits. As a result of connections that were established and/or solidified at the FEAST, a range of other community projects have emerged in the Florence community.
Oakridge, OR

Oakridge lies in a small valley at the foothills of the Cascade Range, surrounded by the Willamette National Forest. At one point a booming logging town, the town now suffers from widespread unemployment. Oakridge again looks to the surrounding forests for economic growth in mountain biking and tourism, yet the potential for these activities to provide the economic prowess that logging once did is unlikely. Food insecurity in Oakridge is a reality that many families confront on a daily basis.

Total Population: 3,191
Unemployment Rate: 14.45%
Median Household Income: $27,442
Child Poverty Rate: 46.43%1

In 1948, Pope and Talbot Lumber Company opened a sawmill in Oakridge, and began a massive logging operation, which at its peak employed over 500 residents, operating shifts 24 hours a day. The Oakridge population doubled during the 1950’s and again through the 1960’s and 1970’s2. The closure of the mill in 1990 escalated a cycle of decreasing economic prosperity, leaving hundreds unemployed and one business after another closing down. Limited employment opportunities led to an out-migration of residents with marketable skills. The massive exodus out of Oakridge sent rent costs plummeting and the city became a magnet for the unemployed and low income because of cheaper costs of living.

Today, much of what is left of Oakridge’s population is people out-of-work, relying on emergency assistance to make do. A quarter of the town’s housing units are singlewide trailers and 78.4% of the students qualify for the National School Lunch Program3. While residents appreciate the beautiful area that surrounds Oakridge, many community members have lost their sense of hope that prosperity will ever return.

From interviews with the food pantry managers, there are limited resources and it is often difficult to distribute them fairly. As a result, there is a sharp divide between the providers of support services, who operate on limited resources to alleviate poverty, and the service recipients, who constantly struggle to bring food to the table.

Recently, the town has attempted to brand themselves as a tourist town. Abounding with outdoor recreational opportunities and a gateway town to the Willamette Pass, Oakridge is bringing in mountain bikers, fishermen, skiers and snowboarders. While tourism is providing much needed economic growth, it is uncertain that tourism alone can provide the economic prowess that logging once did.

Oakridge’s geographic isolation from Eugene further exacerbates their food insecurity, as residents become increasingly dependent on the hour-long commute to the county’s urban core for food access. Despite the challenges presented for residents in accessing food, there exist several opportunities to increase access to this fresh food for the town of Oakridge by partnering with local farmers. The community food assessment for Oakridge will expand on these opportunities as well as describe the programs and services that currently exist to fight hunger and build food security.

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Agriculture

Just a short drive away from the mountainous and forested landscape of Oakridge, lies the Lost Valley, home to a vibrant agriculture community of small commercial farms, large home gardens, and livestock. With excellent top soil from being an old flood plain, the growing season runs from March through October. With the addition of greenhouses and tunnels, the season can be extended year round.

Distribution opportunities for food producers in the Lost Valley are numerous. In addition to the Dexter Lake Farmer’s market, the area is a mere 25 miles to the Lane County Farmer’s Market in Eugene, where the large demand for local food presents many additional distribution outlets. For food producers big enough to compete, this market has potential to yield a lot of profit. At the same time, this market requires a significant crop yield, time investment, and money. For smaller growers with a smaller bounty of crops, it can often be difficult to compete in such a large market, and they may have to look elsewhere.

Small growers may face less competition in smaller communities. Dexter is equidistant to Eugene as it is to Oakridge. In Oakridge, vendors face less competition because they are most likely the only vendor there. Such is the case with Circle H, who found success in marketing their CSA to Oakridge where they are the only farm that delivers there.

Still, as mentioned in Florence, local farmers face challenges in selling rurally because there is not as high of a demand for local food as in urban areas, mainly due to the smaller population.

Feature

Circle H Farm

Circle H is a family-operated organic farm. With roughly 8 acres in production, they grow a diversity of traditional, heirloom, and root crops as well as salad, berries, and herbs for local distribution in Lane County. Siblings Sarah and Joel Hucka inherited the land from their family, the farm earning its namesake from a stamp that their great grandparents used to mark their cattle. Along with the rest of the farm crew consisting of full time employees and seasonal interns, Circle H is organically certified and distributes their crops through a variety of farm-direct sale opportunities including local farmer’s markets and CSA shares.
In addition to the Lane County Farmer’s Market, Circle H sells at markets in Springfield and Dexter, and most recently joined the New Day Bakery Farmer’s Market. Initially selling CSA shares to neighbors in the Dexter/Lowell region, Circle H has expanded and offers them to Oakridge and Eugene/Springfield. With numerous distribution outlets, Circle H sells all of its produce within the county.

While Circle H has been successful in marketing locally, they have expanded slowly. Markets are an excellent distribution opportunity for farmers, but they are also time-consuming, involving processing, packing, transporting, displaying, selling, and cleaning-up, in addition to the work involved in actually growing the food. Circle H has steadily expanded its presence at local farmer’s markets through consignment booths. Last season, Circle H shared booth space with McKenzie River Farm, and now both farms have their own booths. At the Springfield Farmer’s Market, Circle H is part of a consignment booth.

For the future, the farm would like to dedicate a few acres to a single crop and sell to distributors and institutions, such as school districts. A current barrier is a lack of processing facilities that could process and store crops in order for them to be usable by institutions.

Circle H, 2012 CSA Information

20 weekly boxes for on-farm pick-up:
$425 for a full share (8 items per week)
$350 for 3/4 share (6 items per week)
$265 for a half share (4 items per week)

OR 20 weekly boxes for pick-up at delivery sites in Eugene, Springfield, and Oakridge.
$350 for 6 items per week.
SNAP accepted.
Food processing includes all of the activities between the time food is harvested to the time it is distributed to the consumer. Most often these activities include washing, transporting, preparing (chopping, canning, etc...), and storing. Historically, many facilities for processing and canning have existed in Lane County, yet in the past fifty years most of them have shut down.

Today, there is an increased demand for food that is ready for consumption at the time of purchase. Whether it is a meal that simply needs to be heated or a pre-mixed veggie stir fry, consumers are unaccustomed to eating foods in their raw form. Consumers also want to eat crops year round no matter their seasonality or origin. For food producers, these demands have created new needs for processing. Here is a description of different types of processing facilities that could help increase local food consumption:

**Minimal Processing Facility:** Institutions such as school districts and hospitals are often short on staffing resources to be able to prep fruits and vegetables for meals (ie. clean, peel, chop, dice, etc...). These institutions must receive products in a form that is ready to be cooked or combined with other ingredients. A minimal processing facility that can wash, chop, package, and store large amounts of produce could drastically change the ability for local food producers to sell to bigger entities than simply grocery stores or farmer’s markets.

**Refrigerated Storage Facility:** There is also a greater need for large-scale food storage. Most storage occurs on a short-term basis within the needs of local distributors. Currently, large produce distributors such as Organically Grown Company or Emerald Produce help local food producers distribute large quantities of product throughout the greater Pacific Northwest region, but their storage capacity is limited. Farmers could plant more storage crops with the guarantee they would be stored, and consumers could enjoy local food crops beyond the season from which they were harvested.

**USDA Certified Kitchens:** While fresh produce can be directly sold, all food must be processed in a USDA certified kitchen. There are many different people who could have a use for such a kitchen. Farmers could use these spaces to create value-added goods. Also, gleaning groups looking to re-process damaged produce, a food pantry wanting to open up a free meal site, or nutrition educators who want to lead cooking classes could each have a use for a USDA certified kitchen.

### Hunting and Fishing in Oakridge

While agriculture presents one option for local food, others include hunting and fishing, especially for those with the skills and knowledge of how to do so. The Willamette National Forest surrounding Oakridge is full of all types of wildlife, including elk, deer, bears, and birds. Pristine rivers that flow around Oakridge swim full with trout, salmon, bass, and others. Oakridge is also home to the Willamette Fish Hatchery, which raises chinook salmon and steelhead.

According to the Access to Food Survey, 21.3% of participants claim that hunting is a primary source of food. 23.4% said that fishing is also a primary source. John Warren, the Outdoor Adventure Club Director for the Oakridge School District and speaker at the Oakridge FEAST, says that hunting is part of what brings people together in the community. One of the biggest challenges for hunting and fishing is the cost of a license, which has really gone up in the last few years. Another challenge is having the skill-level to be successful and the knowledge for how to process the game. Some opportunities are creating discounted licenses for low-income families, creating community buy-ins similar to community supported agriculture, and sharing knowledge about how to process and where the prime sports are.
As an incorporated city, there exist several options for Oakridge residents to purchase food. Unlike the McKenzie River communities, this area has a full service grocery store as well as multiple convenience stores. Additionally, local food producers have set up a farmers’ market in Dexter, a mere 25 miles from Oakridge. In the past year, efforts have been made to start a farmers’ market in Oakridge.

Rural Grocery Stores

Oakridge is home to three small convenience stores and a Ray’s Food Place. Ray’s, a grocery chain located in many rural communities around Oregon and Washington, employs 32 people, making it one of the biggest employers in town. While other small businesses carry a lot of the same items, Ray’s is a stop chop for many because it is all in one.

Rural grocery store interviews were conducted with owners of each of the above rural food outlets to better understand their challenges. Many of them agreed that high operations costs and availability of satisfactory labor present difficulties.

From local interviews and surveys with residents, food prices in Oakridge are perceived to be high, with 68.2% of survey respondents saying that food is unaffordable. While no formal price comparison was conducted with urban grocery stores, rural grocery stores must pay delivery fees, which are steadily increasing due to rising gas prices. These fees, along with low sales turnover, result in higher mark-ups.

Access to Food Survey (47 Respondents)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Is food available?</th>
<th>Is food affordable?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>97.9% said yes</td>
<td>68.2% said no</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2012 Rural Lane County Access to Food Survey
Dink’s Market is a small convenience store located on the east end of Oakridge. The building has been at this site since the 1930’s when it was a trading post, and only recently was purchased by owners Brenda and Steve Lokan. The friendly couple has renovated the building into a safe, local hangout, where clients are known on a first name basis and homemade sandwiches are prepared fresh. Located just off of Highway 58, clients include truck drivers, loggers, forest service folks, tourists, and locals—many of whom are regulars. Dink’s has had a lot of success in drawing customers due to their road signage, which advertises brown-bag lunches and pokes fun at locals. Their size and rural location present some difficulties.

Seasonal Difficulties: Making most of its money during the tourist season in the summer, getting through the winter is a huge challenge.

Unavailability of appropriate labor: Finding reliable employees can be difficult in a town with a generally unqualified labor. While Brenda and Steve have had luck, a lack of cash flow also leaves little room for outside employment, forcing the two owners to manage and staff the store between the two of them.

High Operations Costs: Like many small stores, operations costs are very high, sometimes higher even than the amount of sales made. For Dink’s, the store’s renovation was also a high expense.

Distribution of Local Food

As mentioned in the Local Food section of this assessment, there is an abundance of food production in the Lost Valley. This food is made available to the region through the Dexter Lake Farmers’ Market. Many small farmers who are unable to compete in the Lane County Farmers’ Market are successful in marketing here. Additionally, Circle H farm distributes a CSA (see p. 24) in Oakridge and accepts SNAP benefits.

Oakridge has declared an interest in opening its own Farmers’ Market. Collaboration with regional food producers is needed in order to attract vendors.

Where do you primarily get your food from?
Food Security Safety Net

Oakridge, OR

Barriers in Access

What factors (if any) affect your ability to get the food you need?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Factor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>Cost of Food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59.5%</td>
<td>Distance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>Quality/Variety of Food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>Availability of Food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>Cost of Household Expenses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.8%</td>
<td>Cost of Transportation</td>
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<td>21.4%</td>
<td>Low Income</td>
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<tr>
<td>19.0%</td>
<td>Medical Costs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.9%</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>Lack of Transportation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2012 Rural Lane County Access to Food Survey, Oakridge

In terms of food security, community residents face many barriers that prevent them from accessing affordable and nutritious food. Below is a description of the biggest challenges for Oakridge as it relates to food insecurity. Many of the statistics were gleaned from Access to Food Surveys, distributed in Oakridge on May 23, 2012 in which 47 people participated1.

Distance: 87.2% of survey respondents said they drive more than 26 miles to purchase groceries at discount stores in Springfield. This commute is both costly and time-intensive, so it is not done frequently. As a result, people end up buying non-perishable food that will last through the month, and often place price ahead of health when making the choice because of a lack of resources.

Cost of Food: Despite food availability, the cost of food at local stores is a significant barrier for Oakridge residents already living on limited incomes. 97.9% of survey respondents said that food is available in their community, but 68.2% claim it is not affordable. While a number of food retail stores do exist, only one is a full service grocery with the rest being small convenience stores.

Low-income Population: A lack of employment opportunities in Oakridge has created a low-income community, with a large number of folks relying permanently on the emergency food system and other social welfare services. Twenty-eight percent of residents live below the federal poverty line2. 44.23% of the population has an income less than or equal to 150% of the federal poverty line, meaning that almost half of the population qualifies for SNAP benefits3. In the 2011-2012 fiscal year, 1,395 individuals, out of a population of 3,205, accessed an emergency food box on an average of 6-8 times per year4. This is above the county average of 4 times per year.

Lack of healthy food: Despite the presence of several food retail stores, the quality of food products is not always the best. According to Edwin Weih, a local physician, many diets in Oakridge are high in calories, generally lacking in nutritional quality, and for the most consist of non-perishable food items5. This type of diet has adverse effects on health, including higher rates of obesity, high blood pressure, and cholesterol. With a dominance of fast food restaurants and convenience stores, there are few options in town for fresh produce that are affordable for the average Oakridge resident.

1 FOOD for Lane County. 2012 Rural Lane County Access to Food Survey. 2012. Oakridge, OR.
Food Security Safety Net

Oakridge, OR

Because of the lack of affordable food retail outlets in Oakridge, a large percentage of residents rely permanently on emergency food programs and public assistance. Oakridge’s emergency food programs include the food pantry, a free meal site, a snack pack program, and Summer Lunch. Public assistance programs that many rely on include SNAP, WIC, Free and Reduced Lunch Program, and Summer Lunch. The biggest challenge for these programs is a general lack of resources and the nutritional quality of food that is distributed.

How many people have accessed an emergency food box in Oakridge? (numbers are unduplicated)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Population: 3,191</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Monthly Reports, FY 2010-2012, FOOD for Lane County

Feature

Oakridge Food Box

Once a month, eligible households receive an emergency food box that is meant to be a 3-5 day supply of groceries. In Oakridge, the food pantry has coordinated a Fresh Alliance grocery rescue program with Ray’s. Fresh Alliance is a donation program of all food that is past the sell-by date but still has a shelf life of several days or weeks. The pantry also receives fresh produce from the Salmon Creek Community Garden. The pantry serves a huge percentage of the population in Oakridge. This year, a total of 1395 individuals accessed an emergency food box.

Madeleine Duncan, manager of the Oakridge Food Box.
Free Meal Sites

Free meal sites are also an important piece of the emergency food system. Meal sites are specifically targeted towards the elderly and homeless, who are either physically unable or lacking in resources to cook for themselves. Frequently, meal sites allow diverse populations to socialize with each other and are great for building community. Unlike the food pantry where someone has a limited number of times that they can access it, a meal site can be accessed infinitely, and as such can be an additional way to serve food pantry clients. Finally, free meal sites are a good opportunity to serve a hot meal that is nutritious. For well established pantries, a free meal site is often a good way to expand. To start a meal site, a group needs to have a certified kitchen and volunteers must have food handler’s licenses.

The Oakridge Methodist Church runs a free dinner on the first Monday of each month. The meal site relies on individual donations collected through the Church and is used to purchase food for the meal. Groups or individuals prepare and serve the meal, using the USDA certified kitchen at the church. Members of the High School’s Key Club group frequently come to help out.

One challenge for the community dinner is a lack of resources. Purchasing food for the event requires a trip to town and nutritional quality of the dinner is sometimes compromised to stay in the budget.

A meal site can become a partner agency of FOOD for Lane County, and then receive food on a regular basis from the food bank. To learn how to become a partner agency, check the feature box on p.19 in the Florence section.
The SNAP program, formerly known as food stamps, is the largest federal nutrition assistance program. This section will give an overview of the SNAP program, and its prevalence in the Oakridge area where an alarming number of residents qualify. In Oakridge, 44.23% of the population has income less than or equal to 150% of the federal poverty line, meaning that almost half of the population qualifies for SNAP.

Families receive SNAP benefits based on their income. In Lane County, 18.3% of the population (63,060 people) is considered food insecure, of which 68% qualify for SNAP benefits. The actual number of people receiving the benefits is less because not everyone is aware that they qualify. Making sure that everyone who qualifies for SNAP receives the benefits is an important part of the emergency safety net in order to support the diets of those on limited income.

Redeeming SNAP benefits also has economic benefits for cities. Grocery stores in rural communities that accept SNAP report that over half of their sales involve SNAP transactions. For retail stores that do not accept SNAP, they lose customers who can use their benefits elsewhere. Studies by Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon show that if all eligible people were enrolled in 2009, the Lane County economy would have received an additional $23 million in federal dollars. The multiplier effect shows that every dollar spent locally gets multiplied into more dollars. Each $1 spent on SNAP generates 1.79$ in economic activity.

One challenge with SNAP is that the benefits are not always enough to purchase a healthy diet. Often recipients must compromise nutritional value for affordability. A recent study done by Share our Strength shows that cost and time are the two biggest obstacles for eating healthy for low-income families. This trend is even more evident in rural areas where there are less grocery options and often higher percentages of low-income people. There exist a lot of misconceptions that those living on low incomes are in need of education on nutrition, but the reality is that they do not have enough resources.

How to Accept SNAP Benefits

USDA’s Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) authorizes all retail businesses, direct marketing farms (farmer’s markets, farm stands, CSA’s), and non-profit food buying cooperatives to accept SNAP. One must meet the eligibility requirements, which include selling food for home preparation and consumption. More detailed eligibility requirements can be found online (http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/retailers/store-eligibility.htm).

*For CSA’s and Food Buying Clubs, payment may be accepted up to 14 days in advance of receiving the food products.

1. Get a USDA account and fill out an application online
2. Mail supporting documentation to complete
3. Once you have been approved to accept SNAP, choose if you would like to be wired for SNAP only, or for debit and credit services as well. A wired EBT system for SNAP only is free from FNS for direct marketing farms. To qualify for the free machine a merchant has to be doing at least $100 in food stamp transactions. If not, the merchant can still participate but must fill out vouchers and mail them in.
4. SNAP and Debit service charges have a relative fixed fee structure.

How to Receive SNAP Benefits

People who are at or below 150% of the federal poverty line are eligible to receive SNAP benefits. Qualifying individuals must go to a DHS office and show proof of income to sign up. Check online to find your local DHS office.

Many programs exist in Oakridge to serve the immediate need for hunger. While there is a high demand for these immediate services, several community-led efforts are beginning to look at more long-term solutions. Increasing connections with food producers in the Lost Valley presents one real opportunity for building food security in Oakridge. Other efforts such as starting community gardens, organizing food buying clubs, and increasing food literacy all help build healthy communities. For these efforts to be truly impactful, there needs to be widespread community awareness of their existence.

**Food Buying Clubs**

A food buying club can take many forms but generally consists of members purchasing food that may be difficult or expensive to obtain. Clubs decide together what food they would like to purchase and often receive wholesale prices. Groups can choose to buy only one food item (i.e. A meat-buying club), buy specific types of food (i.e. All organic), or purchase a variety of items to fill their grocery list. Members equally share the work among themselves thereby trading their time for lower prices. Buying club members enjoy the community aspect of working together and often learn new skills. Clubs can also support local food producers by placing orders directly to them and cut costs by eliminating the middle distributor. Individuals can form food-buying clubs easily by organizing groups with family members, friends, church groups, or volunteers.

In small rural areas, a food-buying club is a good alternative to a food cooperative, where there may be a demand for a certain type of food but not enough capital to establish a legitimate business around it. For communities like Oakridge with limited options for grocery shopping, a food-buying club provides members with more options for the food they want to eat and is often a more affordable solution to purchasing food at the local grocery or convenience store. For folks who rely on discount stores in Eugene, a food-buying club consolidates the 40+ mile trip taken by many to one person picking up the food for a larger group.

In Oakridge a group of community members have created a food-buying club in order to access the food they want at reasonable costs. Because of the purchasing power achieved by the group, members have a wide selection of food options. As a membership club they can order from farms and distributors based in Eugene or around Oregon and as a group receive wholesale costs.

The Healthy Living...Cooperatively is a food-buying club in Oakridge supplying 10-12 members with food from local farms and food distributors. It is a hybridized version of a co-op in that members pay an annual fee of $25.00, and can then participate in ordering their food at low rates. Working members/volunteers get additional discounts for picking up orders in Eugene, assisting with set-up for member pick-up, and other managerial tasks. The group coordinates between themselves for pick-up and delivery which further decreases the cost of food. Because they don’t have a designated store-front and all profits are divided among members, they are considered a cooperative buying club.

The group has set up a virtual farmer’s market online with Circle H Farm, where members place orders directly to the farm through the online ordering portal. Circle H delivers the food on the day when members come to pick up their orders. In addition, Healthy Living...Cooperatively orders from over 10 different distributors, including Organically Grown Company, Surata, and local businesses in Oakridge.

The biggest challenge for the group is their size. With more members the club would have greater cash flow, greater flexibility in terms of food choices, and everyone would enjoy more affordable prices.

*Healthy Living...Cooperatively connects buyers to the freshest, organic and natural products that support a healthy life, using local fruits and vegetables that are seasonal and sustainable.*
How to Start a Food Buying Club

1. Form a group by organizing with relatives, friends, neighbors, church members, or co-workers. Talk to people who want discount prices, have special diets, or want to support local food.
2. Establish a membership fee that will go towards operating costs and equipment (such as a cash register, tables for set-up, gas for pick-ups, etc.).
3. Set up a payment system/common checking account so that everyone’s money is pooled together in the same place.
4. Find distributors nearby who sell the items that you want.
   - Hummingbird Wholesale helps a lot of food buying clubs get started and sells a variety of beans, grains, and other staple items in bulk.
   - OGC sells locally grown produce in the Pacific Northwest and accepts large bulk orders.
   - Planet Verde sells a variety of items and delivers for a small fee.
   - Bountiful Baskets organizes food buying clubs all over the state of Oregon.
   - Small food producers are usually willing to give discounts for larger orders.
5. Pick up orders at the distributors and designate an area for the food to be divided up. It helps if people bring reusable bags or jars to split up the bulk items.
6. Designate volunteer tasks so that the labor is distributed evenly and no single person gets burnt out!

Community Gardens

Community gardens provide a place for people interested in gardening without the space at home or without adequate knowledge. These places are also excellent ways to become more involved in the community and can be ideal sites for building leadership opportunities in youth. A community garden can take many forms, from the more traditional rent-a-plot type where individuals rent a share of the garden to grow what they would like, all the way down to a more coordinated system with a coordinator organizing unified effort for food production. The recipient of food grown in community gardens depends on the garden. Often volunteers are rewarded with the food they’ve helped to grow, or gardens may decide to donate the food to food pantries and free meal sites. Other gardens set up farm stands and make a small profit to offset the operating costs. Community gardens have gained a lot of popularity recently due to a lack of farmable space in urban areas. In Florence, for example, several community gardens have recently been started with more on the way, due to a rising interest in converting dormant land to food production. As shown by this example, community gardens can truly benefit rural areas in order to build support around food and share knowledge and resources.

Harvesting corn at FOOD for Lane County’s Grassroots Garden.
The Salmon Creek Community Garden is a 2 1/2 acre organic garden started in 2007 by a group of volunteers. Leased from the City, the site, located right next to Salmon Creek east of Highway 58, has been transformed since its inception from a plot covered in blackberries and invasive weeds to a beautiful destination spot. It features fruit orchards, 20 raised vegetables beds, six raspberry and blueberry bushes, a huge herb garden, and two large strawberry beds. There are benches for seating with shade provided by a grape arbor. The garden donates produce to the Oakridge Food Box and to volunteers who work in the garden.

The garden has several long-term goals. In addition to feeding the low income of Oakridge, it has immense potential to be a place for hands on learning. While this community garden provides a wealth of opportunities in the future for Oakridge, its existence currently depends on a small army of dedicated volunteers. Despite their optimism for the future, they are in need of greater support and community involvement.

“My vision is for this garden to be a nexus of learning about sustainable methodologies of food production and healthy living for the area.”

-Mavis Pas, Garden Coordinator

Promoting Food Literacy

Would you be interested in learning more about any of the following? (Check all that apply)

2012 Rural Lane County Access to Food Survey, Oakridge

Food literacy helps build healthy food systems by providing community members with opportunities to learn about food that is grown in their region and to develop the skills to prepare nutritious food. Food literacy builds food security by creating a community with members who are familiar with their food system region and by promoting conversations that bring farmers, chefs, and consumers together. In Oakridge a number of groups help foster food literacy by celebrating food and teaching others about food.
The Dutch Oven Cooks are a group of local food enthusiasts that meet up once a month to cook with their cast iron pots. This group has created a sub-culture around eating food to share ideas and equipment. These types of groups are great for building community and promoting healthy cooking. The group meets every second Saturday between 10am and 2pm at Greenwaters Park near the river underneath an awning.

As part of an effort to teach emergency food box recipients how to use the food in their box, OSU Extension has partnered with FOOD for Lane County to host food demonstrations at local food pantries. Using the food ingredients that are in a food box, a volunteer cooks up a meal and distributes samples to clients. The volunteer also shares nutrition information, recipes, and food preparation tips. They often suggest ways to prepare unfamiliar foods that may be included in a food box.

The OSU Extension Nutrition Program organizes trainings to teach volunteers about food safety regulations.

Deanna Hadley does food demonstrations at the Oakridge Food Box on the third Thursdays of the month.

To participate in the Pantry Project, food pantries can contact the Nutrition Program at OSU Extension.
On Saturday, March 3rd, a little over 30 community members participated in a FEAST workshop in Oakridge. A delicious meal celebrating locally produced food drew 35 community members together on Saturday, March 3rd for a FEAST workshop. The purpose for the day was to gather information about Oakridge’s food system and devise plans for its improvement.

The Local Panel:
- **Edwin Weih** (Physician at Five Rivers Family Practice) talked about the consequences of unhealthy diets.
- **Sarah Hucka** (Farmer from Circle H) talked about local agriculture and opportunities for distribution in Oakridge. She shared information about her CSA box.
- **John Warren** (Director of the Outdoor Education Program at Oakridge Junior High) talked about fishing and hunting as potential sources of local food, emphasizing the importance of education around these topics.
- **Judy Hampton** (Board member of the UWCDC) talked about anti-hunger programs in Oakridge, citing a lack of cooking supplies as a common barrier.
- **Mavis Pas** (Master Gardener) gave a description of the Salmon Creek Community Garden, including its needs and challenges.

The Dutch Oven Cooks prepared a meal in their cast iron cooking pots. The meal featured produce from Circle H and Hunton’s Farm, as well as bread from the Lion Mountain Bakery and donations from Ray’s.

Work Groups:
- **Farmer's Market**: Participants want a Farmer’s Market in Oakridge. Since the FEAST several groups have stepped up to try and make this happen, though finding food vendors has been a significant challenge. Organizing needs to happen earlier in the year so that food producers can plant their fields accordingly. The Healthy Living Cooperatively (food buying club) has set up a virtual Farmer’s Market with Circle H.
- **Nutrition Education**: Participants voiced a collective vision to create a healthier town by educating and empowering community members to get materials and prepare healthy meals. Participants want to start cooking classes in the schools and for parents with curriculum material from OSU extension. These could be coupled with food preservation classes. The Snack Pack program could also be expanded.
- **Community Garden**: The current garden coordinator needs more volunteer support and funding. Since the FEAST the garden has received network support funds from FOOD for Lane County to purchase a greenhouse. The guidelines need to be revised, perhaps with assistance from garden staff at FFLC.
- **Anti-Hunger Programs**: Participants want to strengthen the existing programs that serve the low-income. One idea was to organize a drive to collect cooking items to distribute to families in need.
A journey along the McKenzie River will surely include astonishing views of the rushing water and the vibrant evergreens, climbing their way out of the valley. Flowing for roughly 90 miles, the river supplies water to more than 200,000 people in Eugene and surrounding communities. The watershed is for the most part surrounded by wilderness, until it nears the lower part of the river where residential, commercial, and agricultural development dominate the landscape. A string of unincorporated communities dot this lower watershed area for a stretch of forty miles. A vision of food security for this region includes the story of farms in the lower valley as well as a description of food distribution options in the eastern foothills. For the purpose of this assessment, the geographic range stretches from Walterville out to Belknap Springs, and includes the communities of Leaburg, Vida, Finn Rock, Blue River, and McKenzie Bridge.

Total Population: 4,427  
Unemployment Rate: 8.41%  
Median Household Income: $46,750  
Child Poverty Rate: 10.06%1


The first inhabitants to live along the McKenzie River were Native Americans, including the Kalapuya and Molalla people. They lived in the lower river area during the winter months and spent summers in the high Cascades. The first white settlers arrived at the beginning of the 18th century, when explorers from the Pacific Coast Fur Trading Company ventured down the Willamette and found its McKenzie fork.

Similar to Oakridge, the McKenzie River bears witness to a tumultuous history of resource-extraction. In addition to timber, the McKenzie River valley has also supported a fur trade industry and mining operations. In the mid-1800’s gold mines were discovered up by Blue River, including the Lucky Boy Mine. These drew many settlers to the area, but mining ended by 1912.

The river also served as a major timber supplier to mills in the Willamette valley. Booth-Kelley Lumber Company and later Weyerhauser cut millions of trees and employed thousands of river residents. The river was used to float logs to mills in Coburg and Springfield. Cutbacks in federal timber harvests at the end of the 20th century have had devastating effects on employment in many of the small rural communities. Currently undergoing lawsuits, the Goose Project is an effort by the Forest Service to manage timber harvest operations. The project would harvest 38 million board feet of lumber around McKenzie Bridge.1

In addition to logging, the construction of two dams and the fish hatchery have historically been important sources of employment. Today the lack of opportunities for employment is at the root of food security issues in the area.

The communities along the McKenzie River face food insecurity due to an overall unavailability of food retail options. Despite the presence of agriculture in the lower river valley, poverty and hunger are realities faced by a large portion of the residents in Blue River and McKenzie Bridge. This section will narrate the story of agriculture in the lower river valley and provide a description of food retail options that exist. After analyzing the biggest barriers in terms of access to food, it will explore opportunities for building food security.

The McKenzie River, OR

The McKenzie watershed is the only source of water for a population of over 200,000. Keeping this watershed healthy requires working with landowners to regulate activities that pose risks, such as agriculture and development. Most of the agricultural land is located along the valley floor in close proximity to the river. Additionally, the prime riverfront property along the McKenzie faces steady pressure for development, fueled by tourist activity in the valley and as a destination for retirees. While both activities can be harmful to watershed health, agriculture is preferable to development, which requires much more infrastructure, including pavement and septic systems, and generates more runoff. Protecting the land from development will also be important to preserve prime farmland for food production.

Agriculture

The river valley floor is home to prime farmland. With fertile soil, large tracts of open land, and a steady supply of water, the area hosts a vibrant agricultural community with many growing crops and grazing animals. Higher upriver the growing season lasts from June through September and on the lower part of the river, there isn’t much elevation change from the Willamette valley so the growing season is from April through October. There are over 30 farms in the area though not all are growing food or at a commercial scale. Medium sized farms between 11-50 acres are most prevalent and grow a diversity of crops, while a handful of food producers operate on a much larger scale selling hazelnuts in the global market. The next biggest crop in production is blueberry. There are some landowners raising livestock, and much land dedicated to growing hay.

Feature

McKenzie River Farm

McKenzie River Farm is a small diversified organic farm located in Leaburg, most commonly known for its blueberries. They grow a variety of fruits and vegetables and tend to over 5,000 bushes of blueberries, some of which are rented from neighbors. They also raise chickens, pigs, and cows. Certified organic by Oregon Tilth, these farmers’ harvest traditional and heirloom crops, even experimenting to less traditionally grown vegetables like purple broccoli, which sprouts in early spring. Sustainability is important to this farm, so
their animals provide the manure for compost and fertilizer. In turn, most of the animal feed is grown on site.

A stated mission of the McKenzie River Farm is to sell directly off the farm. On this front they operate a year-round on-site farm stand where seasonal vegetables, farm fresh eggs, and a selection of value-added products are available. The farm also provides U-pick opportunities for blueberries, pumpkins and squash, which provide rich experiences for berry-picking enthusiasts. Loyal customers come back year after year to stock up on berries and the marketing method also attracts a lot of tourists to the area, which also helps stimulate activity and business in the surrounding small towns.

While selling directly off the farm is their preference, in recent years the farm has expanded to sell through bigger distribution outlets, including the Lane County Farmer’s Market in Eugene, and grocery stores in Eugene, including The Kiva, Capella’s, and Market of Choice. One challenge with selling to distributors is that there is less control over the condition of the product when it is on the shelf or inaccuracies in labeling. Direct sale opportunities prove to be the easiest way to ensure quality for the consumer.

This farm has big ideas for the future. They plan to continue experimenting with new crops to see what grows well in the region. They also recently opened a USDA certified food cart out of which they will sell food to customers. They can also use the food cart to produce and sell value-added goods with their farm crops.

A Challenge With Growing Blueberries: Mummy Berry

A recent challenge for McKenzie River Farm and other blueberry growers in the McKenzie has been Mummy Berry. Monilinia vaccinii-corymbosia is a fungus, which attacks berries, making them shrivel up and dry out around the time of harvest. When infected berries fall to the ground, they overwinter and begin sprouting tiny little mushroom-like structures. These in turn produce a million spores and quickly begin infecting leaf buds and shoots of neighboring plants. Once infected, these shoots produce a conidia that moves to nearby flower blossoms. The conidia develops with the plant, making it unclear whether a bush has mummy berry until it is time for harvest and it fails to ripen. Mummy berry can destroy an entire crop of blueberries and poses a serious threat to many Northwest blueberry producers especially those using organic practices1. Efforts are being made throughout the region to spread education about how to get rid of the fungus.

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The McKenzie River, OR

Feature

Herrick Farms

Herrick Farms is located just past Cedar Flats in Walterville. Run by Vernon and his wife, Paula, Herrick Farms has 300 acres in production, much of which is leased from other land-owners and not all of which is used to grow food. This type of land agreement, called a farm deferral, is in fact the case with a lot of land along the McKenzie where landowners will lease out the land to be managed by others. It is an effort by the state to protect farmland from development.

With more acreage than McKenzie River Farm, this farm has a different approach to growing food. Herricks Farm uses conventional farming methods with minimal use of pesticides. With lower costs of production than organic farms, they are able to sell their crops at more affordable prices and feed a significant portion of the river community.

All of the produce at Herrick Farms is sold in their farm stand located just off of Highway 126. Because of a long-standing reputation, the farm manages to sell all of their products through the farm stand alone. They supply an enormous amount of affordable fresh food to the surrounding community. The farm is also well known for its U-pick pumpkin patch.

Feature

Hazelnuts Along the McKenzie

Hazelnuts in the Willamette Valley comprise 90% of the US consumed hazelnuts1, and in 2009, Lane County alone harvested 3,450 acres of hazelnuts2. A significant portion is grown for export to be sold on the international market, with biggest purchasers being China and Germany.

To compete in such a large market, hazelnut growers have organized themselves into cooperatives to pool their resources together to be more competitive. There are two primary types of agricultural service cooperatives: a supply cooperative (to purchase inputs for agricultural production) and a marketing cooperative (to coordinate distribution efforts).

Hazelnut farmers in Oregon have established the Hazelnut Growers of Oregon, a marketing cooperative that provides growers with greater control in how their crops are distributed, including processing, packaging, promoting, and selling. The co-op is
owned by 140 hazelnut-growing families located all over the valley and overseen by a grower-elected board who are all hazelnut growers. They process their hazelnuts in a facility located in Cornelius, OR that is shared by other hazelnut cooperatives as well. The Hazelnut Growers of Oregon handles approximately 30% of all Oregon hazelnuts produced each year, enjoying steady growth in tonnage for worldwide distribution. The co-op produces numerous hazelnut food products from hazelnut butters to in-shell hazelnuts. Their hazelnut products are sold domestically and all over the world to small bakeries and restaurants, as well as to industrial food processors to be used in other food products.

Being organized under a cooperative model helps growers set field prices for hazelnuts delivered to distributors and processors. The cooperative model as a business organization also suits the economic and social lifestyle of farmers, who can focus on production and consolidate their efforts in distribution.


A drive along the McKenzie provides astonishing views of the hazelnut trees, yet not a single outlet for their purchase. This could be a real tourist attraction and marketing opportunity for the region.

Fishing on the McKenzie

The McKenzie River is perhaps best known for its fishing opportunities. The River has one of the most pristine, naturally reproducing wild populations of spring Chinook salmon in the Willamette Basin. The rushing cold water is an ideal spot for them to breed. The fish hatchery has helped restore the site as spawning ground for salmon, though increased development along the river poses a huge threat. The McKenzie River also swims full with rainbow trout, cutthroat trout, brook trout, whitefish, summer steelhead, northernpike minnows, and others.

Sports fishing is a common activity along the McKenzie, drawing in tourists but also providing an important source of food for those with the patience and skill. From the access to food surveys in which 55 people participated, 23.6% of people rely on fishing as a source of food.
The McKenzie River, OR

Highway I26 carries one through a series of small towns, most unincorporated, and more often than not holding a small general store where convenience items can be bought. Two farmstands are opportunities for direct marketing and a number of restaurants encourage tourists to support local businesses. While convenience items are available, for staples, a majority of residents are making the regular commute to grocery stores in Springfield.

Where do you primarily get your food from?

Rural Grocery Stores

McKenzie River

Rural Food Outlets along the McKenzie River
Food retail stores in rural areas often act not only as food distribution sites but also as local hangouts, where community members can come together to socialize. These stores thrive in the summer, but during the winter months high operating costs and minimal sales result in an ironic dilemma. The stores scattered about the river are not meant to feed their own residents but rather to cater to tourists passing through for the summer months. As the graph on the previous page shows, only 13% of participants in the Access to Food Survey get their food from convenience stores. The nearest grocery store is a Ray’s in Walterville, but most consumers shop at grocery stores in Springfield.

Melanie Stanley, owner of the Meyer General Store in Blue River, shares the familiar story of a single mother in Blue River who can’t afford the time nor gas to drive to Springfield for food on a regular basis. As a SNAP recipient she has slim pickings on where to spend her food stamp dollars, and is forced to rely on Meyers for her staples. Melanie shares, “I don’t want her to be spending that money here. She could go to town and get 4 times as much food because my prices are higher. I’m not here to be supplying groceries to the locals—I’m here for the summer when all of the tourists come”. The challenge with being located so remotely makes it impossible for owners to lower their prices. These stores supply convenience items that might not be worth a trip to Springfield, and otherwise capitalize on the tourist season.

From interviews with owners at each of the 5 markets along the McKenzie, including Vida Market, Meyer’s General Store, Harbick’s Country Store, and McKenzie Bridge General Store, it is clear that there are challenges that all owners across the region face.

**Getting through the winter** is one of the biggest challenges for these stores. The nasty, grimy weather keeps tourists at bay—resulting in very low monthly sales, sometimes as low as a few hundred dollars. This shortfall forces many owners to go into debt in order to cover other expenses of store maintenance, such as operating costs and stocking. Steve Harbick, owner of the McKenzie Bridge General Store, shares that his energy bill is sometimes as high as $900 in the winter, when average weekly gross sales can be as low as $2000. He says, “For a store to survive out here we have to increase our inventory during the summer and try to maximize sales. Then as winter is approaching you have to bring down inventory and minimize costs.”

### Which of the following are major challenges for your store?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Other Major Challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High operations cost</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Required minimum buying requirements 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seasonal difficulties</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Lack of community support 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of satisfactory labor</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Competition with large chain grocery stores 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High inventory costs/low turnover</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Narrow profit margins 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low sales volume</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Shortage of working capital 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government regulations</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Shoplifting, bad checks/internal theft 0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2012 Rural Grocery Store Survey
Food Distribution

The McKenzie River, OR

High Overhead Costs: As mentioned there are really high costs for these small stores. The winter brings with its cooler temperatures a higher energy bill when sales are already low. Paying wages to employees is also a high cost. Jerry, the owner of the Vida Market, shares that the cost of paying an employee can often determine how early the store will close. “On a winter day if we’re only making a little bit each day, it doesn’t make sense to be paying an employee 30% of the sale, so we’ll close early. I have to have two people here at any one point so that makes it even more expensive.” Finally, the high cost of gas is exacerbated by the distance between these small stores and the major I-5 corridor, forcing the stores to pay higher delivery fees to distributors or absorb the cost themselves by driving to town to pick things up.

High Delivery Fees/Distribution Challenges: The stores along the McKenzie are each charged individual delivery fees by distributors, sometimes as high as $30 each, to cover the costs of transportation, even though the distributor is only making one trip and most of the stores are along the way. The stores have at one point or another placed orders together in order to pay a single delivery fee, but in this case distributors have refused to give the stores individual invoices. The stores have since found that it doesn’t make much sense to order together, if either way they will end up paying the delivery fee to get their own invoice.

Inventory Costs/Meeting the Minimum: Meeting the minimum order limit can pose a real challenge for some of the tiny stores, making them resort to placing orders every two weeks or driving to town to pick up the food themselves at discount groceries. Distributors also require certain mark-ups and with the added cost of delivery fees prices must set higher than if they drive to town to pick up the food themselves. The money they save at the discount groceries allows them to set lower prices for customers.

Unavailability of Satisfactory Labor: Out of the four stores along the McKenzie, three of their owners said that there is a general lack of satisfactory labor in their communities. Because of a lack of employment opportunities, people in the area do not have developed work skills. Darin Harbick, Steve’s cousin, runs three businesses located in Rainbow, a tiny unincorporated town between McKenzie Bridge and Blue River. At his Harbick’s Country Store alone he employs 20 people, a significant percentage of folks in a town with a population of 500. He shares that when he has an opening it’s the same people who have already applied before.
There are a number of restaurants located along the McKenzie. However, in contrast to Oakridge, which hosts a large number of fast food restaurants, the restaurants along the McKenzie are a bit more expensive. One reason is that Highway 126 is a large thoroughfare into the Cascades, and so it draws more tourists, and restaurants serve as one way to get people to spent their money locally. Since the restaurants cater to tourists, their prices are somewhat unaffordable to locals. The Reservoir Dawgs is one restaurant that does have lower prices.

Nestled under the trees in downtown Blue River, Reservoir Dawgs opened only 3 years ago. Owner Bob Schaffer always had a dream of opening up a hot dog stand and when he moved to Blue River he began his search for an adequate space. When the local beauty shop shut down, he remodeled the building into a hot dog restaurant.

From its onset, Schaffer has kept prices low to make it a local hangout. Unlike other restaurants in the valley, the majority of his customers are locals.

A real challenge for Reservoir Dawgs and other restaurants in the area is managing supply. With pick-ups for food happening only once a week, it is difficult to always know how much food to buy. For example, if they buy too much a lot will go to waste, and if they don’t buy enough they have to close the restaurant for the day and lose potential sales. This restaurant also faces many of the challenges discussed in the previous section that confront other food retail businesses along the McKenzie.
Distributing Local Food: Farm to Consumer

While convenience stores along the McKenzie are perhaps the most noticeable of food distribution outlets, both farm stands and u-pick sites provide consumers with additional venues for purchasing food. By eliminating the distributors and processors, consumers are quite literally several steps away from where the food was grown.

From Access to Food surveys distributed throughout the area, price and availability are the main factors that shape consumers’ decision to purchase local food. Increased advertising and labeling can increase awareness about where to purchase local food, and accepting SNAP benefits can make local food accessible to those living on limited incomes.

**U-Pick:** U-picking provides consumers with an opportunity to visit a farm and see how food is grown. It is a great activity for families and friends and allows people to stock up on food for the winter. In comparison to farm stands and farmers’ markets, U-picking is one of the cheaper ways to purchase local food.

**Farm Stands:** Farm stands are opportunities for consumers to see where their food is grown as well as for food producers to sell food directly to the consumer. They require less investment than farmers’ markets so prices are generally cheaper. Farm stands also offer tourists who are passing through a chance to sample local flavors.

**What is the main reason you don’t purchase local food?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Too expensive</td>
<td>56.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not available</td>
<td>43.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know where to get it</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not food I like</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2012 Rural Lane County Access to Food Survey
As mentioned in the previous section, there are limited food retail options along the McKenzie River through which residents can access food. A handful of small convenience stores, some tourist restaurants, a couple of farm stands, and the food pantry are the sole distributors for a 40-mile stretch. The cost of this food is generally unaffordable for the majority of residents. This general absence of food is exacerbated by poverty, distance between communities, unemployment, and overall community disinvestment.

Distance and Cost of Food are the leading factors that contribute to hunger in the McKenzie River. From Access to Food surveys in which 55 people responded, 77.8% are driving over 25 miles to get their main groceries and 55.1% said food is unaffordable. There is a lack of affordable food in the region, making the discount groceries in Springfield (sometimes upwards of 50 miles away) the next best option. Residents must plan their trips carefully and often sacrifice freshness over perishability, quality over quantity, and nutrition over price. The communities upriver are truly food deserts.

Cost of Household Expenses was cited as a third major factor in preventing people from getting the food they need. Property values are high along the McKenzie River. Many agree that there are very rich and very poor people in the area, with an absence of people in the middle class. More research is needed to better understand the relationship between poverty in an area and high property values.

Access to Food Survey (55 Respondents)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Is food available?</th>
<th>Is food affordable?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>96.2% said yes</td>
<td>55.1% said no</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Poverty is another contributing factor to hunger. When living on a fixed income many families must pay fixed bills (ie. rent, medical costs, utilities...) and food is often where cuts can be made, sacrificing quality and nutrition for quick fix alternatives.
The McKenzie River, OR

Food Security Safety Net

Food Pantry

In communities with sparse access to regular groceries, the food pantry becomes something more than a supplier of emergency food boxes to round off the month when funds have run tight. Instead, the food pantry is a source of food that people tend to rely on permanently. For the especially low income, including the homeless and those without a mode of transportation, the food pantry may be their only source of food.

Opening its doors every other Tuesday, the McKenzie River food pantry is housed in the same building as the McKenzie School Gym. The Leaburg Community Cupboard, open on the fourth Friday of the month, is housed out of the McKenzie Bible Fellowship. Both pantries receive a variety of perishable and non-perishable food from FOOD for Lane County.

Unlike other pantries in the FFLC network, McKenzie River pantry volunteers personally pack and deliver food boxes to clients who lack access to transportation. Many of their clients are not only homeless, but also car less, making visits to the food pantry difficult and trips to Winco or Springfield impossible. Without the door-to-door service that the pantry volunteers provide, these families would not have access to food at all.

Also, the county average for number of times clients access a food box is 4.4 times. Clients at the McKenzie River pantry access is 7.7 times, suggesting that people rely on it much more heavily than in other areas.

The McKenzie River Food Pantry has been established for over twenty years, though it was not always an official FOOD for Lane County partner agency. Before signing up to receive regular deliveries from the food bank, the food pantry had a gleaning program set up. This program was a bit different than traditional gleaning programs, which have historically involved gleaning farm fields at the end of a season. Rather, pantry volunteers would glean leftover food from a variety of sources (stores, food banks, etc...) for adoptees, often elderly, homeless, or very low-income fami-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How many people have accessed an emergency food box? (numbers are unduplicated)</th>
<th>2010-2011</th>
<th>2011-2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>McKenzie River Food Pantry</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaburg Food Pantry</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>276</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Volunteers at the McKenzie River Food Pantry packing bags for clients.
Limited access to food affects children perhaps more so than adults. Childhood hunger can have detrimental effects on physical and mental development as well as performance in schools. Unhealthy eating habits during childhood can also determine the way someone will eat for the rest of their life. A number of programs exist county wide to alleviate the problem of childhood hunger, although many of these do not exist along the McKenzie River because of the cost to implement them in rural areas and lower participation rates. There is not, however, a shortage in need for these programs. In 2009, 48.5% of students across Lane County were eligible for free and reduced lunch.  

1 Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon. Addressing Hunger: Federal Nutrition Programs, Lane County, OR. November 2010.

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

**Free and Reduced Lunch**

The National School Lunch Program is a federally funded program by the USDA that aims to provide nutritious food to school aged children. Children whose families are below the 130% poverty line are eligible to receive school lunch free, and those between 130-185% of the federal poverty line are eligible for reduced price meals. Families often rely on school meals to make sure everyone gets enough to eat. It is an important part of the safety net. It is also an opportunity to provide nutritious meals to kids and support local agriculture.

% Free and Reduced Eligible Students in Rural Lane County

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>McKenzie River Elementary</td>
<td>83.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warterville Elementary</td>
<td>39.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siuslaw Elementary (Florence)</td>
<td>59.87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mapleton Elementary</td>
<td>75.51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oakridge Elementary</td>
<td>75.86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lundy Elementary (Dexter/Lowell)</td>
<td>68.11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


At McKenzie School Elementary, 83.10% of the students are enrolled in the Free and Reduced Lunch program.

Summer Food Program

Thousands of kids across the county rely on free and reduced lunch/breakfast for a majority of their meals. However, when school ends, often times so do the meals and families are placed with a huge burden of how to feed their kids when school is not in session. The Summer Food Program is a USDA funded program that provides funds to organizations to serve meals to low-income children throughout the summer when school is not in session. These meals are available to anyone under the age of 18, no questions asked.

FOOD for Lane County coordinates the Summer Food Program for Lane County, with over 65 meal sites, many of which are in rural areas. The McKenzie River School used to have a summer food site but the program was too expensive to run and there wasn’t enough participation. The lack of success for this program illuminates several challenges that arise in extending services to rural schools. First, the cost was expensive because paying for gas to drive out there everyday did not make sense. Also, the McKenzie School District covers roughly a 60-mile radius, so for parents it may not be worth the gas to drive their kids to Blue River just to get a free meal. Instead of running a regular summer lunch program, FFLC has created a hybrid model that works well in areas such as the McKenzie. The McKenzie River Pantry creates boxes of food that are packed specifically with kid-friendly food, allowing families with children to get additional food during the summer months.

Despite challenges, there is a huge need for some type of food assistance program for children during the summer. FOOD for Lane County has recently teamed up with the food pantry to get more kid appropriate meals to the food pantry to make up for the fact that there is no summer food program. This way parents can pick up food during the summers when they access the food pantry.

W.I.C. (Women, Infants, and Children)

WIC is a public health nutrition program designed to supplement the diets of pregnant and breast-feeding women, as well as infants and children under 5. WIC offers vouchers for certain foods, which are identified as nutritionally important for women and children.

Unfortunately, very few of the stores along the McKenzie River are able to accept WIC because of their size. For a store to be able to accept WIC it needs to carry certain types of products. For small stores this proves to be a challenge because shelf-space is limited and inventory often expires before it is sold. In 2011, the WIC program broadened its list of accepted foods to make it easier for stores to accept the WIC vouchers. An updated list can be found online: http://public.health.oregon.gov/Healthy-PeopleFamilies/wic/Pages/foods.aspx. Again, it is free for stores to accept WIC.
The Berggren Demonstration Farm is located on the lower McKenzie River, near Walterville off of Camp Creek Road. This recently acquired 30-acre parcel of land previously in pasture, presents a partnership between EWEB, McKenzie River Trust, and the Bonneville Power Administration to demonstrate agricultural approaches that protect the water quality of the McKenzie River. With the increasing threat of development along the McKenzie, this project represents an effort to show how responsible land stewardship can be economically viable.

The farm will track its transition from conventional pasture to organic food crops while employing watershed-friendly farming techniques. There are other efforts to explore how energy efficiency and renewable energy can reduce operation costs of farms.

The project intends to identify and develop emerging and under-utilized market streams. As a non-profit entity it can sell to institutions such as school districts, without the risk that other commercial farms face.

The Berggren Demonstration Farm to play a significant role in building a strong regional food system for the McKenzie River Valley.

EWEB has started a Healthy Farms Clean Water program to work with growers to protect the water quality. This project includes reducing chemical use, reducing water consumption, and teaching about natural resource conservation. There has been a positive response from many landowners, especially with the free soil sampling and nutrient management through the SWCD. EWEB is also doing free agricultural chemical collection to properly dispose of old unused chemicals and fertilizers.

The program also aims to help farms become more economically viable so that they are less likely to sell to developers. On this front they provide consultations in irrigation efficiency and energy efficiency and have partnered with Willamette Farm and Food Coalition to help farmer’s access local food markets. Ecotrust has developed a website called Food Hub to help foster connections between growers and buyers. EWEB is also paying for organic certifications to help farms transition to organic.
On Saturday, April 21st, community members living along the McKenzie River came together to discuss the barriers in the food system and talk about solutions. With a little over 20 people in attendance, participants were given the chance to share ideas and network with each other.

The Local Panel:
- Greg Clift (McKenzie River Nursery) gave a description of local agriculture and mentioned that he was willing to donate starts to garden groups that can’t afford them.
- Melanie Stanley (Meyers General Store) talked about rural grocery stores along the McKenzie and the challenges in carrying fresh produce despite a large demand for it.
- Sue O’Brien (McKenzie River Food Pantry) shared that lack of transportation is a big barrier for accessing food.
- Robin Roberts (Family Resource Center) explained the success of her parenting classes, and expanded on the biggest health concerns in the area being diabetes and obesity.
- Shane Kamrath (US Forest service) expanded on hunting and fishing opportunities, citing cost of licensing and regulations as big barriers.
- Jared Pruch (Cascade Pacific RC&D) talked about the Berggren Demonstration Farm and the role it hopes to play in building regional food security.

The Meal:
Sourcing food locally is perhaps the hardest in the beginning of Spring, when winter crops are at the end of their harvest and planting for the new season has just begun. Prepared by Bernadette Fleischer, the meal featured a mixed greens salad with radishes donated by the McKenzie River Farm, stinging nettles quiche (picked by Rosie Sweetman), hot dawgs from the Reservoir Dawgs, and blackberry cobbler from the McKenzie River Farm. Rock Java donated coffee for the event.

Groups:
- Nutrition education: Participants expressed a vision to build a healthier community by educating families and youth about nutrition, teaching skills related to cooking and gardening, and increasing access to healthy foods. The Family Resource Center connected with OSU Extension about possibilities for teaching nutrition classes. Also, participants highlighted the importance for the farm stands at McKenzie River Farm and Herricks Farm to accept SNAP benefits. Since the FEAST, the McKenzie School received a grant to hire students to work in the school garden.
- Transportation/access to food: Participants brainstormed different ideas for increasing access to food by starting a food-buying club or creating a carpool system using a church van or school bus. More collaboration is needed to see where the interest is.

Next Steps: The group decided to reconvene in September, 2012.
Opportunities

Local Food

• (all) Increase food production in rural regions. Support small to mid-size food producers, fund community and school gardens in rural communities, and develop resources that promote home gardening, such as garden classes and information sharing.

• (Florence) Increase distribution outlets and direct sale opportunities for locally caught fish. Research alternative ways to make commercial fishing successful with minimal processing facilities. Selling whole fish off the docks directly to consumers is one way to avoid processing regulations. Community supported fisheries have been successful in Alaska and elsewhere (http://www.redsalmon.com/).

Processing

• (all) Identify all existing USDA certified kitchens in rural communities and publicize this information. The kitchens can be used for educational purposes, such as cooking classes and food preservation workshops. These spaces can also be used by food producers to prepare value-added products or store their products. Many churches have USDA certified kitchens that are available for public use.

Food Distribution

• (all) Increase collaboration between small food retail businesses. Create a strong alliance of rural grocery stores that can organize themselves under one voice to change statewide policies. Investigate options for businesses to combine their food purchase orders and to share transportation/delivery costs.

• (all) Increase distribution outlets for fresh produce in communities. Increase and strengthen the distribution networks between communities and local food producers. Create more direct-sale opportunities of local food (perhaps through CSA’s, consignment booths, farmers’ markets, or food buying clubs).

• (Oakridge, McKenzie River) Build support for existing food buying clubs and organize new buying cooperatives among residents and small businesses. Develop marketing strategies to increase awareness about existing buying clubs and increase their membership. Partnering with existing food retail businesses could help food buying clubs fill their orders as well as increase healthy food options at the stores.

• (Florence) Organize a food reserve in case of an emergency. Located on the coast and prone to flooding during the heavy rain season, Florence should identify available storage facilities and stock them with non-perishable food.
Food Security Safety Net

• (all) Open up [more] free meal sites. Free meal sites are important community building and an opportunity to serve a hot, healthy meal to those in need. For emergency food providers, free meal sites often target populations who lack the ability to cook for themselves. Depending on the community there is a need for breakfast, lunch, and dinner sites.

• (Oakridge, McKenzie River) Increase acceptance of SNAP and WIC benefits at all food retail businesses. Work with all food retail businesses to make sure they can accept SNAP and WIC benefits. One challenge for rural stores is their inability to have the required inventory. However, in 2011, the Oregon Health Authority modified its list of WIC approved foods so that more stores are able to accept WIC benefits. Perhaps a model can be created for stores that are still unable to accept WIC benefits, whereby multiple stores in a specified radius collectively meet the inventory.

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• (Oakridge, Florence) Assist existing food charities in becoming FOOD for Lane County partner agencies. Many entities other than food pantries serve food to community members in the form of charity, such as Snack Pack (for youth) and meal sites. As a partner agency, one is able to receive USDA food, access network support funds, and receive guidance for serving those in need.

• (McKenzie River, Florence) Assist farm stands and farmers’ markets in setting-up acceptance of SNAP benefits. Farmers’ Markets and farm stands are often the closest source of fresh produce for rural residents, many of whom are SNAP recipients. There are farm stands along the McKenzie River and one on the way to Florence, which currently don’t accept SNAP benefits. It is free for farm stands and farmer’s markets to accept SNAP benefits, though they often need guidance and support in setting it up. Road signage is important.

• (all) Set up gleaning programs with local food producers. Create an inventory of food producers who have extra crops and are willing to work with community groups. Re-examine gleaning models to create a program that is advantageous for food producers. Connect with existing gleaning groups to understand best practices. Perhaps work trade arrangements can be made so that gleaners are involved in other aspects of growing food than just the harvest.
Support existing community food efforts. Increase the general awareness of existing community efforts, (ex. community gardens, food buying clubs, local gardening groups, etc...) so that the community can better support them. Local advertising and regular community food events can help spread awareness.

Partner with the student volunteer groups in order to involve youth in community food efforts. Volunteering is a proven way for youth to develop job skills as well as develop a sense of service to their community. Student volunteers are also a good source of labor for service providers operating on limited resources. Additionally, volunteer service often fosters positive interactions between diverse populations, which helps support healthy communities.

Develop education around cooking and shopping on a budget. Implement programs that teach people of all ages about healthy diets. Teach people skills so they can cook nutritious meals and preserve food. OSU extension is a good partner for implementing nutrition education programs. Share our Strength offers a number of programs that can be implemented in rural areas by a variety of different entities.

Develop education around hunting/fishing/local foraging. Each community possesses a plethora of food options harvestable from the wilderness. However, these activities require the knowledge and skill in order to be successful. There needs to be increased education efforts to teach younger generations how to hunt, how to fish, and how to process game.

Support existing community food efforts. Increase the general awareness of existing community efforts, (ex. community gardens, food buying clubs, local gardening groups, etc...) so that the community can better support them. Local advertising and regular community food events can help spread awareness.

Partner with the student volunteer groups in order to involve youth in community food efforts. Volunteering is a proven way for youth to develop job skills as well as develop a sense of service to their community. Student volunteers are also a good source of labor for service providers operating on limited resources. Additionally, volunteer service often fosters positive interactions between diverse populations, which helps support healthy communities.

Develop farm apprentice programs to train the next generation of food producers. The age of current food producers is rising and the future generation needs to be trained. Increase outreach about existing farm apprentice programs. Create more opportunities for young professionals to pursue a career in food production.

Spread knowledge about existing funding opportunities for small-scale and start-up food producers. It is difficult for food producers to be profitable without the assistance of off-farm income. Information about existing funding/lending opportunities needs to be spread and new ones need to be developed, designed specifically to meet the needs of small-scale food producers.

Encourage conversations across the county about food self-sufficiency. One gap for achieving a county that is fed 100% locally is a large-scale processing facility that would permit food producers to sell to institutions. The Oregon Solutions Project brought together many different entities to talk about this endeavor. New partners should join the join the conversation to see what role they can play.
Methodology

The Rural Lane County Community Food Assessment uses a variety of research methods. Since food systems are a recent topic of research, this project relied on both qualitative and quantitative data. Qualitative data was collected through one-on-one interviews, informal conversations, and community meetings, in order to understand the perspectives of many different food system stakeholders. Quantitative data was collected through two different surveys, a Rural Grocery Store Survey and an Access to Food Survey. Statistics from the United States Department of Agriculture and National Census Data informed the assessment as well.

Rural Grocery Store Surveys

A total of eleven rural grocery stores in Lane County participated in the 2012 Rural Grocery Store Survey, developed by Kansas State University. Three store owners in Florence, four stores along the McKenzie River, and four in Oakridge participated. The Oregon Food Bank has adopted the survey and invited rural grocery stores across Oregon to participate, as the beginning of a conversation with store owners statewide. The survey results informed the challenges and opportunities related to distribution that are discussed in this assessment. All surveys were administered by the author with the owner to allow for elaboration and commentary. The survey questionnaire can be found in the appendix section.

Access to Food Surveys

For the purposes of this assessment and to generate more quantitative data about rural food systems, an Access to Food Survey was created and distributed in each community. A total of 192 people (74 in Florence, 47 in Oakridge, and 55 from the McKenzie River communities) participated in the survey. On May 2, 2012, the survey was administered in Florence at the Florence Grocery Outlet and 74 people participated. On May 23, 2012, the survey was administered in Oakridge at Ray's Food Place, with 47 respondents. In the McKenzie River, the Family Resource Center sent the survey home to all parents, of which 55 returned the survey. Participation in the survey was voluntary. All participants received a free packet of seeds.

Conclusion

The three communities discussed in this food assessment each have a unique food system, with geographical and socio-economic features presenting different challenges and assets. While the assessments are presented separately, there are inherent similarities to each other. It is the hope that this assessment will provide a broad picture of challenges and assets facing rural communities in Lane County, from which ideas in one community can be borrowed by another.

Community food systems are ever-evolving and this report is but a glimpse of the current situation. The Rural Lane County Community Food Assessment is meant to be a living document and constantly depends on updates, changes, and contributions from the community. With the process of writing the assessment, new attention has been given to rural food systems and it is the hope that this work can be a springboard for further action in developing stronger and healthier communities.
Access to Food Questionnaire

The results of this questionnaire will be used in the 2012 Rural Lane County Food Assessment. Your responses will remain confidential. Thank you for your time. Your opinion is greatly appreciated!

1. In which city or community do you live? ______________________________________

2. Annual Household Income:
   □ Less than $10,000 □ $10,000-$30,000 □ $30,000-$50,000 □ More than $50,000
   □ Unemployed □ Retired

3. Number of Adults living in your household:
   □ 0 □ 1 □ 2 □ 3-5 □ More than 5

4. Number of Children living in your household:
   □ 0 □ 1 □ 2 □ 3-5 □ More than 5

5. Is food available in your community?
   □ Yes   □ No   Comments: ____________________________________________________

6. Is food affordable in your community?
   □ Yes   □ No   Comments: ____________________________________________________

7. Where do you primarily get your food from? (Check all that apply)
   □ Grocery Store □ Discount Grocer (ex. Costco, Winco, etc…)
   □ Convenience Store □ Farmers’ Market
   □ Food Pantry □ Hunting
   □ Fishing □ Grow your own
   □ Natural/Specialty Store □ Food Co-op/Buying Club
   □ Other: __________________

8. How far do you go to get your main source of food?
   □ 0-5 miles □ 6-10 miles □ 11-25 miles □ 26+ miles

9. What form of transportation do you use when you go to buy groceries?
   □ Walk □ Drive your personal vehicle
   □ Public Transportation □ Have a friend/family member drive you

10. What factors, if any, affect your ability to get the food you need? (Check all that apply)
     □ Distance □ Cost of food
     □ Lack of Transportation □ Cost of Transportation
     □ Low Income □ Availability of food
     □ Quality/variety of food □ Rising cost of Household Expenses
     □ Medical costs □ Other: __________________
Appendix A

11. Please rank the following factors in order of importance of what shapes your decisions regarding a food purchase (1 being the highest and 5 being the lowest)
   __ Price
   __ Convenience
   __ Locally Produced
   __ Taste
   __ Healthfulness

12. Are you eligible for government food assistance?
   Yes   No   I Don’t Know

13. If yes, which programs do you (or your children) use?

   SNAP (Food Stamps)  Food Bank/Pantry
   WIC  Other: __________________
   Meals on Wheels  None
   Free or reduced school lunch/breakfast

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

   __ Fruit
   __ Vegetables
   __ Milk
   __ Poultry
   __ Meat
   __ Eggs
   __ Processed Foods (jam, salsa, pickles, etc…)
   __ Baked Goods
   __ No, I don’t

15. If not, what is the main reason you don’t purchase local food?
   __ Not available
   __ Too expensive
   __ Don’t know where to get it
   __ Not food I like
   __ Other: __________________

16. Would you be interested in learning more about any of the following? (Check all that apply)

   __ How to cook or shop on a budget
   __ Growing fruits and vegetables
   __ Raising livestock (including poultry)
   __ Cooking healthy food
   __ Local food for schools/ school gardens
   __ Having a certified community kitchen for making value-added products to sell
   __ Food Preservation
   __ Community Gardens
   __ Other: __________________

17. The results of this survey will be used in the 2012 Rural Lane County Food Assessment. If you would like an electronic copy when it is complete, please include your contact information below:

   Name: ________________________________ Phone Number: ________________________________
   E-mail Address: ________________________________

Once completed, please return this survey to the place where it is being distributed.
Or mail to FOOD for Lane County, CC: Danielle Hummel, 770 Bailey Hill Road, Eugene, OR 97402
The results of this survey will be used in the 2012 Lane County Food Assessment.
Questions? Contact Danielle at 541-343-2822 or dhummel@foodforlanecounty.org

Page 2
Appendix B

Rural Grocery Store Owner Survey
Rural Community Food Systems Assessment Project

Name of store: ________________________________
Address: ____________________________________
Phone number: ________________________________
Contact person for store: ________________________
Email address: _________________________________

Would you like to be added to a listserv for rural grocery store owners and advocates?
____ yes  ____ no

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

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

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

   ________________________________________________________________

3. What products do your secondary suppliers supply?

   ________________________________________________________________

4. Do minimum (purchasing/ordering) buying requirements create a problem for your grocery store?
   ____ yes  ____ no

   If yes, how?

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

   ________________________________________________________________

6. As an independent grocer, do you feel you are getting fair pricing from your suppliers compared to chain stores?
   ____ yes  ____ no
Appendix B

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

Comments:
7. Have you had problems getting products delivered because of your location?
   ____ yes  ____ no

Comments:
8. Do you sell locally-produced food in your store?
   ____ yes  ____ no
If yes, what products?

9. Do you accept Food Stamps/SNAP?*  ____ yes  ____ no
   Do you accept WIC?**  ____ yes  ____ no
* Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
** Women, Infants and Children Program

10. Has your business been negatively affected by the presence of emergency or supplemental food distribution in your community (i.e. people get bread from food pantry or gleaners so don’t buy it from you)?
    ____ yes  ____ no
If yes, explain:

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

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

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

12. Do you collaborate with other small independently owned stores?
    ____ yes  ____ no
If yes, for which purposes? *Check all that apply.*

- [ ] Cooperative advertising/marketing
- [ ] Grocery distribution purposes
- [ ] Sharing concerns and/or ideas
- [ ] To achieve minimum buying requirements
- [ ] Other ________________________________

If no, would you be interested in doing this?

- [ ] yes
- [ ] no

Why or why not?

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

- [ ] yes
- [ ] no

If yes, how could it help?

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

Advertising
- Newspapers
- Radio
- TV
- Flyers/inserts
- Facebook
- Internet/WWW
- Promotions
- Word of mouth
- OTHER: Please identify: ____________________________________________
When running a grocery store, how important is it to you to offer each of the following? Rate the importance of each by circling the number that best fits your response.

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<th>Very Important</th>
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<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Comments:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Availability of food</td>
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<tr>
<td>(variety, brand choices)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments:</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Prices of items offered</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
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<td>Comments:</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Customer service</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Comments:</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Business hours</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Buying locally</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

______________________________________________________________________________
Appendix B

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

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

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<thead>
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<th>Not Very Well</th>
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<td>2. Availability of food (variety, brand choices)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Comments:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Accepting Food Stamps/SNAP and WIC</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Comments:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

How do you assess the buying needs of your customer?

Is your stocking of products responsive to customer requests?

What other concerns or comments do you have?
Appendix B

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

Tell us about your store:

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

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

Do you have more than one location? _____ How many? _____

What are your hours of operation?

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

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

Are there other grocery outlets in your community?

_____ a ‘quick shop’
_____ another full service grocery

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

How many employees do you have, not counting yourself?

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

What are your average weekly gross sales?

_____ Less than $5,000
_____ Between $5,000 and $10,000
_____ Between $10,000 and $20,000
_____ Greater than $20,000

This survey was developed by Kansas State University Center for Civic Engagement and is being used with their permission. We thank them for their support of this project. For more information, please contact Sharon Thornberry, Community Food Systems Manager, Oregon Food Bank.