“Tough Like Alfalfa”

A Community Food Assessment for Lake County, Oregon
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Acknowledgements

This assessment would not have been possible without the support of the residents of Lake County who welcomed me into their community meetings, ranches, businesses, gardens, and homes. Thank you for sharing your unique history, culture, and outlook, as well as your visions for the sustainable future of Lake County’s food system.
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.

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

Sharon Thornberry
Community Food Systems Manager
Oregon Food Bank
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Introduction

Why focus on food?

Strengthening the food system has the potential to affect more than just the food on people’s plates. Food is closely tied to the culture, health, and economy of a region. So, while this assessment focuses on the food system within Lake County, this is intertwined with other topics such as changing industries, unemployment, and local history.

Community Food Systems

This assessment also deals heavily with the idea of a sustainable community food system. This goes beyond the incorporation of environmentally sustainable production practices to include equitable distribution of food, the minimization of food waste, and fair wages for those involved in food production. It is through the full realization of this definition that strengthening the food system has the potential to reach so many areas, from economic revitalization to addressing hunger.

A sustainable community food system is a collaborative network that integrates sustainable food production, processing, distribution, consumption and waste management in order to enhance the environmental, economic, and social health of a particular place.
Agriculture in Douglas County

Introduction

A Community Food Assessment, or CFA, is a collaborative, participatory project that takes a big look at a food system including production, consumption, distribution, and waste.

The goal of this assessment is to begin to tell the story of the food system within Lake County, Oregon. Oregon’s third largest county geographically, Lake County is home to cattle ranching, hay and alfalfa production, and a unique and long history of life in Oregon’s high desert region. It is also home to high unemployment, long distances between communities, and residents who are unsure about where their next meal will come from.

The Community Food Assessment, or CFA, is a grassroots, participatory research process that centers on both current assets and challenges in the hopes of informing future projects focused on building a stronger regional food system. With an action-orientated approach, this CFA is intended to serve as a foundation for this process, and can be amended or expanded as needed. Developed by the Oregon Food Bank, this model has been used to document the food systems of communities across Oregon.

As part of the 2016-2019 Strategic Plan, CFA recommendations will be incorporated into CHIP programs under the organization’s third health priority of increasing physical activity and reducing obesity, which also focuses on improving food security. Additionally, this assessment will serve as an organizing tool for the Outback Food Initiative, as well as anyone else in the community who may find it useful.

About Community Food Assessments

Development of this Assessment

In 2011, a Community Food Assessment was completed focusing on both Klamath and Lake Counties, which have both a shared past and an interconnected present. The need for a CFA focusing solely on Lake County was established based on growing community interest in working to strengthen the local food system. The 2016 Lake County Community Food Assessment therefore serves as both a follow-up to this report and more in-depth look at the communities of Lake County.

In 2013, Lake Health District’s Community Health Improvement Program (CHIP) conducted a Community Health Needs Assessment where community members listed increasing access to healthy food and nutrition as the fifth health priority for Lake County. In spring of 2015, a FEAST (Food, Education, Agriculture Solutions Together) event was held in Lakeview to further bring together community members interested in improving Lake County’s food system. This food assessment was then undertaken from 2015-2016 through a partnership with RARE (Resource Assistance for Rural Environments) AmeriCorps, the Oregon Food Bank, and Lake Health District.

As part of the 2016-2019 Strategic Plan, CFA recommendations will be incorporated into CHIP programs under the organization’s third health priority of increasing physical activity and reducing obesity, which also focuses on improving food security. Additionally, this assessment will serve as an organizing tool for the Outback Food Initiative, as well as anyone else in the community who may find it useful.
Located east of the Cascades in Oregon’s high desert region, Lake County was first established in 1874. It was created from the eastern portion of Jackson County and the southern portion of Wasco County, and included present day Klamath County within its borders until 1882. Lake County gets its name from the number of lakes located within its borders, including Goose Lake, Lake Albert, Summer Lake, and Hart Lake, though these have been affected by drought in recent years.

With 8,358 square miles and a population of 7,838, communities are both small and remote. Two incorporated towns reside within the county borders: Lakeview and Paisley. With a population of 2,294 people, Lakeview is both the largest town and county seat. Located at 4,802 feet in elevation, Lakeview also claims the title of “Tallest Town in Oregon.”

In addition to these two towns, there are a number of unincorporated communities: Valley Falls, Adel, Plush, Summer Lake, Silver Lake, Christmas Valley, and Fort Rock. Located south of Lakeview, the community of New Pine Creek is split by the California border, located half in Lake County and half in Modoc County, CA.

Due to its remote location, this area of Oregon is often referred to as the Oregon Outback, with over 70 percent of the land owned by the state or federal government. For those in the northern end of the county, Bend is the largest major city for accessing additional resources and services, while those in the southern portion are closest to Klamath Falls.

Lake County is faced with many of the problems often affecting remote, rural areas. Once a thriving mill town, Lakeview continues to be affected by the decline of the logging industry with four out of five of the town’s mills now closed. Currently, the local economy is based on agriculture, lumber, natural resource extraction, government, health care, and a minimum security prison.

Tourism is also a burgeoning industry within Lake County. Tourists are drawn to the county’s abundant outdoor recreation opportunities, Lakeview’s designation as a major center for hang gliding, and several areas for collecting sunstones, Oregon’s state gem.

However, the unemployment rate remains 2 percent higher than the rest of the state while the median average income is over 10,000 dollars...
Introduction

lower than elsewhere in Oregon.\(^5\) In 2011, 15 percent of Lake County residents held bachelor’s degrees, compared to 28 percent in the rest of the state and nationally.\(^6\) Despite local scholarship programs that allow many students to attend college at a reduced cost, the lack of high paying jobs prevents many of these individuals from returning to the area after receiving their degrees.

Many people are drawn to the region due to the low cost of land, but find themselves struggling with unsteady employment, higher transportation costs, and lack of access to essential services. Lower incomes and long distances between communities also contribute to the higher rate of food insecurity within the county, which is 17.3 percent compared to the 15.2 state rate.\(^7\) Despite being a rural ranching community with a rich homesteading tradition, a short growing season with unpredictable frosts means that Lake County produces little fresh produce. Currently, the USDA designates the entirely of Lake County as a rural food desert.\(^8\)

However, faced with a harsher climate than Western Oregon, Lake County has developed a strong, close-knit community committed to helping their neighbors and solving problems on their own terms. While this CFA delves into many of the above issues within the context of understanding the local food system, it also highlights many of the efforts already underway through the hard work and dedication of Lake County residents.

History of Food In Lake County

Lake County has long been a site of human occupation, with archaeological evidence stretching as far back as 14,300 years ago. The area was primarily occupied by the Paiute-Snake tribes, though the Klamath, Modoc, and Pit River tribes also inhabited the area seasonally. Tribes travelled throughout the year to take advantage of changing hunting, fishing, and foraging opportunities. In the summer months, deer, mountain sheep, roots, waterfowl eggs, and water lily seeds called wocus made up the majority of people’s diets, while chokecherries, wild plums, and berries were dried for winter use in the fall months.

In 1870, the Klamath Treaty ceded all land belonging to the Klamath and Modoc tribes, as well as the Yahooskin band of the Snake tribe in present day Lake County and parts of the surrounding counties. In return, the Klamath reservation was created, along with exclusive rights to fish and gather wild plants in the area. However, the Klamath reservation was terminated in 1961, and much of the land is now occupied by the Winema National Forest. Today, there is no official tribal land in Lake County.\(^9\)

“Older residents have been heard to say, “If things get too tough, you can always go over to ‘easy valley’” the nickname given to the Willamette Valley. A person either loves Lake County or doesn’t. Many young people raised in the county are happy to return, after a stay in the city, to enjoy the wide open spaces, the privacy, the independence, and the friendships that Lake County affords.”

–Lake County History: The First 100 Years
Introduction

Several homesteading acts brought settlers into the area in the late 1800s. Homesteaders were tasked with the difficult job of clearing sagebrush from the land before cultivation could occur, a task referred to as “grubbing.” Early reports declaring the land suitable for dryland farming also turned out to be inaccurate, and homesteaders were faced with lower precipitation levels than expected, harsh weather, and long distances from larger communities and railroad transportation. Many of these early homesteads were abandoned.¹⁰

Starting in 1869, Irish immigrants began settling in the area to herd sheep, giving this part of the state the nickname “Little Ireland.” Sheep herding, as well as grain and potato production, were affected by changing markets and land use regulations and have now largely been replaced by cattle and hay production. Lakeview’s two slaughterhouses closed during the 1950s and the town’s grain elevators now stand empty.⁹

"It seems there was a lot more wheat when we were kids around here."  
-Lake County Resident

1909 Revised Homesteading Act:

In 1909, the previous Homestead Act of 1862 was altered to encourage people to settle east of the Cascades, as most settlement had so far been concentrated in the fertile agricultural land of western Oregon. The amount of land allotted was increased from 160 to 320 acres, which made public lands available for homesteading at a cost of 10 dollars as long as it was occupied within six months of purchase and improved within five years.

This act brought a number of settlers into central Oregon, where many established homesteads in the Fort Rock and Christmas Valley areas. Early reports about the suitableness of the area’s land for agriculture contained some misinformation and exaggerations, with one publication stating, “The soil consists of rich black loam and grows wheat, which will average 60 bushels to the acre. All varieties of fruit, such as apples, pears, prunes, plumes, cherries, and other kinds of berries grow in abundance,” as well as promises that a railroad would be quickly built to transport agricultural products.¹⁰

Despite some good production years, many homesteaders struggled to subsist in the desert climate of the area and many early homesteads were abandoned.
During the Lake County Consumer Survey, fifty-four percent of respondents stated that they produced some of their own food. This section outlines the food produced in Lake County through agriculture and ranching, home gardening, the production of value-added products, and hunting and fishing. It also delves into processing and food waste and their important place within a community food system.

Though this section deals with food produced in Lake County, only a portion of this remains in the county to be eaten by residents. Amidst 40,000 cows, it can be hard to access local beef due to a lack of nearby USDA-certified processing facilities. Due to the short growing season, fruit and vegetable production tends to occur on a small scale instead of a commercial production. Without the use of season extension equipment, scaling up this production can be too risky when a single poorly timed frost can kill an entire crop. Therefore, where other reports may focus on commercial produce production, this section highlights many of the innovative ways that home gardeners have developed to grow their own produce in the high desert.
Home to several solar energy farms, Lake County sees an average of 211 sunny days a year. However, precipitation levels are low, and the majority of moisture is provided by melting snowfall. On average, Lake County receives 31 inches of snowfall and just 12 inches of rain during the year. In recent years, this has been further exasperated by a severe drought. “If the drought hadn’t stopped when it did, we would have seen a lot of guys selling off their cows,” said a local rancher. While precipitation levels increased during the most recent growing seasons, local producers are worried that the drought years aren’t yet behind them. “I’m worried about it, but what can I do?” one rancher asked.

While the last spring frost date for Lakeview is listed as June 26th, residents of Lake County will tell you that frosts can occur at any time of year. The county officially contains five separate USDA Plant Hardiness Zones, ranging from Zone 5A to 7A. This variability in climate is echoed by county residents, who explain that the area is interspersed with microclimates. Paired with the geothermal activity that runs throughout the county, some residents may be able to plant their gardens weeks before those located just a mile or two away. In Paisley—locally referred to as the “Banana Belt”—gardeners in the community are often able to start planting a full two weeks before those in Lakeview.

The climate in Lake County is well-suited to hay and alfalfa production, which makes up the majority of agricultural sales. Producers grow hay for both on-ranch use and outside sales. Intertwined with hay production, cow-calf operations dominate livestock. Cattle are typically shipped out of the area to be sold live at auctions, often in California. Therefore, while the majority of Lake County cattle begin their lives grazing on open pasture, many will spend their last few months on feedlots as far away as the Midwest. Some local ranchers also graze their cattle on warmer pastureland in California during Lake County’s long winter.

At the time of the 2012 Agricultural Census, there were a total of 373 farms located in Lake County. This represents an 11 percent decrease since 2007,
Local Food Production

when there were 417 farms. At the same time, average farm size has increased 6 percent from 1,661 acres to 1,762 acres in 2012. This represents a consolidation of farmland, as ranchers purchase their neighbors’ operations.

The total market value of agricultural products sold in Lake County is $85,646,000. Of this amount, 53 percent comes from crop sales, while the remaining 47 percent comes from the sale of livestock. The average age of the principal farm operator is 58.3, the same as the national average. This means that a new generation of ranchers will need to have the skills, ability, and desire to take over the area’s ranches. “We’ve been going all our lives,” one older rancher stated.

“People have a romantic image of ranchers and farmers riding their horses back to their homes in the evenings and serenely watching sunsets, but that the reality is that I’m out working until it is dark and never really get to enjoy the natural beauty of the land, while at the same time feeling very tied down to it.” -Lake County Producer

Changes in Markets:

While grains such as wheat, oats, and barley grow well in Lake County’s climate, changes in the market have led them to be replaced by forage products such as hay and alfalfa.

“People have a romantic image of ranchers and farmers riding their horses back to their homes in the evenings and serenely watching sunsets, but that the reality is that I’m out working until it is dark and never really get to enjoy the natural beauty of the land, while at the same time feeling very tied down to it.” -Lake County Producer

Changes in Labor:

Increases in efficiency, along with the replacement of horses by machinery for many tasks, have led to a decrease in the number of jobs that are available on local ranches and farms. One resident stated, “Pretty much all of the ranchers in my age group have bachelor’s degrees. We’re not all lucky enough to come back.” Others stated that, while many young
Local Food Production

to come back to the area and ranch that may not always be possible. “The parents are bright enough to send their kids to college, because they realize that they might not be able to come back to farm or ranch,” said another resident. One rancher stated that unpredictable profits and the debt required to purchase land are the main impediments preventing young people from moving back to pursue ranching.

“Local ranchers also listed infrastructure problems such as poorly maintained roads and length restrictions as a barrier for transporting their agricultural products. In Adel, a rancher listed the lack of high speed internet as a main impediment to this business. “It’s handicapping Lake County,” he stated.

Additionally, the lack of private land can make it difficult for productivity to increase in the area, as new ranchers are limited to purchasing existing agricultural land.

Barriers to Local Marketing:

1. Lack of nearby USDA-certified processing facilities
   “It can be hard to educate customers on how to purchase whole or half animals.”

2. Lack of premium markets for grass-fed or organic meat
   “There’s no market in Lake County.”

3. Direct-marketing takes time, skill, and interest
   “I don’t like marketing. I’m not going to make cold calls and convince someone to buy my product.”

4. Market necessitates scale and efficiency
   “It’s hard to survive in this market as a small producer.”
Located a few miles outside of Lakeview, Shamrock Ranch is a small, family-run operation that uses bio-dynamic growing methods to produce vegetables, fruit, and eggs in the often harsh high desert climate. Amanda O’Bryan manages the farm along with her husband Brad and their 3 young children. New to the area, Amanda has been able to grow crops that she was initially told couldn’t be grown in Lake County. Produce from the garden is then sold at the Lakeview Saturday Market.

A combination of crop rotation, bio-intensive methods, and trench planting are used to produce a variety of crops such as garlic, potatoes, melons, squash, brassicas, and lettuce. By growing crops like melons, Amanda is doing what many in the area told her she could not. This is partly due to the ranch’s presence in a microclimate, as well as geothermal activity beneath the farm that creates slightly warmer soil. However, Amanda also attributes her success to practices such as carefully selecting seed varieties that are well suited to high altitudes and shorter growing seasons. This often results in her buying seeds that are native to Eastern Europe and the Middle East. Her best tomato seeds have come from Iraq, and she grows Afghan honeydew and Israeli cucumbers. While she would like to have a hoop house in the future, the use of straw mulch has extended her growing season slightly while also cutting water use by a third. Heritage chickens are also raised on the ranch for both egg production and breeding stock.

The ranch is currently in the process of being certified “naturally-grown” and they would like to apply to be certified bio-dynamic in the future. Although these practices go beyond organic standards, Amanda believes that USDA organic certification is now geared more towards larger operations, and the costs and regulations can be too burdensome for family farms.
The Talbott Ranch transitioned to certified-organic production about 10 years ago. “As a small producer, we needed to find a niche,” Pete Talbott explains. Transitioning to organic allowed the ranch to increase their profit margins. “We were almost doing it anyway,” he says about their previous management practices, which made it easier to get certified. “It was a lot of paperwork, but we’ve got it down after ten years.” The majority of the ranch’s cattle are sold to Panorama Meats, an organic distributor that sells to Whole Foods markets in the Pacific Northwest, Northern California, and the Rocky Mountain region. All of the beef from Talbott Ranch comes back to Whole Food Stores in the Northwest, but not before travelling to California for processing. The ranch produces about 300 head of cattle a year, which remain on pasture year-round. Pete is able to buy certified-organic alfalfa from neighboring Doubleheart Ranch, to supplement what is grown on his own land. Cattle are then taken to California to graze during cold winter months. Pete and Pam Talbott also raise a small herd of Katahdin sheep, which remain in Oregon to graze year round.

Pete and Pam also sell a small percentage of products through their “locker business” which allows customers to buy whole, half, and quarter portions of beef, as well as whole lambs. This used to be a larger part of the business, but price premiums offered through Panorama have increased, making selling to the distributor more economically comparable to direct marketing, with less hassle for Pete and Pam. For direct sales, Pete has to transport his animals to an organic-certified meat processor in Springfield, pick up the cut meat, and deliver it to customers. While he has some local customers, a larger percentage are located in the Portland area and California. He also has to work with customers to educate them on different kinds of meat cuts and pricing. Now, this part of the business is mostly offered to existing customers.

When asked about the need for a local USDA-processing facility, Pete explained, “It would be nice, but I don’t see how it could be supported economically.” Much of the beef produced in Lake County is grain-finished elsewhere, and Pete doesn’t believe that there’s a large enough market willing to pay premiums for grass-finished beef locally. Pete sells some meat to friends and neighbors, but this is also processed in Springfield. “I’m not going to sell anything that isn’t USDA-inspected,” he says.
Munhall Farm

“We don’t want to confine. We want a pig to be a pig and a chicken to be a chicken. Grass-fed beef is healthier. We have a clientele that really appreciates what we do.” - Allen Munhall

Munhall Farm is a small-scale operation located in Lakeview’s Westside. Allen Munhall was first inspired by the principals of Joel Salatin to begin raising chickens, turkeys, pigs, and cattle on pasture. While the farm is small in size, it allows the family to supplement their income while also producing their own supply of high-quality meat. “We buy very little meat,” Allen states. Products from the farm are sold through word of mouth, primarily at Lake Health District where Allen is also employed as a nurse. While Allen states that people are sometimes initially unwilling to pay higher prices for his meat, they are often convinced after tasting the difference between his products and store bought meat. “There’s no way we could raise chickens for ninety-nine cents a pound,” he says. Poultry are processed on-site by Allen, while pigs and cattle are either kept for personal consumption or processed by Outback Meats and sold by the half or quarter animal.

While Allen is happy with the current size of his farm, he believes that there is a market for someone to start a larger operation in the area, particularly for pasture-raised poultry. He suggests that a growers co-op could help to share the cost of feed and processing equipment, two of his biggest expenses. “There’s options out there,” he states.

Bidwell Canyon Farm

Located in Fort Bidwell, CA, Bidwell Canyon Farm is working on direct-marketing produce through a booth at the Surprise Valley Saturday Market, a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) and a farm stand. With the help of high tunnels, the farm uses organic methods to grow a wide variety of vegetables such as corn, greens, carrots, beets, and tomatoes, in addition to offering fresh eggs. The farm stand is open the first and third Saturday of the month during the growing season.

There are currently seven participants in the farm’s CSA, with owner Brian Taylor estimating that they have the capacity to handle up to fifty shares in the future. As the program expands, Lake County represents a potentially untapped market, particularly if participants were able to help coordinate CSA share pick-ups and delivery. Additionally, in an effort to continue diversifying their operation, Bidwell Canyon Farm would like to expand into agritourism. Brian got the idea after out of town visitors were amazed by the natural beauty of the area while staying on the farm.
Local Food Production

Lake County Granges

“There’s no more big dances like there used to be. It was a big deal at one time. It’s just slowly died down, and they’re all that way.”
–Westside Grange Member

Grange Halls were first established in the United States after the Civil War in 1867 in order to promote agricultural interests, as well as the well-being of farmers and their communities. In addition to being the oldest national agricultural advocacy group, granges often served as the center of community life in rural areas. However, as fewer people go into farming as a profession, grange memberships have declined.

While Lake County was once home to a number of granges, their numbers have steadily decreased as granges either become less active or close their doors entirely. Near Lakeview, the Eastside, Thomas Creek, and New Pine Creek Granges have all closed. While the Westside Grange remains open, they have scaled-back their activities. Now, they hold a small monthly potluck and meeting, in addition to renting out the grange hall for weddings, graduation parties, and other celebrations.

“TVs the big thing,” one member joked about the decline in grange membership and activities. “The younger generation just isn’t interested,” she states. Located in North Lake County, the Fort Rock Grange remains the most active.

Processing:

A lack of USDA-certified processing facilities means that most cattle raised in Lake County are transported out of the area for either grain-finishing or slaughter. This remains a major obstacle for residents who want to access local meat, who typically have to purchase either a whole, half, or quarter share of an animal. Unless community members purchase animals together, this can cost from hundreds to thousands of dollars. These partial animals shares are available through mobile slaughter, which is not USDA-inspected.

Local ranchers expressed mixed opinions on the feasibility of a local USDA-processing facility. While many thought that it would be used by some producers, they were also unsure if there was enough of a market to fully support such a facility.
Lakeview Lockers operates a retail location and mobile slaughter service in Lakeview. The store carries gourmet meat, eggs, cheese, beer, wine, and other specialty products. During summer months, a popular Friday night BBQ is held at the store, as well as Saturday wine and beer tastings. Custom butchering is also available through the business’ mobile slaughter program.

During 2016, the store was purchased by employee Kayla Mathews so that former owners, Ross and Kelly McGarva, could focus on their ranch business. During this transition in ownership, the custom butchering portion of the business was placed on hold. However, this will resume in the fall, when the business will begin processing wild game before moving onto livestock during the spring.
Local Food Production

Home Gardening

“Bring up gardening in Lake County, and you’re bound to be told about the uncooperative climate, along with a story about a particularly bad summer frost. Gardeners have to contend with both a short growing season and unpredictable frosts, and many residents expressed frustration with having to regularly cover their crops and repeatedly losing harvests. According to one rancher, “It’s a full-time job. They’re out there all the time with blankets covering their crops at the beginning and end of the season.”

In Plush, where residents contend with extreme heat, strong winds, and “unholy hailstorms,” community members help to ease this burden by helping to cover each other’s gardens during inclement weather. “People will come out and cover anyone’s who is gardening,” resident LuAnn Anderson states. However, Plush residents would still like to have access to a community greenhouse or other form of communal season extension. “The season is 90 days at best,” LuAnn explains.

While fruit trees are common throughout Lake County, temperature fluctuations and recent drought years have made harvests unreliable. “You get apricots maybe once every five years,” one Lakeview resident stated. In Paisley, where the climate is slightly warmer and apple and pear production are typically more reliable, the drought has meant that there has been little fruit production in recent years, along with a number of fruit tree deaths.

“Some years, we have people anxious to get their plants into the ground, and we will see them replanting maybe three or four times.” -Lake County Resident

After the climate, the large deer population represent one of the biggest obstacles for gardeners, and many residents have given up on gardening without a deer fence in place. With little annual rainfall, high water costs can also be a barrier. “It can be an expensive hobby,” one resident explained. “A garden can add a hundred dollars a month onto someone’s water bill,” another stated.

However, long-time local gardeners have developed numerous strategies for growing a wide variety of crops in the high desert climate. “Lakeview is tomato country,” one resident states, referring to the popularity of tomato production in the area despite the climate. This is built on many years of experience, and several of those interviewed had been gardening in the same area for 20 or 40 years.
Local Food Production

Produce has begun selling seeds and plant starts in Christmas Valley. Feed stores located in Lakeview and Christmas Valley also carry gardening products.

Local gardeners expressed frustration at gardening education offerings that taught the same methods as those used in western Oregon and expressed a desire to capitalize more on local experience and knowledge when teaching gardening methods in the community. As many current gardeners are getting older, it is important that this information is passed on to the next generation.

In Paisley and Plush, community members expressed concerns that this knowledge is already being lost as the most prolific gardeners who “gardened for everyone” pass away and fewer young people take up gardening. Another gardener would like to see more bartering occurring amongst gardeners in order to create access to a wider variety of crops.

“There’s a lot of knowledge out there in the community.”-Lake County Gardener

Greenhouses, often unheated, are frequently used for season extension and protecting cold-sensitive varieties from unpredictable weather. One local gardener places gallon jugs full of water around the outside of her hoop houses, which absorb heat during the day and radiate it back into the hoop house at night. Because the high altitude leads to large differences in temperature between day and night, this method works well in the high desert. Heavy use of mulch can also help to reduce water costs, and those without deer fences have had success with products like Liquid Fence that use odor to deter deer.

Lake County gardeners reported having to contend with soil that is dense, rocky, or low in organic matter. However, local ranches are an abundant source of manure, and woodchips are available from the Collins-Pine Mill for a small fee. Two garden centers sell seeds, starts, soil, and other gardening supplies in Lakeview, while Sid’s

Gardening tips from Lake County Gardeners:

- Look around your neighborhood and see what is growing well there before deciding what to plant
- Use mulch to minimize water costs
- Get an initial soil test and adapt practices to your individual soil needs
- Look at required soil temperatures instead of growing zones for plants started in the ground
- Pick seed varieties that are well suited to high altitude and short season growing

Recommended Crops:

- Potatoes
- Salad greens
- Garlic
- Early peas and beans
- Carrots
- Early Girl tomatoes
Local Food Production

Hunting & Fishing

“Growing up, game was a large part of our diet.”
“The food source is great.”
-Lake County Hunters

Hunting and fishing help to supply many Lake County residents with additional sources of food, as well as recreational opportunities. Community members commonly hunt for mule deer, elk, duck, and grouse, while fishing for trout and bass. Bow and rifle hunting are both common, and residents of a variety of income levels participate.

While some hunters have their meat processed for them, others butcher their own meat. “It’s a family thing,” one hunter stated about making their own hamburger, sausage, and other products. According to one hunter, even ranchers with their own sources of beef may rely on wild game. “Cows are worth money,” he explained.

Hunting and fishing also help to strengthen the local economy by bringing additional tourists into the area. “Hunting tourism is big business. They come up and rent a place, then hire a cook, guide, and teenagers to clean their birds,” one rancher stated about selling packages for goose hunting on his property.

Desert Springs Trout Farm

Located outside of Summer Lake, Desert Springs Trout Farm provides sustainably-raised rainbow trout to local ponds and lakes, as well as elsewhere in Oregon, California, Utah, Nevada, and Idaho. Trout are raised in Desert Spring, a naturally flowing artesian well that stays at a consistent 60 degrees, allowing trout to be raised year round. The farm provides live fish to stock both private and public waterways, including a contract with the Oregon Department of Fisheries and Wildlife.

Value-Added Products

Products such as baked goods, honey, and jams are produced for both home consumption and sale on a small scale throughout Lake County. The selling of baked goods has been made easier by the passage of the Home Baking Bill, which allows for the sale of low-risk baked goods without the need for a certified kitchen. However, some residents complained that regulations, such as those preventing the sale of individual baked goods, were still too strict.

The presence of wild plums through Lake County, which grow prolifically in the area but few other places, represent an opportunity to market unique value-added products to a wider audience.
Located just over the state line in California’s half of New Pine Creek, Stringer’s Orchard utilizes one of the region’s unique crops—the wild plum. Operated by John Stringer, the business has been a family operation since it was purchased by his parents in 1975. Today, wine, jam, syrup, gin, and brandy are sold on the premise, in area stores, and, increasingly, across the nation through online sales. Because wild plums are very tart, they are only used for producing value-added products like those made at Stringer’s. According to John, wild plums aren’t as profitable as other kinds of fruit due to the fact that they don’t produce their own sugar. He then has the added cost of purchasing sugar to add to his products in order to make them palatable. However, wild plum products are specialty items that are not produced many places, and he receives orders from people across the country who are eager to find places to purchase items such as wild plum wine and gin.

Due to disease and several years of severe drought in the area, the orchard has lost a number of its trees, lowering yields. New wild plums take a notoriously long time to establish, up to 6 or 8 years. This has placed a strain on the business, as it takes about 6 pounds of plums to produce one gallon of wine. However, Stringer’s Orchard demonstrates the potential for creating marketable products from wild plums, which grow throughout Lake County and are already being used to make jams and other products for personal consumption in many kitchens throughout the area.
Local Food Production

Food Waste

In Lake County, the prevalence of livestock production and backyard chicken flocks helps to reduce food waste. For example, unusable food helps to feed backyard chickens at Paisley Charter School, Lakeview’s Food Pantry, and Gordon’s Produce Stand. At Sid’s Produce, spoiled produce is given to a nearby buffalo producer. While many partnerships like this exist throughout the county, these connections could still be further strengthened by connecting sources of food waste with local producers, particularly at larger institutions.

Additionally, because many rural grocery stores in the area carry predominantly shelf-stable products and limited fresh produce, there is often less food waste to begin with, but this could change if stores expand produce offerings in the future.

Fruit Tree Gleaning

On good production years, a large amount of tree fruit often goes to waste in Lake County. People may have fruit trees in their yards, but no interest in harvesting or eating the fruit, and fruit can be seen rotting on the ground around Lakeview during these times.

A gleaning program could help coordinate volunteers to collect this fruit and distribute it to those who need it.

“You can have [expired] milk if you’re raising a pig.” – Plush Resident on the Hart Mountain Store
Local Food Production

Opportunities & Recommendations

- Establish a gleaning group to collect excess tree fruit in good production years. 
  *Potential Partners: Food Pantries, CHIP, Outback Food Initiative, Oregon Food Bank*

- Create a guide based on local gardening knowledge and tips for new gardeners. 
  *Potential Partners: Outback Food Initiative, OSU Extension, Bloomers Nursery*

- Amend local laws to allow for laying hens and bees within town limits. 
  *Potential Partners: County Commissioners, City Council Members, OSU Extension*

- Explore interest in developing a producers co-op for poultry in order to share feed and processing equipment costs 
  *Potential Partners: OSU Extension, local producers*
Barriers to Food Access

A food system isn’t truly sustainable unless all members of a community have access to nutritious food. However, several barriers currently exist in Lake County that prevent community members from getting the food that they need for both themselves and their families. While the majority of Lake County Consumer Survey respondents stated that food was available in their community, only 32 percent of respondents stated that food was affordable. Of those respondents, 19 percent stated that while food is affordable to them, it is still more expensive than in less rural areas and may be unaffordable to those with children or fixed incomes. Additionally, it is important to look at the kind of food that is available, as many respondents reported limited options for purchasing fresh produce within their communities.

Many of the barriers to food access in Lake County—higher prices, lower incomes, and long distances between communities—are present in many rural communities across America. While delving further into these topics, this section also highlights many of the unique solutions to these problems which are already underway in Lake County, as well as providing recommendations for how these resources could be further strengthened.

Food Security: “Access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life. Food security includes at a minimum: the ready availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, and an assured ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways (e.g., without resorting to emergency food supplies, scavenging, stealing, or other coping strategies).” 17

“I’m paying the rent. I’m paying the electric, but I don’t have anything for food.” -Christmas Valley Resident
Barriers to Food Access

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<th></th>
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Map the Meal Gap, 2014

Food Insecurity: “Food insecurity is limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways.”

Food Insecurity in Lake County

Once ranked worst in the country for hunger, Oregon’s state food insecurity rate remains above the national average. In 2014, Lake County’s overall food insecurity rate was 17.3 percent, compared to the state average of 15.2 percent. The county’s child food insecurity rate is even higher at 26.8 percent, compared to 24.5 percent in Oregon as a whole. This equals 390 children in Lake County who may be uncertain about where their next meal will come from.

During the 2015 Healthy Teens Survey, 11.5 percent of surveyed Lake County 8th graders and 18.7 percent of 11th graders reported reducing the size of their meals because there wasn’t enough money to purchase food.

Behind these statistics, there are a number of individual stories of people struggling to put enough food on their table. One resident reported watching her cupboards steadily grow empty until a family member brought her food; another spoke of an injury sustained during mill work necessitating visits to the food pantry; and public health staff told stories of their clients reducing their own meals in order to have enough for their children.

Long distances between communities, higher food costs, and an aging population all contribute to the county’s higher rate of food insecurity. The decline of the logging industry also continues to reverberate through the community, leading to unemployment and lower incomes. This often forces people to make choices between paying rent, heating, medical, or food costs. Survey respondents listed availability of quality food as their main barrier to accessing the food they need, in addition to cost of food, transportation, heating and medical costs, and time. Long working hours often leave families with little time to prepare food from scratch, leading to reliance on less nutritious and often more expensive convenience foods. In Northern Lake County, some households are without running water and electricity, making storing and preparing food difficult or impossible.

However, there has been some improvement in recent years. Food insecurity in Lake County has decreased from 19.3 percent in 2009, which corresponds with an overall decrease in food insecurity in Oregon.

“My husband and I both work and I have a second job, so we can afford food. However, for people on fixed incomes or who have children at home, it is not as affordable.”

-Lake County Consumer Survey Respondent
Barriers to Food Access

Income and Unemployment

“Money is a lot of the issue here, especially in the winter.” –Christmas Valley Resident

“It’s hard for kids to move back with degrees.”
-Lake County Rancher

Approximately 19.3 percent of the population of Lake County lives in poverty.22 The median household income is more than 10,000 dollars below the state average, while the unemployment rate is 2 percent higher than the rest of the state.5 Underemployment due to a lack of high paying jobs and high seasonal employment both contribute to food insecurity.

“In the winter, money is a lot of the issue here.” –Christmas Valley Resident

“It’s hard for kids to move back with degrees.” –Lake County Rancher

In 2012, the annual average income was $34,397 in Lake County, compared to $44,229 in Oregon as a whole.5 Seasonal employment is available on local ranches, as well as with government agencies such as the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management. Because of the limited number of well-paid, year-round jobs, it can be difficult for young people to move back to the area after graduating college. Additionally, while seasonal agricultural work typically provides housing and access to ranch products year-round, workers are usually only paid during the ranching season. This leaves many families struggling to make ends meet during winter months.

“We got discouraged. We got defeated. I think that once we start getting people employed again, it’s going to come back.”
-Lakeview resident on mill closures

Moving Forward: New Employment Opportunities

“I think that with Red Rock and the 42nd group, things will get better.”-Lakeview Resident

While still in the early stages, several planned businesses have the potential to bring hundreds of new jobs into the Lakeview area. These include a biofuels plant, two commercial marijuana operations, and a large solar plant. While these businesses have committed to hiring locally, the number of jobs that will be made available will most likely necessitate bringing in additional employees from outside the area.

Red Rock Biofuels: With adjustments to the town’s urban growth boundary recently approved to accommodate the plant’s location just south of Lakeview, Red Rock Biofuels will convert woody biomass into diesel and jet fuel. Moving forward, construction of Red Rock has the potential to create a number of long-term jobs, as well as short-term employment during construction.

“We need to have jobs available for our residents after they graduate from college with a degree. There is nothing here for those who hold a Bachelors Degree. Working for minimum wage is ridiculous when you have student loans to pay as well as needing to support a family!”

-Klamath & Lake Counties Community Action Services 2015 Community Needs Assessment23
Barriers to Food Access

Transportation

“The only one option for food shopping, it makes it extremely hard to make other choices for shopping unless you want to drive 90 miles to buy groceries. “

-Lake County Consumer Survey Respondent

The average population density of Lake County is one person per square mile, with the majority of the population living in the Lakeview area. As part of the Lake County Consumer Survey, many residents reported regularly driving over 90 miles to purchase groceries in larger cities such as Klamath Falls and Bend.

Because of this, residents are often faced with paying higher prices for fewer options by staying in Lake County or spending time and money driving out of town to shop at discount stores. For those without personal transportation, options are limited.

While this distance makes it hard for residents of these communities to access food, it also makes it difficult for fresh food to get to the community, and many rural grocery stores carry shelf-stable products in place of fresh produce. Lower purchasing volume and transportation costs also often force local grocery stores to sell items at higher prices.

“We have no car. The nearest store is a five mile walk round trip.”

-Lake County Consumer Survey Respondent

Lake County Public Transportation

Within Lake County, public transportation is primarily available through the Lake County Senior Center, which provides senior ride programs that are also open to the general public. In Lakeview, the senior center offers a program that provides rides locally, as well as to Klamath Falls and Alturas, California a few times a month. Rides are free within town and cost between five to ten dollars for out of town trips. While the majority of participants are using the program to attend doctors’ visits, it is also being used for grocery shopping. Participants can sign up for rides by contacting the senior center.

The Lake County Senior Center also provides ride services in northern Lake County. In North Lake, the senior bus picks up riders in Summer Lake, Silver Lake, Christmas Valley, and Fort Rock, and provides regularly scheduled trips to Klamath Falls, La Pine, and Bend. The bus takes participants on casino trips, to doctors’ appointments, and to grocery outlets such as Wal-Mart, Safeway, and Bi-Mart.

In North Lake and Paisley, there is a second program run through the Inter-Court Family Center in Paisley. Supported by an ODOT grant, volunteer drivers provide free rides to Bend, Klamath Falls, and Lakeview. Requests for rides need to be made at least five days in advance, and it is not guaranteed that volunteer drivers will be available for all requested times. This ride program is available to residents of Paisley, Fort Rock, Christmas Valley, Silver Lake, and Summer Lake. While it was originally designated for seniors and disabled residents, the program is now open to the general public, and many participants are using the program to purchase groceries.
Barriers to Food Access

Senior Population

Lake County is home to an aging population, with over 20 percent of the population over the age of 65, compared to 14 percent in the rest of Oregon. Seniors are more likely to live on fixed incomes and have less access to transportation. Older residents in Lake County are also less likely to use SNAP benefits for which they are eligible. At the Lake County Senior Center, many clients feel that food assistance is for young people raising families and worry about taking benefits away from others.

Clients are also often unwilling to share the personal information required to receive assistance. According to staff members, the lunch served at the center three times a week is the only meal of the day for some of their clients, and they often notice people taking food home for later meals.

“People don’t want to reach out and ask for help.”
–Senior Center Staff Member

Director Andrea Wishart lists transportation as the biggest barrier for seniors in accessing food, while Senior Navigator Nonie Moss lists low incomes, transportation, and cooking ability as the three largest factors affecting senior nutrition in the area.

High medical costs can also be a barrier for seniors. “We have a lot of seniors that don’t qualify for assistance, but because of their medical bills and prescription costs, they have less money than all of us,” a staff member states. Many of these seniors rely on the free bread and produce distributed at the center.

Lake County as a Food Desert

Food deserts are “low income census tracts where a substantial number or share of residents has low access to a supermarket or large grocery store.”

The USDA currently designates Lake County as both a low-income and low-access tract, meeting the definition for a rural food desert spanning the entirety of the county. To meet this definition, communities must have both low incomes and low access to fresh, healthy foods, with at least 33 percent of the population living 10 miles or more from a supermarket in rural areas, compared to one mile in urban locations.

When surveyed, the majority of respondents indicated that while food was available in their community, options are limited. Residents particularly noted a lack of variety, fresh produce, and organic options.

“Their are cycles of refresh produce. The food supply varies by the time of month.”
–Paisley Resident
Barriers to Food Access

Federal Food Assistance

Eligibility for food assistance is determined by income level using federal poverty guidelines and varies by program. Someone at 100 percent of the federal poverty guideline, or 11,880 dollars in annual income for an individual, is at the federal poverty level. Food assistance eligibility typically begins before this income level from between 135 to 185 percent of the poverty guideline.

2016 Federal Poverty Guidelines

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Food Assistance Eligibility by Program

- Suplemental Nutrition Assistance: 185%
- Women, Infants, and Children (WIC): 185%
- Klamath-Lake Counties Food Bank: 185%
- Free School Lunch: 130%
- Reduced School Lunch: 185%
- Senior Farm Direct Nutrition: 135%

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

SNAP, or the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, is a federal nutrition program which provides food assistance to eligible individuals and families through an electronic benefit transfer (EBT) card. Replacing paper food stamps, EBT cards function in the same way as a debit card and can be used to purchase food at grocery stores, convenience stores, and authorized farmers markets and farm stands. In addition to food products, SNAP benefits can also be used to purchase seed and food-producing plant starts. During 2011, approximately 45 million people received SNAP benefits nationally, or about one in seven residents of the United States, with an average monthly benefit amount of 134 dollars per person. SNAP is a federal entitlement program, meaning that all individuals who qualify will receive assistance and participation in the program does not have the potential to take away benefits from others.

During 2015, Oregon residents whose gross income was at or below 185 percent of federal poverty guidelines were eligible for SNAP benefits. In 2012, an average of 766,527 Oregon residents used SNAP benefits each month. This represents 73 percent of the total population eligible for assistance within Oregon.

In 2015, 35 percent of Lake County SNAP recipients were children.

In 2012, an average of 1,529 Lake County residents participated in SNAP each month. An additional 717 individuals were eligible for benefits which they did not use, resulting in a 68 percent participation rate. For those eligible over the age of 65, the participation rate was 41 percent. This is a slight increase from 2009, when 60 percent of all eligible residents and 38 percent of seniors participated.

If all those who were eligible participated, an estimated additional $1,100,320 would be brought into the local economy. This is more than the $707,000 estimated by Map the Meal Gap to meet all additional county food needs. As part of the Klamath and Lake County Community Action Services 2015 Assessment, Lake County clients listed SNAP as their second most utilized resource, with both SNAP and food pantries listed as vital services.
Barriers to Food Access

“I only get $16 a month. I go to Bend to shop.”
“My food stamps recently got cut to $60 a month. And I’m feeding two.”

–Lake County Consumer Survey respondents on SNAP benefits

However, even those using SNAP are often left with unmet food needs. During the 2016 Lake County Food Pantry Client Survey, 62 percent of respondents reported using SNAP benefits. For those using SNAP, benefits lasted from one week to more than a month, with approximately two weeks being average. Lakeview Food Pantry organizers report that the pantry is busiest towards the end of the month when clients’ SNAP benefits have run out.

With the average cost of a meal currently $2.95 in Lake County, even someone receiving the maximum individual monthly allotment of $194 would be unable to eat three meals a day for an entire month without approximately seventy dollars in additional food resources. The average allotment in Oregon is $120, which would then require an addition $145 each month to meet all food needs. In 2014, the average yearly earnings for Lake County SNAP recipients was $10,818.

“There are also barriers to using SNAP benefits in Lake County. For pantry clients not using SNAP, reasons included being unsure if they qualified, being unsure about how to use benefits, being uncomfortable or embarrassed using benefits, or not knowing what programs are available. The small size of communities in Lake County means that people will often know both the store cashiers and those in the checkout line with them, potentially increasing stigma around using an EBT card, easily recognizable as the “The Oregon Trail Card” within the state. One resident reported that a problem with a SNAP transaction was announced over a store-wide intercom. Additionally, some Lake County grocery stores do not currently accept SNAP, requiring residents to travel outside of their community in order to use benefits."

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“Some are so proud, so they won’t [accept assistance].”–Christmas Valley Resident

During the 2016 Lake County Consumer Survey, 12.9% of respondents were unsure if they qualified for food benefits, and other respondents indicated that they would not use them even if they were eligible. Many community members stated that pride and the value placed on independence creates a stigma around using benefits or accepting other forms of government assistance in the area. Additionally, individuals living in more remote parts of the county may have a desire to “live off the grid” and are therefore unwilling to share the personal information required to receive assistance.

“If I am strong enough to work, I will pay for my own.”–Lake County Consumer Survey Respondent

During the 2016 Lake County Consumer Survey, 12.9% of respondents were unsure if they qualified for food benefits, and other respondents indicated that they would not use them even if they were eligible. Many community members stated that pride and the value placed on independence creates a stigma around using benefits or accepting other forms of government assistance in the area. Additionally, individuals living in more remote parts of the county may have a desire to “live off the grid” and are therefore unwilling to share the personal information required to receive assistance.

“People fend for themselves,” one Christmas Valley resident stated.
Barriers to Food Access

**Women, Infants, and Children**

The Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Supplemental Nutrition Program is a federal assistance program that provides support to low-income pregnant, postpartum, and breastfeeding women, as well as infants and children under the age of five. To qualify for WIC, a family’s income needs to fall at or below 185% of the federal poverty level. The WIC program offers access to approved, nutritious foods such as fruits and vegetables, whole grains, milk, and baby food, as well as nutrition education and counseling, breastfeeding support, and health referrals.  

In 2015, almost half of all pregnant women in Oregon participated in WIC. This number was higher in rural areas, with 54% of women in rural counties participating compared to 38 percent in metropolitan counties. In this same year, 62.13 million dollars were spent in WIC benefits at authorized grocery stores, pharmacies, and farmers markets across the state. Unlike SNAP, WIC is not a federal entitlement program. Instead, WIC is a federal grant program which Congress authorizes a set amount of funds for each year.  

Within Lake County, the WIC program is overseen by the Public Health Department, which recently made the transition to E-WIC from the older paper voucher system. This means that WIC clients now receive an electronic benefit card similar to the SNAP program instead of individual paper vouchers, though purchases are still restricted to WIC-approved foods. Beth Hadley, director of Lake County Public Health, praised this transition, stating that it helps remove stigma for WIC clients and reduces stress for store cashiers. In 2015, 128 families participated in the WIC program within Lake County, which consisted of ninety-one pregnant, breastfeeding, or postpartum women and 243 children under the age of five. Of these families, 45% had a family member working. That same year, 135,893 dollars were provided to local grocery retailers through WIC purchases. In Lake County, 43% of all pregnant women participated in WIC in 2015, compared to the state average of 54% for rural counties.  

Annie Thornton, Lake County WIC Coordinator, explained that some local families who are eligible for WIC don’t use the service because of either pride or the stigma around using assistance. Annie stated that while most of their WIC clients also receive SNAP benefits and visit the local food pantry, there is still a gap, particularly among working families.

**Emergency Food Assistance**

A member of the Oregon Food Bank Network, The Klamath-Lake Counties Food Bank is a regional food bank that provides food to pantries in Klamath and Lake Counties. Lake County’s food pantries are then responsible for regularly picking up food in Klamath Falls. The Klamath-Lake Counties Food Bank distributes more than 31,000 pounds of food every week, which helped feed approximately 6,400 households in 2014. First-time pantry clients receive a one-time emergency food box and are then referred to the Klamath-Lake Counties Food Bank to determine eligibility and receive a punch-card.
Barriers to Food Access

This punch-card allows a pantry client to receive twelve boxes a year, though those in need can call the food bank to receive additional boxes. It is up to the client how often they want to come to the pantry and receive a box. They could come to the pantry only during winter months due to seasonal employment, every week for a shorter time after a job loss or other hardship, or once a month to help supplement SNAP benefits. Clients can also come in for produce and bread without it counting towards their 12 boxes. Food boxes are intended to last three-five days. While these boxes are intended as emergency food assistance, the reality is that they represent a regular food source for many pantry clients.

Of surveyed clients, 61% visited the pantry monthly, while 21% visited a few times a year.

Lake County is home to three food pantries located in Lakeview, Paisley, and Christmas Valley. In Lakeview, a shopping-style pantry is set up every Thursday in the first floor of The Gathering Place, a local church operated by Lakeview Ministries. In Paisley and Christmas Valley, premade food boxes are assembled by volunteers and distributed based on family size once a month. In Paisley, there was initially some resistance within the community to establishing a food pantry, which a pantry volunteer attributed to a fear of change, as well a worry that it would attract “riff-raff” and affect local business. However, the pantry now regularly feeds up to 50 people a month in a community of 250 residents, with many clients using the pantry each month. Distribution also tends to increase during the winter months when there is less seasonal work available on local ranches.

The Christmas Valley pantry is operated by the North Lake County Food Share. Once a month, a volunteer makes the 125-mile trip to Klamath Falls to pick up food for the pantry. The distance from the Klamath-Lake Counties Food Bank makes it difficult for the pantry to carry as much fresh produce as the Lakeview and Paisley pantries. “There’s been very little recently. It’s hit or miss. We got a pallet of potatoes during the winter which took us a few months to give away. We get strawberries sometimes, but it’s not on a consistent basis,” a pantry volunteer explains. With the spread out nature of the Christmas Valley population, the pantry partners with congregation members at Fort Rock Church to offer home deliveries to those unable to attend the pantry in person.

In July of 2016, the Christmas Valley Food Pantry provided food boxes to 77 families.

The majority of surveyed pantry clients stated that they heard about the program through word-of-mouth, most often from one of the pantry organizers. Lakeview is also home to the Food Share program, which provides emergency food boxes and distributes holiday food boxes to anyone in the community on Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter. The presence of both the Lakeview Food Share and the Lakeview Food Pantry has caused some confusion within the community, as both organizations are operated by Lakeview Ministries. Unlike Lake County’s three food pantries, Food Share is an independent program, unaffiliated with the Oregon Food Bank.
Operating every Thursday at The Gathering Place in downtown Lakeview, the food pantry is an important resource for residents of Lakeview and the surrounding areas. Pantry Manager Marty Provost states that, “No one in the community should go hungry if they know where I live.” One of the key features of the Lakeview Food Pantry is how well pantry staff, volunteers, and clients know one another.

“I’ve been there before,” one volunteer stated about their own struggles with food insecurity. Most people are greeted by name when entering into the back of the church where tables are stocked with produce, canned good, and other staples. Through the Oregon Food Bank’s Fresh Alliance program, the food pantry is now able to get bread, meat, and produce that the local Safeway is no longer able to sell.

Often distribution is highest in the winter and at the end of each month, but they also see an increase in seasonal workers during the summer who have just moved to the area and are having trouble making ends meet before receiving their first pay check. In October of 2015, the Lakeview Food Pantry gave out approximately 100 food boxes, which served 243 people and required 181 volunteer hours. As Lakeview Ministries works closely with the local prison and corrections programs, many people volunteer with the food pantry as part of their parole or community service requirements.

“The interaction with the people is my favorite part, seeing the joy. The food is a necessity. It’s what everyone at the very least should have. It’s important that people know they’re not alone. Just to let them know someone cares.”-Lakeview Pantry Volunteer
May to October, the Klamath-Lake Counties Food Bank is able to distribute additional produce to the communities they serve. Produce is acquired through the Oregon Food Bank and locally, and has to be picked up by pantry volunteers in Klamath Falls. In Lake County, produce is being distributed by the Lakeview Food Pantry and Paisley Food Share, which rotate distribution weeks. In Lakeview, the line often stretches down the block before the give-away starts, with an average of 100 people coming to get free produce. In July of 2016, 18,102 pounds of produce were distributed to a total of 1,422 community members in Lakeview, Paisley, and the surrounding area. Unlike the food pantry, produce is available to anyone in the community through this program, regardless of income level.

Unfortunately, logistical problems have prevented this program from being expanded into North Lake. While the food bank has the additional produce to distribute, volunteers from North Lake would need to arrive at the Klamath Falls warehouse from between nine to ten in the morning on the Friday they wanted to distribute, and then give away the produce within four hours of leaving the warehouse.

“The rich and the poor were here. Fruits and vegetables are so expensive to buy.”
-Lakeview Resident
Open to anyone in the community, the Food Share program gave away 225 bags of food to residents of Lakeview, New Pine Creek, and the surrounding area a few days before Thanksgiving this year. Bags contained many of the necessary ingredients for a Thanksgiving meal—a choice of turkey or ham, canned vegetables and cranberries, stuffing mix, potatoes, soup, and desserts.

Housed in the shared Lakeview Food Pantry and Food Share warehouse, a long line of people came out the distribution despite the snow, along with home deliveries for seniors and others without transportation. As one of three holiday distributions throughout the year, a number of community volunteers helped to sign people in, hand out food, and deliver boxes to people’s homes.

While many of those in attendance were also food pantry clients, volunteers also saw a number of new faces. This year saw an increase in attendance over previous years, and the Food Share program also provided a hot meal on Thanksgiving Day for the first time. Unlike the Lakeview Food Pantry, no proof of income is required for the holiday distribution or Thanksgiving meal.
The program, fresh meals are delivered three times a week along with frozen meals for non-delivery days and weekends. The meals delivered through the program are the same served at the center, which are prepared as one meal by cooking staff.

The program can handle about fifteen clients at a time and typically hovers around this number. While the meal is designated as a lunch, program staff explain that it is the only meal of the day for the majority of clients using the program.

Additionally, residents of North Lake indicated a need for a meal delivery program in the northern part of the county.

### Senior Meals

Senior meals are served at the Lake County Senior Center three times a week in Lakeview. There is a suggested donation for seniors and a small fee for the general community. Meals typically include a salad bar, main dish, desert, and snacks, with the majority of food provided by the Klamath-Lake Counties Food Bank. Holiday meals are often the most popular, with 80-100 people eating at the center during Thanksgiving and Christmas meals.

Themed-meals are also offered once a month to celebrate the month’s birthdays, as well as bingo games and movies following certain meals. Moving forward, senior center staff would like to move past the ideas that the meals are just for seniors and get more people from the wider community to attend.

In the northern part of the county, senior meals are offered at the Homestead Café in Paisley and The Lodge at Summer Lake. The Lodge at Summer Lake offers meals twice a month on the second and fourth Tuesday at noon, which typically bring in around forty people from the Summer Lake, Paisley, Silver Lake, and Christmas Bareis to Food Access

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Barriers to Food Access

Valley area. The program, which is in its eighth year of operation, is reimbursed through the Area Agency on Aging in Klamath Falls. According to a lodge staff member, one of its main draws is the social opportunity. “It’s one grand social party,” he explains.

North Lake Soup Kitchen

For several years, a seasonal soup kitchen has operated in Christmas Valley at the Well in the Wilderness Church. The North Lake Soup Kitchen runs from October-April, and often serves between 30-50 people each week. The program has been privately funded through donations from the congregation, local stores, and individuals.

However, with several of the volunteer cooks getting older and stepping down from the program, the future of the soup kitchen is uncertain. “There’s been no one to step up to the plate. It’s a lot of work. Everything is homemade,” a congregation member stated, “They may just let it go.”

Emergency Food Assistance in the Warner Valley

“As a community, we are really aware.”
-LuAnn Anderson, Plush Resident

Formally, Plush is without a food pantry or other emergency food assistance program. However, the small, close-knit nature of the community leads many community members to prepare meals for their friends and neighbors in the event that they have fallen on hard times such as job loss, illness, or simply a rancher living on his own—locally referred to as “batching.” Often, these meals are prepared at Plush’s sole restaurant, located inside the Hart Mountain Store. According to Plush resident LuAnn Anderson, this kind of informal assistance works well in Plush where everyone knows each other well. “People notice when their neighbors are struggling,” she states.

This typically takes the form of prepared meals, rather than the staples that are distributed through a food pantry. In the past, there have been residents in Plush who have borrowed money for gas from others in order to get to the food pantry in Lakeview. According to Luann, this hasn’t occurred in recent years, which she attributes to changes in Plush’s current residents.

However, increasing coordination between Lakeview’s Food Pantry and the community of Plush may help to fill this need if it reemerges in the future or offer assistance to those who may be uncomfortable receiving help from their neighbors.
Previously run through the Humane Society, All God’s Creatures is now an independent non-profit that distributes free pet food to the Lakeview area on the second Saturday of every month, with the requirement that people’s pets are spayed or neutered. The program is run entirely on donations of food and money, with about ten to twelve people receiving pet food through the program every month. While All God’s Creatures is focused on feeding pets, Program Coordinator Rhonda Dial explains that most of their clients are already utilizing services such as SNAP and the local food pantry for themselves, but are unable to purchase pet food. This program can then give participants up to 50 extra dollars a month to spend on other necessities such as heating, bills, and meeting additional food needs for themselves.

Providing education about the importance of spaying pets can also help to break an expensive cycle of increasing pet ownership, and the program helps to pay for spaying and neutering when they are able. Rhonda attributes the program’s success in changing people’s attitudes to their non-authoritative approach. “If you don’t act like an authority and don’t shove things down people’s throats, new ideas can be really well-received,” she states. Currently, the program is working on acquiring a van in order to start offering services in the northern part of the county, with the eventual goal of opening a no-kill shelter in Lakeview.

“If you take the bull by the horns, things will happen.”
-Rhonda Dial, Program Coordinator
Barriers to Food Access

School Lunch Programs

Lake County contains five separate school districts and nine total schools. Five of these schools are part of Lake County SD 7, located in Lakeview. Other schools are located in Paisley, Adel, Plush, and North Lake. The North Lake District includes students from the communities of Silver Lake, Christmas Valley, and Fort Rock. Of these five school districts, only two participate in the USDA National School Lunch Program—Lakeview and North Lake. Paisley School, a public charter school, operates an independent school lunch program, while Plush and Adel’s schools provide snacks and quick foods for students. The National School Lunch Program guarantees that students at participating schools have access to nutritionally adequate meals. To insure this, free and reduced meals are available to students who meet income eligibility requirements. Children in Head Start, foster care, or who are homeless, migrants or living in a household receiving SNAP, FDPIR and/or TANF benefits can receive categorical eligibility or direct certification without filling out a full application. If a child does not fall into one of these categories, income-based eligibility can be determined by filling out the full application with the relevant school district.36

During the 2015-2016 school year, 44.9% of students were eligible for free or reduced lunch in Lake County. This equals 545 eligible students out of a total student population of 1,213. In the North Lake School District, this percentage was 73.6, or 167 eligible out of a total of 227 students.35

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>School District</th>
<th>Percentage Eligible for Free or Reduced Lunch</th>
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<tr>
<td>Lake County SD 7</td>
<td>50.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Lake SD 14</td>
<td>73.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paisley SD 11</td>
<td>68%</td>
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* Eligibility rates for Adel SD 21 and Plush SD 18 are kept confidential in order to protect student anonymity due to their small size.

Fremont Elementary

Unlike many modern schools, the kitchen at Fremont Elementary still contains cooking equipment such as stove tops, ovens, and industrial mixers. Because of this, many items can be prepared from scratch instead of simply reheating food prepared elsewhere. This allows for more potential flexibility for increasing incorporation of healthy foods into the school lunch program, though cold storage space and cost remains a limiting factor for carrying more fresh produce. Students from A.D. Hay Elementary, located across the street, also eat their school meals at Fremont.

Alternative Education

Operated by the Central Oregon Intergovernmental Council (COIC), alternative education is offered for youth aged 14-21 who have not been successful in a traditional classroom setting. The program also offers a work-education component that combines community service projects with earning classroom credits. Lunch is provided by Lakeview Senior High, however COIC students do not have access to the full lunch offerings available at the high school. According to a program staff member, the amount of food is often inadequate for young people engaged in the physical labor required for the work-education program, many of whom are also struggling with food insecurity and not receiving full meals at home.
Unable to keep up with the cost of conforming to the USDA’s National School Lunch Program, Paisley Public Charter School found itself without a school lunch program for one year. During that time, many students relied on quick foods such as hot pockets purchased from the local store during their lunch hour. Now, the small school has been operating its own independent breakfast and lunch program for several years with widespread community support. Breakfast and lunch are offered by suggested donation, with about 68% of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch under a standard federal lunch program.

The program receives donations from individuals and local congregations, in addition to community members who volunteer their time to help prepare the meals, serve food, and wash dishes. Donated beef from area ranches, as well as local products like rhubarb and wild plums, are often used in the meals, which are typically prepared from scratch. In order to meet safety standards, donated beef is typically processed in Burns, where the program has also been able to receive free processing and delivery. According to kitchen manager Sheila Stephens, “Cooking from scratch like this takes someone who really cares about nutrition. Someone else could have opened a can of chili and be ahead financially and time wise.” However, Sheila always manages to pull whatever meal she is preparing together, stating, “Some people have the miracle of loaves and fishes, but I have the miracle of time.” The program has been able to increase the amount of fruits and vegetables eaten by students over time. “My goal is to get people back to eating real food,” she says.

The school lunch program has been very popular among students and the community as a whole, and could serve as a model for other small, rural schools who are struggling with offering a meal program. This isn’t the first time that Paisley Charter School has had to come up with creative solutions due to its small size. The schools also operates an online program for county homeschoolers, as well as a residential dorm for students attending the school from outside Paisley, including participants in the school’s international program.
Currently, Head Start works with about forty families in the Lakeview area. The Head Start philosophy entails working with the whole family to help develop healthy habits, rather than just the child. During the day, Head Start serves two family-style meals, emphasizing the importance of eating together as a family. “We want kids full when they leave here,” states Head Start Coordinator Vicki Taylor. This is because she knows some of the children aren’t eating an adequate amount of food over the weekend, returning hungry on Monday. She has also noticed that the number of parent volunteers staying to eat with the children increases towards the end of the month, which she attributes to tight resources which may not allow parents to purchase adequate food for themselves during this time.

Vicki states that it can be very difficult for single parent, working families to have the time to prepare healthy foods instead of relying on quick convenience foods. However, she also believes that more cooking and nutrition education has the potential to make this easier to manage. Currently, Head Start sends home different recipes with children, including simple, healthy snacks that kids can prepare for themselves, in addition to encouraging families to bring in and share their own recipes. Overall, the program is typically able to increase the amounts of fruits and vegetables that children eat over the course of the year.

Currently, Lakeview Head Start is in the process of building a larger building which will allow them to serve more families and provide additional services. The new building will also contain a larger kitchen, which Vicki would like to use to restart the Summer Meal program that Head Start helped to operate in the past.
Barriers to Food Access

A Gap in Access: Summer Meals

Currently, there are no summer meal programs in Lake County. This leaves many low-income families struggling during summer months when school meal programs are no longer available. Previously, a program was run at the town park in Lakeview every weekday during the summer. The meals were open to anyone eighteen and under, with up to ninety-one lunches being given out each day. According to WIC Coordinator Annie Thornton, the absence of this program is leaving a large gap among low-income youth during summer months.

Despite its benefits, several challenges existed for running the program. Funding for the program comes out to about four dollars per lunch, which doesn’t allow for paying staffing and transportation costs. The organization running the program will also have to have access to a certified kitchen and ample cold storage space, preventing local congregations from taking over the meals. Lakeview Head Start may be able to begin running the program again after moving to a larger location next year, but this would still leave those elsewhere in the county without access to a summer meal program.

In the past, the Fort Rock Community Church distributed punch cards to students which allowed them to pick up bags of food at Sagewood Grocery in Christmas Valley during summer months, but they discontinued the program because of logistical problems and low participation. Because the population of North Lake is so spread out, it wasn’t feasible to distribute food directly to students, and, according to one volunteer, many parents were either without transportation or unwilling to drive youth to the pick-up location. So, while the need for a summer meal program remains high in North Lake, where 73.6% of students are eligible for free and reduced lunch, coordination remains difficult.

Weekend Meals

Currently, the North Lake School is the only school in Lake County to provide weekend food for students through a partnership with a local congregation. The school operates on a four day school week, meaning that low-income students were without school meals for three days out of the week before it began.

Paisley Charter School also operates on a four day week, while schools in Plush and Adel are on a 4.5 day schedule. Common in rural areas where students may have to be bused long distances to reach school, these schedules also leave low-income students without access to school meals and snacks for several days each week.

Drug Use & Food Insecurity

“Chaos is their only constant.”
-North Lake resident on children growing up in families affected by drug use

Across Lake County, people are worried about the increasing prevalence of drug use in their communities, particularly in North Lake. Residents in the area reported that this affects not only the stability of families, but the ability for children to access food assistance services.

“People may say, ‘I’ll give you sixty dollars in SNAP for so much cash,’ in order to purchase drugs,” one resident stated. A student at North Lake School also reported that some parents take and sell food provided by the weekend backpack program in order to purchase drugs. Ultimately, addressing food insecurity will need to go hand-in-hand with combating drug use.
During the last five school years, volunteers from the Fort Rock Community Church have provided backpacks full of food for the weekend to K-12 students at the North Lake School District. Though parents do have to opt into the program through a letter sent home with students, the program is open to everyone. Backpacks contain items such as ravioli, tuna, granola bars, fruit cups, peanut butter, and corn tortillas. At the end of the 2015-2016 school year, forty-five students were participating in the program out of a total of 227 students.

A volunteer for the program believes that there are more students who could benefit from the program, but their parents are stopped from opting in by pride. Before the program began, one of the school cooks sent food home with a student she had noticed was hungry, only for the school to receive an angry call from her mother, who felt she was being told she couldn’t feed her child. Because of this, the school has been careful to acquire parental consent before sending any food home, even though this limits the number of students the program can reach.

Through a grant, the school was able to purchase the backpacks used in the program and food is primarily paid for by donations from congregation members. Volunteers also donate their time to purchase, pack, and delivery the food to the school each week. Recently, the program has also begun receiving donations from the Christmas Valley Music Festival held in the area in August of each year.

Like many programs in Lake County, the High Desert Brain Food Program was started through the hard work of dedicated community members. Lindy Simmons, who helped start the program, says she was inspired to start a weekend food program in Christmas Valley after seeing a similar program in Mesa, Arizona. “There’s a real need,” she states. The school was very receptive to the idea, with one teacher reporting that she could see a significant difference among her students after the backpacks started being sent home.
Barriers to Food Access

Rural Grocery Stores

Store owners are caught trying to compete with the prices offered at larger stores while still trying to make a profit when faced with higher inventory and transportation costs due to their small size and remote location. One store owner stated, “If you don’t use it, you lose it,” going on to say that there should be more consumer education about why prices are higher locally. Many county residents shop at the Safeway located in Lakeview or larger discount stores located in Bend or Klamath Falls once a month, only shopping at their local stores when they run out of items between larger shopping trips. However, for those without transportation or the money to travel out of town regularly, the continued survival of these stores is vital to their ability to acquire food.

Additionally, many of these stores serve additional functions in the community. In Plush, the Hart Mountain Store is not only the only grocery store, but the town gas station, restaurant, bar, and meeting place. They host birthday parties, “spaghetti feeds,” and Superbowl watch parties. For residents of Summer Lake, the Summer Lake Store also operates a gas station, post office, and functions as one of the primary meeting places for residents to socialize, especially for seniors in the area. Many area stores also supply local schools and restaurants in order to meet minimum ordering requirements from suppliers. For example, the Summer Lake Store also orders food for the Paisley School, Summer Lake Lodge, and Playa, a nearby residential arts program.

Store owners reported that while they rarely purchased products from secondary suppliers, they occasionally purchased products from

While the Safeway located in Lakeview is the county’s sole chain grocery store, the majority of Lake County’s communities still contain a small store. Most have been in the community for many decades and are now struggling to compete with large chain stores and online shopping, as well as the development of viable succession plans. Many are moving away from the general store model towards operating as more of a convenience store, with the majority of sales occurring during summer months when tourists are visiting the area for outdoor recreation opportunities. Average monthly sales during the summer are often more than double monthly winter sales. In order to take advantage of these increased sales, the majority of stores have separate winter and summer hours, staying open from half an hour to four hours longer during summer months. However, two store owners also stated that residents can call them after-hours in emergencies or on holidays.

“People buy what they run out of here and do their larger shopping out of town once a month.”
-Lake County Store Owner

“The school and store are the heart of the community” –Plush Resident
Barriers to Food Access

Costco, Bi-Mart, and Cash’n’Carry in Bend, Klamath Falls, or La Pine. With the exception of eggs carried at one store, none of the stores surveyed carried local products. One store owner stated that while it’s possible that a percentage of the beef he carries was originally produced in the area, it would have first been processed elsewhere by a larger distributor and shipped back in.

Several stores in Lake County currently do not accept SNAP or WIC, with one owner stating that he was worried that he might offend existing customers who don’t believe in government assistance programs if he started accepting SNAP. Another store owner stated that he had problems accepting WIC in the past when the program still used the paper voucher system.

“People come through here all the time now,” one Plush resident stated, noting the increase in visitors to the area’s sunstone mines.

The expansion of SNAP and WIC acceptance could also make it possible for more residents to purchase food at their community stores, further increasing revenue.

Located 14 miles south of Lakeview, New Pine Creek is a community without a store. According to one resident, “We have nothing. We installed large shelves in our garage and go to Costco in Klamath Falls to buy in bulk. People can come to us if they need a can of corn or something. They can pay if they want. We also keep three gas cans for people who come through and run out of gas.”

Store owners are also concerned about how they will retire with few people willing to take over their businesses, as several stores have failed to sell when put on the market. One store owner referred to these kinds of stores as “dinosaurs.” Another stated that a new owner would need to fit in with the local culture and get along with the “ranchers, miners, and hunters” that make up the community.

However, the increase in tourism within Lake County could continue to also increase the profitability of these stores, making them a more desirable purchase for potential new owners. For example, the first scenic bikeway was established in Lake County during 2016. At 89.3 miles in length, the Oregon Outback Scenic Bikeway will take cyclists through the communities of Lakeview, Plush, and Adel, all of which contain locally-owned stores that could benefit from the increased tourism in the area. Those travelling from western Oregon may also pass through the communities of Silver Lake, Summer Lake, Paisley, and Valley Falls on their way to the trail. “People come through here all the time now,” one Plush resident stated, noting the increase in visitors to the area’s sunstone mines.

The mills closed. The stores closed. We all started going to Klamath.”-Lakeview Resident

Credit

During the Rural Grocery Store Owner Survey, several Lake County grocery store owners indicated that they will allow customers to purchase items on credit if they know the customer is in need. One owner stated that he had given out several thousand dollars’ worth of food on credit to customers he knew couldn’t pay and that he did not expect to ever be repaid for. The smaller size of communities in Lake County contributes to this, as most store owners stated that they have close relationships with their customers. In Plush, costumers also have the option to be billed monthly through a charge account.
Having worked in produce when he was younger, Sid Robinson opened Sid’s Produce three years ago in response to the need he saw in Christmas Valley for increased availability of fresh produce. Previously an empty lot, the business has grown beyond Sid’s initial expectations, selling 10,000 pounds of watermelon last summer. Sid is now looking into ways to expand his building to keep up with customer demand. He had initially planned for the store to be a seasonal produce stand, so he is working on making a number of improvements to the building now that it is open year-round.

Three times a week, Sid makes the 64 mile drive to La Pine to pick up his produce order. As the business expands, Sid wants to stay focused on carrying primarily produce, though he also sells other items such as eggs, honey, spices, and condiments. The store also expanded into offering gardening products this year, including plant starts, organic fertilizers, and potting soil.
“You don’t know what you’re going to get each time, but it’s generally half fruit and half vegetables. It’s all really affordable.”
-Coordinator Candace Johnson

Coordinator Candace Johnson worked for four years to bring the Bountiful Baskets program to Lakeview because she wanted more options for affordable produce for both her family and the wider community. Operating in twenty-five states, Bountiful Baskets is an online food co-op that offers bi-weekly boxes of either conventional or organic low-cost produce, with additional offerings of meat, bread, and other value-added products.

Before a Lakeview site could be established, Candace had to get 100 people to sign up for the program. This was quickly accomplished through social media advertising and word-of-mouth, but working out the delivery route to Lakeview took much longer. Initially, volunteers had to drive to Burns to pick up the boxes. “It has to be worth it to the trucking company,” Candace says, but adds, “now there’s enough interest that the truck comes here.” Currently, Lakeview is the only delivery site in Lake County. Residents can pick up their baskets at a local elementary school every other Saturday. While numbers decline slightly in summer when some participants have their own gardens, the program typically receives orders for at least eighty baskets. Currently, they can accommodate orders for up to ninety-six baskets, with the option of adding additional sites in the future if orders consistently exceed this number.

Residents of Paisley and the Warner Valley typically send one person to pick up baskets for the area, and those in Lakeview may split basket items or send a neighbor to pick up their box if they are unable to make it. Currently, no one from the Christmas Valley area participates. Baskets need to be picked up during a twenty minute window on the pick-up date, so those travelling from farther away would need be sure to arrive during this time. The program, which has been operating for a little more than a year now, has been very popular in the community. “We have the highest numbers in the state of Oregon,” Candace stated. In the future, Candace would like to expand the number of people volunteering with the program so that each volunteer only has to help every few months in order to prevent people from getting burnt out. Volunteers receive a small amount of additional produce in exchange for their help. “It’s all volunteer run. No one gets paid,” she says.

Some seniors in the community struggle with the online ordering required for participation. However, Candace has worked on individually walking people through this process in the past, and is willing to help anyone else in the community who is unsure on how to complete the online order. “I feel like it’s a need for the community. I’m happy to help in any way that I can,” she says, “Hopefully, we’re here for the long-haul.”
Gordon and Edna DeBoy have been operating a produce stand in Lakeview for the last five years. Gordon, who previously worked as a produce procurer for different grocery chains, says that he was inspired to start the business because of the lack of available produce in town. “I was motivated by a desire to bring a quality product at a decent price to the public,” he explained. While Gordon states that it would be cheaper to offer lower quality produce, he’s committed to maintaining a high standard of quality.

He typically spends about ten hours a week driving to either Klamath Falls or California to pick up produce. Products include berries, peaches, apricots, tomatoes, and other produce throughout the season. When in Klamath Falls, Gordon also visits a local beekeeper to pick up honey to sell at the stand. During the growing season, Gordon either carries less of the items that are commonly grown by Lakeview gardeners—such as green beans and zucchini—or buys excess produce from the gardeners directly. “If you grow it, I’ll sell it,” he stated. He’s previously sold locally grown carrots, zucchini, beets, and green beans.

The stand is open from around May to September at the Saturday Market and two to three times a week in the L&J Mercantile parking lot. This location has proved to be a good fit for the stand. Being located right on Highway 1-40 helps to bring in additional customers, and the store lets Gordon and Edna store produce in their walk-in cooler. Before, they were stuck storing as much as they could in their home and garage. At one point, they considered also operating a stand in Christmas Valley or Paisley. However, “Fuel costs would just about take away any profits,” Gordon states.
Tim Schneider and Mike Beeson first had the idea to open a second grocery store in Lakeview three years ago, shortly after Stewart’s closed. “People enjoyed the option,” Tim stated about the former grocery store, “It didn’t hurt Safeway.” While keeping a neighborhood market feel, the store hopes to carry a full selection of groceries, including a large produce section and deli. Tim would also like to have a “local corner” featuring a rotation of locally-produced products and vendors.

The market also hope to offer a delivery service for seniors and nearby communities such as Plush, New Pine Creek, and Lakeview’s Westside. However, for these trips to be financially feasible, multiple people will need to participate in each community, particularly in more remote areas like Plush. “The more people we can get, the more possible it will be,” Tim states.

Currently, there are about 100 community members who expressed interest in financially supporting the project. Tim explains that they are focusing on this “community-infused” strategy in order to build community buy-in, as investors will be more likely to shop at the market. If successful, Tim and Mike hope to use this model to establish similar neighborhood markets in other communities, both within Oregon and outside the state.
Opportunities & Recommendations

- Establish summer meal programs throughout the county and expand weekend food programs.  
  *Potential Partners: Early Learning Hub, Lake County Public Health, Lakeview Head Start, CHIP*

- Hold a presentation at the Lake County Senior Center on SNAP usage and online ordering for Bountiful Baskets.  
  *Potential Partners: Lake County Senior Center, Bountiful Baskets, Women’s Health Ambassadors*

- Provide SNAP education for store owners and sensitivity training for employees.  
  *Potential Partners: Oregon Food Bank, Department of Human Services*

- Create opportunities to purchase seeds and plant starts with SNAP at local stores.  
  *Potential Partners: Oregon Food Bank, Department of Human Services, Local Store Owners*

- Increase promotion of Lake County food pantries through traditional media forms such as print and radio for those who are new to the area.  
  *Potential Partners: Food Pantries, CHIP, Lake County Examiner, Chamber of Commerce*

- Include recipe cards with food boxes at Lake County food pantries, particularly for unfamiliar foods.  
  *Potential Partners: Food Pantries, OSU Extension, CHIP, Lake County Public Health*

- Increase coordination between tourism promotion and local grocery stores to encourage tourists to shop locally.  
  *Potential Partners: Lake County Chamber of Commerce, Grocery Store Owners*
This section highlights the hard work being done by dedicated individuals to improve Lake County’s food system. Within the county, the same individuals are often involved in project after project, committing large amounts of their time to community efforts. This section further delves into the educational programs, gardens, and food-focused events currently underway, as well as opportunities for strengthening and expanding community food efforts in the future.

Moving forward, increasing partnerships between organizations and recruiting the support of additional community members will play a vital role in creating a sustainable food system in Oregon’s Outback.
Community Food Efforts

Gardening, Nutrition, and Cooking Education

Education into her lessons, only allowing healthy snacks in her classroom. She has found that her students often go home and educate their parents about the healthy eating habits they’ve learned in her class. “If you start early and don’t give other options, kids will gladly eat carrots and other healthy foods,” she explains.

“FFA and 4-H are really important to this community. Without that, less young people are going to stay.” –Lake County Resident

Youth Education

Programs such as FFA (Future Farmers of America), 4-H, and summer jobs “haying” keep local youth involved with the agricultural system. At Lakeview Senior High, agriculture teacher Kristy Reese estimates that out of the 40 students in her class during the 2015-2016 school year, approximately 30 wished to stay in the area and pursue ranching. The agriculture class focuses on livestock grazing, hay and forage, and other large-scale grain production. Kristy is also the Lakeview FFA instructor, where most participants raise livestock for their project.

“The struggle for all of rural America. We all face this—to get our young people to come back to this place.” –Lake County Resident

The high school also offers a horticulture course which focuses largely on growing bedding plant starts in the high school’s heated greenhouse. These starts are then sold around Mother’s Day as a fundraiser for the FFA program. At North Lake School, a FFA program and agriculture course are offered, while a life skills class covering cooking and nutrition content is taught at Paisley Charter School. Mary O’Leary, who teaches grades K-4th in Paisley, also focuses on incorporating nutrition education into her lessons, only allowing healthy snacks in her classroom. She has found that her students often go home and educate their parents about the healthy eating habits they’ve learned in her class. “If you start early and don’t give other options, kids will gladly eat carrots and other healthy foods,” she explains.

Additional youth education opportunities are available through Lake County’s 4-H programs. Run through the OSU Extension Office in Lakeview, programs are available in the communities of Lakeview, Paisley, and Christmas Valley. These include cooking clubs, which are run by volunteers with oversight from extension staff. These clubs focus on teaching elementary school students to develop healthy habits and cooking skills, typically culminating in a final cooking project that is presented at the Lake County Fair.

Two cooking clubs operate in Lakeview, in addition to groups in Paisley and North Lake. Livestock projects focusing on breeding and marketing are also available in all three communities. For participants who live within city limits, there is a 4-H farm available outside of Lakeview for housing sheep, pigs, and goats.

OSU Extension has also recently begun offering an “Ag in the Classroom” program, where high school-aged FFA students are trained in agricultural lessons which they then teach to local elementary students. This program was offered at all three of Lakeview’s elementary schools this year, but OSU Extension hopes to expand it to additional classrooms in the future.
Starting as a pumpkin patch, the first school garden program in Lake County was established at Union Elementary through the hard work of coordinator Amanda O’Bryan, head teacher Savana Pool, and members of the Union Parents’ Club. After receiving a grant from the Oregon Department of Agriculture and Department of Education, the program was expanded to include Lakeview’s two other elementary schools, Fremont and A.D. Hay, though it is still primarily based at Union Elementary. Amanda O’Bryan worked with students to develop garden plans over the winter, with garden construction beginning in spring of 2016. A garden has now been planted next to the Union baseball field, and potato towers were grown at both Union and A.D. Hay. There are plans to expand the program by installing raised beds and reading gardens at Fremont and A.D. Hay. Because the Lake County growing season and the school year do not overlap for very long, a greenhouse will be installed at Union during August of 2016 to extend the growing season into the fall. The program uses organic growing methods.

Through the program, garden-based education is being incorporated into both regular curriculum and special events. On Earth Day, all students at Union Elementary were able to participate in a fruit tree grafting lesson and take home a newly-grafted fruit tree of their choosing. A field trip to Shamrock Ranch, located just outside of Lakeview, was also held during the spring. During the field trip, students were excited to help plant a sunflowers maze, hold newly hatched chickens, and feed the ranch’s lamb. Produce grown in the school gardens will be incorporated into school meals and snacks in an effort to increase the fresh produce available to students and improve nutrition. The program is planning to sell produce at the Lakeview Saturday Market as both an educational experience and a source of additional funds for the program.

In addition to being the first school garden program in Lake County, the Union School Garden Program is one of few rural school garden programs, which are more commonly located in urban areas. Union Elementary is located about 12 miles outside of town in Lakeview’s Westside. Bordering by ranches, grazing cows come right up to school property and many students come from agricultural backgrounds. However, the Union School Garden Program is still filling a need expressed by many in the community to teach the next generation about producing their own food, in addition to increasing the availability of fresh, local produce at Lakeview’s elementary schools.
Community Food Efforts

Youth Health Advocates Program
Starting during the 2016-2017 school year, a peer-to-peer health education program will be offered through a partnership with OSU Extension and the Community Health Improvement Program (CHIP). Ten teens from across the county were selected to teach their peers health-related lessons, which will include a focus on healthy eating habits and physical activity. The program is open to sophomores and juniors at Lakeview Senior High and North Lake School, with participants receiving a 500 dollar stipend for their work with the program.

FoodCorps
In response to community interest in increasing food education for youth and Lakeview’s growing school garden program, Lake Health District was selected to be one of three new FoodCorps sites in Oregon. Starting in September of 2016, a FoodCorps service member will be placed in Lakeview full-time to help educate students about nutrition, cooking, and gardening. To accomplish this, the FoodCorps service member will help to support and strengthen the Union School Garden Program, as well as the Community Health Improvement Program’s various youth projects.

The Pioneer Saloon
The Pioneer Saloon is one of the main centers of community life in Paisley. Recently purchased by new owners, the restaurant is undergoing a period of transition. New owner John Steffes is a former organic farmer who fell in love with Paisley during a bike trip through the area. While running the business is keeping him busy for the time being, John would like to eventually acquire land to continue farming in order to supply both the restaurant and Paisley Charter School with fresh produce. At that time, he would also like to get students involved with the project to teach them about producing their own food.
Community Food Efforts

Community Education

Agricultural information is available to all county residents through the OSU Extension Office in Lakeview. Previously, a Master Gardener program was offered through the office, but the class was discontinued due to low participation. According to extension agent Jamie Davis, everyone in the community who wanted to participate in the program had already completed the training after a few years of it being offered. “Enough people would need to retire or new people would need to move here. We ran out of people to train,” she stated. She did see potential interest for a social gardening group, rather than the heavily structured Master Gardener curriculum. Additionally, some local gardeners who attended the course in the past expressed frustration with the curriculum, as they believed that it didn’t adequately consider the local climate, using the same material for both western and eastern Oregon.

In the past, Lake County Public Health offered a series of educational classes on topics such as patio gardening and cooking skills, but cancelled the program due to low attendance. Lakeview Head Start ran into a similar problem after opening their educational parents’ meetings to the general public. While twenty to forty people typically attend meetings held for parents at the Head Start facility, only two people attended a similar meeting offered at The Gathering Place for the general public.

A social group focusing on peer-to-peer education may have the potential to generate more interest than previously offered lecture-style classes. This would also ensure that content focuses on high desert gardening methods, while also providing a venue for gardeners to trade and share produce.

During July-October, OSU Extension operates a volunteer-staffed phone hotline to teach people about food preservation and safety at 1-800-354-7319. Free dial gauge testing is also available for canning equipment at their office in Lakeview.

Modoc High Tunnel Users Group

Funded by a grant from the Western Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program, the Modoc High Tunnels Users group’s goal is to support the use of high tunnels in Modoc County and the surrounding area. A user-driven group, meetings are held quarterly, typically at the site of a member’s high tunnel operation. Meetings then include a presentation and tour, focusing on distributing regionally-specific information on topics such as installation, pest-management, and marketing. In the time between meetings, the group is working to build a network of high tunnel users to exchange information and support season extension in the region.
During 2015, the Women’s Health Ambassadors program was launched by CHIP and Lake Health District using funds from the Eastern Oregon Coordinated Care Organization. Ten women from across the county were selected to lead different health education lessons among their congregations, organizations, and other social groups. Women from Lakeview, Paisley, and Christmas Valley are serving as health ambassadors, representing groups such as the Lake County Senior Center, St. Patrick Catholic Church, Lakeview Head Start, and the Paisley Community Center. The program focuses on using existing social groups to disseminate health information while also empowering new leaders in the community. In place of lectures, the classes focus on discussions and peer-to-peer education among the women in each group. Ambassadors receive a stipend for their work with the program.

After receiving training in health-related lessons, the ambassadors were each responsible for recruiting participants and holding their own classes over a seven month period. In addition to topics such as meditation, self-image, and physical activity, each group held a session on healthy eating and nutrition. Each group tackled this in their own way—such as preparing healthy snacks as a group, discussing strategies for buying healthy food on a fixed-income, and giving out strawberry plants as prizes for a quiz on nutrition facts.
Developed by the Oregon Food Bank, a FEAST (Food-Education-Agriculture-Solutions-Together) event is a full-day workshop that brings community members together to organize around improving their food system. Hosted by Oregon Food Bank staff members, FEAST events contain both speaker presentations and facilitated conversations amongst those in attendance. A FEAST event was held in Lakeview in April of 2015. Speakers included Melissa Cheyne from Cheyne Farms, John Adams from the Community Health Improvement Program, Karen Bunch from the Lakeview Saturday Market, Ginger Casto from the South Central Oregon Economic Development District, and Candace Johnson from Bountiful Baskets. During the event, small breakout groups focused on gardens and production, food education, and the local food supply.

Each working group came up with a vision and ideas for potential solutions for their topic:

**Gardens and Production:**
Vision: Increase local production of produce among both large and small farms, as well as increasing the number of home gardens.
*Potential Solutions: Community Gardens/Greenhouse, Home Garden Coordination*

**Food Education:**
Vision: Incorporate food education into the school system and educate community members.
*Potential Solutions: Include hands on growing and cooking instruction into the school curriculum, bring back home economics courses*

**Local Food Supply:**
Vision: Create year-round affordable food supply for all areas of county, including meat, produce and dairy, through more accessible food distribution points.
*Potential Solutions: Local USDA processing plant for beef, year-round farmers’ market, a second low-cost market, encourage institutions such as schools, hospitals, and restaurants to carry local products*
In order to draw attention to the number of old, heritage fruit tree varieties in the area and encourage local fruit production, the Outback Food Initiative decided to hold a scion exchange as the group’s first event, which served as a fundraiser for both the Union School Garden Program and the opening of the Lakeview Community Garden. During a scion exchange, scions, or cuttings from fruit trees, are traded for grafting onto new root stock. This is both an inexpensive way of acquiring new fruit trees and a way to gain access to local varieties that are better suited to the local climate.

In advance of the event, Outback Food Initiative members collected scions from fruit trees in the area and information was distributed to the community about collecting scions on their own to bring to the exchange. During the event, rootstock and grafting services were available, as well as a grafting demonstration that showed several different grafting techniques. After the success of the first event, members of the Outback Food Initiative are committed to holding the event in future years. With the closest other scion exchange over 4 hours away, this event has the potential to draw attendees from the surrounding areas of Oregon and California, further promoting Lake County’s community food efforts.
Similar to the FEAST model, a Community Conversation is a shorter event that focuses on documenting the existing strengths and challenges of a community’s food system. A Community Conversation was held in Paisley in April of 2016. Many of the challenges brought up during the conversation echo those found around the county: higher cost of food, local availability, lack of transportation, seasonal incomes associated with ranch work, senior populations with set incomes, and lack of knowledge about how to buy and prepare healthy food. However, many of the strengths revolved around the particularly tight-knit community present in Paisley, as well as its long homesteading tradition.

All those in attendance were involved with producing some percentage of their own food. Paisley residents ranch, garden, fish, hunt, gather mushrooms, and pick wild plums from a community patch north of town. While the older generation tends to garden more frequently, skills are being passed onto the next generation through involvement in 4-H programs and a life skills course offered at the Paisley Charter School. Sharing of food is common, whether that involves picking up a Bountiful Basket in Lakeview, sharing garden produce, or asking a neighbor for an ingredient to a recipe. This community cooperation also extends to addressing food waste—all waste from the local store and school lunch program are fed to area livestock.

“It’s not perfect, but we really do have a strong community.”

“On good years, you lock your car to keep from getting zucchini put in it.”

“There was a time you had to be a homesteader to live in Paisley.”
Throughout the discussion, several ideas on how to strengthen Paisley’s food system emerged:

- Get more kids in the kitchen through the use of Seed to Supper and Cooking Matters curriculum
- Establish a summer lunch program
- Bring back lost skills, such as with a community cider pressing in good production years
- Establish a program that would allow food preservation equipment to be checked out at the local library
- Create a Facebook page to share excess food, gardening information, and other resources
- Get the larger community involved with new Forest Service garden

*Participants map locations where they get food in their community*
Interest in Community Gardens

During the assessment, local interest in establishing community gardening programs was evaluated in several ways. During the Food Pantry Client Survey, 81% of respondents stated some interest in growing their own food, with access to space listed as the biggest barrier to doing so. During the Consumer Survey, respondents listed access to season extension equipment as the most important factor in a community garden. Numbered responses are listed in order of importance.

Food Pantry Client Survey:
- Are you interested in growing your own food?
  - Yes: 52%
  - Maybe: 29%
  - No: 19%

- What are your main barriers to doing this?
  1. Available space
  2. Materials (seeds, tools, etc.)
  3. Knowledge about gardening
  4. Short growing season
  5. Free time

Lake County Consumer Survey:
- What factor would make you most likely to participate in a community garden?

1. Access to a greenhouse or other season extension
2. Close location
3. Low fees
4. Gardening instruction/classes
5. Access to seeds/tools
6. Accessible/table height garden beds

Lakeview Community Garden Public Forum

In May of 2016, a public forum was held in Lakeview to gauge local interest in community gardening, with those in attendance agreeing that there is a strong need for a community garden within the community. Participants decided that the garden should offer individual ownership of plots for a fifteen-dollar fee, with the stipulation that garden beds be maintained organically.

What would you most like to see in the garden?
- Kids tools & plots
- Garden classes
- Perennials
- Ground cover
- Straw bail beds for seniors
Community Food Efforts

Community Gardening Opportunities

Through this assessment, several opportunities emerged for creating community gardens within Lake County.

- **PLAYA Residential Arts Program**
  Located along Summer Lake, PLAYA is a residential program for artists in a variety of disciplines, such as writers, visual artists, naturalists, and performance artists. While there is a developed garden located at PLAYA, the frequent rotations of residents keeps it from being utilized, and program staff are open to others in the community using the space.

- **Paisley Forest Service Garden**
  During 2016, forest service employees started a garden space at the Paisley Ranger District residence. The group is open to additional community members using the garden space, particularly those with more gardening experience in the area.

- **Lakeview Geothermal Greenhouse**
  Used for a commercial tomato operation during the 1970s, one half of the geothermal greenhouse facility a few miles north of Lakeview currently remains vacant. While the front of the facility houses a gardening center, the back half remains vacant with raised beds and year-round geothermal heating.

- **Lake Health District Garden**
  The garden area located behind Lake Health

District Hospital was previously managed by Rotary First Harvest to grow produce for the Lakeview Food Pantry. With garden infrastructure still intact, the only thing needed is coordination and community participation.

**The 42nd Group**, a commercial marijuana operation opening in Lakeview, originally planned to also grow specialty food products. However, new regulations now prohibit marijuana operations from operating mixed-used facilities, preventing the group from using their greenhouses for other purposes. Still, the group remains committed to supporting community food efforts and local production.

**Senior Center Garden**
Though limited by space, the Lake County Senior Center has begun growing a small garden behind its building. Using donated plant starts, the garden is primarily maintained by maintenance staff, though the rest of the center staff try to pitch in as well. Everything grown in the garden is used in the senior meal programs.
Located about five miles north of Lakeview, Warner Creek Correctional Facility is a minimum-security men’s prison that currently houses around 500 inmates. All inmates at the facility are scheduled to be released within four years, so there is a focus on work programs that build skills to aid reentry into society. These include a garden program and a sustainable agriculture course. This is one of many prison garden programs in Oregon which are part of a larger initiative to increase sustainability in the state’s prisons.

The sustainable agriculture course uses OSU Extension curriculum that has been modified for use in prisons by Lettuce Grow, an organization focused on developing prison gardens. After completing the eight-week course, students are able to earn a certificate in sustainable agriculture. This year, approximately thirty inmates signed up for the course within two days, meaning that there is now a waiting list. While there is some overlap, the garden program is offered separately, as inmates need to have the security clearance to go outside of the prison fence where the main garden is located. In addition to the main garden, there is a heated greenhouse and vermicomposting facility located within the prison walls.

In the past, up to 20,000 pounds of food have been produced in the garden during a single growing season. With so many inmates, the produce grown in the garden is a small percentage of the total food consumed at the prison. For this reason, program coordinator Rob Hass explains that the benefits are linked more to providing educational and work opportunities for inmates rather than meeting a large percentage of the prison’s food needs. Starting this spring, the prison will also begin growing bitterbrush and sage for habitat restoration in partnership with the Institute for Applied Ecology and the Bureau of Land Management. These plants will then be used to restore native habitats in places that have been damaged by forest fires.
Christmas Valley Library

Located on Christmas Tree Lane, the Christmas Valley Library serves a number of additional functions in the community. It’s the local information hub, gathering place, and, unexpectedly, a source of local eggs. Librarian Julie Crowl states that she sees selling local eggs at the library as another opportunity to get more fresh food into the community, which is something that she believes Christmas Valley urgently needs. The eggs are produced by a library patron who is able to earn extra money to support their flock through the library sales.

Christmas Valley Weekend Market

Currently, the Christmas Valley Weekend Market only sells a few food items such as local goat cheese, fry bread, and occasional excess garden produce. In the past, they have had people interested in regularly selling produce at the market, but problems with harsh frosts killing crops and vendor conflicts have gotten in the way. “If we had someone who was willing to bring produce in, we’d gladly accept it,” a market organizer said.

Surprise Valley Saturday Market

Located about 60 miles from Lakeview in Modoc County, CA, the Surprise Valley Saturday Market is held in Cedarville on the 2nd and 4th Saturday of the month from late June to October. Relatively new, the market has been in operation since 2013. With a wide variety of vendors, the market accepts both SNAP and WIC. Though it is only an hour from Lakeview, the climate in the area is milder due to its location in a valley, making it better suited for fruit and vegetable production.

Community Food Efforts

Local Food Purchasing

60% of surveyed Lake County residents reported that they purchase some of their food locally. For those that reported no local food purchases, most common reasons included lack of availability, higher cost, and not knowing where to find local products.

Along with the Lakeview Saturday Market, additional opportunities exist to purchase local food in the area. However, these resources could be further strengthened as the Lakeview and Christmas Valley markets work on increasing produce vendors and the Surprise Valley Market works on expanding hours.

Surprise Valley Saturday Market
Operating since 2002, the Lakeview Saturday Market runs from June to September behind the Lakeview town parking lot. Split between craft and food vendors, the small market is currently working on attracting additional produce sellers. With a lack of largescale produce production in the area, many of the vendors are backyard gardeners selling their excess produce, with some wholesale produce also being sold at the market. Due to this, vendors may not have products available every week, therefore, the market offers the option to pay for each week individually or for the full season. Products such as honey, eggs, and baked goods are also available. Baked goods are able to be sold due to the 2015 Small Home Business Baking Bill, which allows for the production of low-risk baked goods in home kitchens, bypassing the often prohibitive costs associated with a certified kitchen.

As the market works on expanding food vendors, market manager Amanda O’Bryan hopes to begin accepting SNAP at the market in order to increase the number of low-income residents who are able to purchase food. Currently, she is the only vendor in Lake County that accepts Oregon Farm Direct Nutrition Program Vouchers. These vouchers are distributed to seniors and families using WIC for purchasing local fruits and vegetables. While she has received several vouchers from local seniors, she has never received a voucher through WIC.
Initially funded by a USDA Local Foods Promotion Program Planning Grant, a food hub project is moving beyond the planning stages into a pilot program in Surprise Valley, CA. The group is made up of producers from Modoc County, California and Washoe County, NV who hope to combine their harvests in order to meet institutional demands and supply the region with high quality, local food. Produce, USDA-inspected meat, and value-added products are included in the project. If fully implemented, the Surprise Valley Food Hub will include Southern Oregon within its focus.

There are currently seven producers involved with the food hub, which has started selling to a few institutions in the Surprise Valley area. In the future, Lakeview and the surrounding area could be included within the project’s scope, supplying local products to stores and schools.
Community Food Efforts

Sustainable Energy & Recycling: Examples from Outside the Food System

“Environmentalist aren’t well loved here. We’re not sure what they’re after.”
- Lake County Rancher

“Well the cowboys and ranchers around here aren’t really happy with them environmentalists. In fact I think my husband wrote a... poem about that that was quite popular... and a little derogatory.”
- Lake County Resident, OSU Anthropology Field School

For many residents of Lake County, the environmental movement carries deeply negative connotations stretching back to the collapse of the timber industry in the 1990s. This sentiment is also present with members of the ranching community, who are distrustful of outside interests intervening in the stewardship of their land. There is a fear that outside groups will be able to dedicate more time and resources to changing policies than the ranchers that they will affect. “Ranchers don’t have money for lawyers,” one Lakeview rancher stated.

At the same time, Lake County has been a pioneer in sustainable energy production. With its abundant sun, wind, and geothermal activity, Lake County has the potential to meet 100 percent of its own energy needs while also beginning to export sustainably-produced energy to other counties. Warner Creek Correctional Facility, Lake Health District, and all but one of Lakeview’s schools have been geothermally heated since 2013.

There are currently five solar plants in the county with plans for more underway, and a biofuels plant is in the planning stage south of Lakeview.

At first glance, these two concepts—Lake County as a place that is both distrustful of environmentalism and a pioneer in sustainable energy production—seem at odds. However, the two examples below demonstrate successful approaches to working toward environmental sustainability in a way that is in line with Lake County’s culture and values.

Both of these examples were spearheaded by local people who were familiar with the realities of life in the high desert, and they also demonstrate the importance of focusing on education, understanding, and the ability for environmental sustainability to go hand and hand with economic sustainability.

Projects aimed at strengthening Lake County’s food system should keep these lessons in mind by highlighting the ability for increased local food production to strengthen the local economy, as well as the independence and resiliency of a community.
Lake County Resources Initiative (LCRI) is an alternative energy non-profit that has been operating in Lakeview since 2002. During this time, LCRI has been working to increase the sustainability of Lake County while also working closely with the ranching community and many residents who might otherwise be skeptical of other environmental organizations. This can be attributed to both LCRI’s place in the community and an approach that focuses more on the economic benefits and increased independence that alternative energy can bring to Lake County. According to LCRI founder Jim Walls, “It takes time to build the trust.”

While recycling options are still limited in Lakeview, the ability to recycle products such as paper and corrugated cardboard can be attributed to the hard work of an informal community group who met regularly over a several year period. According to one group member, “It was considered a dirty word.” This was largely due to the ranching and logging community’s clashes with outside environmental groups and policy. Over a two year period, the group did community outreach and education at venues such as the Lakeview Saturday Market until the idea became commonplace and more widespread support for recycling programs emerged.
Community Food Efforts

Opportunities & Recommendations

- Partner with the Surprise Valley Food Hub to bring local products into Lakeview’s stores and institutions.
  
  *Potential Partners: Surprise Valley Food Hub, Lakeview Neighborhood Market, Lakeview School District, FoodCorps*

- Increase the number of backyard gardeners selling excess produce at the Lakeview Saturday Market and work towards SNAP acceptance at the market.
  
  *Potential Partners: Lakeview Saturday Market, Outback Food Initiative, Farmers Market Coalition*

- Create a social gardening group for gardeners to share local knowledge and provide peer-to-peer education.
  
  *Potential Partners: Modoc High Tunnel Group, Outback Food Initiative, Bloomers Nursery, OSU Extension*
Conclusion

“What I love about this community—we all got that hope for the future, that we can make changes. We work at it as a community.”—Lake County Resident

While Lake County does not have the easy climate or large population of western Oregon, it does have resilient, hard-working residents with deep roots in the area and a strong community and family-focused ethic. Many residents have already dived headfirst into strengthening the county’s food system, whether that means filling a need for weekend meals, creating a school garden program, or working hard to grow produce for local sale. Lake County residents are committed to improving the local food system on their own terms, and in order to move forward with this work, partnerships between existing programs, organizations, and key stakeholders will need to be strengthened. By working to document this work and providing recommendations for moving forward, this assessment hopes to serve as a first step for this greater coordination to occur.
Methodology

The Lake County Community Food Assessment was completed over the 11-month timespan between October 2015 and August 2016. A mixed-methods approach was used, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative sources of data. However, there was a larger focus on qualitative data, with quantitative data used primarily to provide background information and larger context. Overall research design was based on the principles of community-based, participatory research.

Three surveys were used for this assessment. These included a Consumer Survey, Food Pantry Client Survey, and Rural Grocery Store Owner Survey which were all administered on a county-wide level. The Lake County Consumer Survey was administered both in-person and online. The Rural Grocery Owner Survey was originally developed by Kansas State University’s Center for Engagement and Community Development and has been adapted by the Oregon Food Bank for use in Community Food Assessments.

Semi-structured and informal interviews were conducted with a variety of key stakeholders and community members. Information was incorporated from a FEAST (Food, Education, Agriculture Solutions Together) event held in Lakeview in April of 2015. Using a shorter version of this model, a Community Conversation was held in the community of Paisley in April of 2016. The Outback Food Initiative served as an advisory committee for this assessment.
Works Cited


33. Lake County Public Health. (2016, April). Lake County WIC Statistics [E-mail to the author].
Rural Grocery Store Owner Survey
Oregon Food Bank
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
- Books/cards/gifts
- Café/restaurant
- Catering
- Delicatessen
- Fuel
- Groceries
- Other (specify)
- Hunting/fishing/camping supplies
- Institutional supply (school, hospital)
- Pharmacy
- Photo development
- Pre-packaged snacks
- Self-serve snacks/drinks
- Video rental

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
   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:
Appendix A

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
____ Debt and/or high payments
____ 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. 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not Very Important</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>1. Quality of food</td>
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<tr>
<td>Comments:</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Availability of food (variety, brand choices)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Comments:</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Prices of items offered</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Comments:</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Customer service</td>
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<tr>
<td>Comments:</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Business hours</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments:</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Buying locally</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Comments:</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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

_____________________________________________________________________________

Do you collaborate with other small independently owned stores?
How does your store do at providing the following to customers? Rate your store by circling the number that best fits your response.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not Very</th>
<th>Well</th>
<th>Very</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Quality of food</td>
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<td>Comments:</td>
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<td>2. Availability of food (variety, brand choices)</td>
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<td>3. Prices of items offered</td>
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<td>4. Customer service</td>
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<td>5. Business hours</td>
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<td>6. Buying locally</td>
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<tr>
<td>Comments:</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Accepting Food Stamps/SNAP and WIC</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

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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?

Tell us about your store:

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

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, sthornberry@oregofoodbank.org.
Rural Grocery Store Survey
Supplemental Semi-Structured Questions

1. Tell me about the history of your store.

2. Does your store serve additional functions in the community, such as a social gathering place or event venue?

3. Tell me about your relationship with your customers.

4. Do you ever offer items on “credit” or other similar systems?

5. How do you see the future of your store? Do you have a succession plan for who will take over the operation?
Appendix B

Lake County Food Pantry Survey

The results of this survey will be used in the 2016 Lake County Food Assessment. Participation in this survey is voluntary and confidential, and will not affect your ability to receive a food box.

Have you filled out this survey before?
□ Yes  □ No

Community that you live in: ________________

Sex: □ Male  □ Female  How old are you? □ Under 25  □ Between 25-54  □ Over 55

How many adults are in your household? _____  How many children (18 and under)? _____

How did you find out about the food pantry? ________________________________

How often do you or your family come to the food pantry?
□ Weekly  □ Monthly  □ A few times a year  □ Once a year  □ Less than once a year

Do you use any of the following government assistance programs (Check all that apply)?
□ SNAP (Food Stamps) □ WIC □ Meals on Wheels
□ Free or reduced school lunch/breakfast □ Other: ________________  □ None

If you receive SNAP benefits, how long do these benefits usually last?
□ 1 Week  □ 2 Weeks  □ 3 Weeks  □ All month  □ More than one month  □ N/A

If you are eligible for food benefits that you do not use, what is the main reason (Check all that apply)?
□ Prefer not to use  □ Unsure about how to sign up  □ Unsure about how to use
□ Feel uncomfortable/embarrassed using benefits  □ Lack of places that accept benefits
□ Other: ____________________________  □ N/A

Where else do you and your family get food (Check all that apply)?
□ Lake County Grocery Store  □ Farmers’ Market  □ Convenience Store/Gas Station
□ Co-op/Food Buying Club  □ Grow your own  □ Community Meal
□ Hunting/Fishing  □ Outside Lake County  □ Delivery Service
□ Eating with family/friends  □ Other: ______________________

How many days does your food box usually last? _______

Does your household usually consume all of the food in your food box? □ Yes  □ No
Appendix B

If no, what is the main reason?

☐ Unsure how to prepare food   ☐ Don’t have access to a kitchen/appliances
☐ Food isn’t culturally appropriate   ☐ Received too much food   ☐ Isn’t food that I like
☐ Food allergy/health concern   ☐ Don’t have time to cook   ☐ Other: ____________
☐ N/A

What two foods would help you to better prepare meals/do you need more of?

1. __________________________
2. __________________________

What do you use to cook your food (Check all that apply)?

☐ Stove   ☐ Oven   ☐ Microwave   ☐ Crockpot   ☐ Other: ____________   ☐ No appliances

Can you refrigerate or freeze food?

☐ Yes, both   ☐ No, both   ☐ Refrigerate Only   ☐ Freeze Only

Are you interested in receiving recipes along with your food box?

☐ Yes   ☐ Maybe   ☐ No

Are you interested in growing your own food? ☐ Yes   ☐ Maybe   ☐ No

What are your main barriers to doing this? (Check all that apply)

☐ Available space   ☐ Knowledge about gardening   ☐ Materials (seeds, tools)
☐ Free time   ☐ Short growing season   ☐ Other: ____________
Appendix C

Lake County Consumer Survey

The results of this survey will be used in the 2016 Lake County Community Food Assessment.
Your participation is voluntary and your responses will remain confidential.

Have you filled out this survey before? □ Yes □ No

Community that you live in:______________

Sex: □ Male □ Female How old are you? □ Under 25 □ Between 25-54 □ Over 55

Is food available in your community?
□ Yes □ No Comments: ________________________________

Is food affordable in your community?
□ Yes □ No Comments: ________________________________

Where do you primarily get your food from (Check all that apply)?
□ Lake County Grocery Store □ Farmers’ Market □ Convenience Store/Gas Station
□ Co-op/Food Buying Club □ Food Pantry □ Grow your own
□ Hunting/Fishing □ Outside Lake County □ Delivery Service
□ Online □ Other: ________________________________

How far do you go to get your main source of food?
□ 0-5 miles □ 6-15 □ 16-25 □ 26-40 □ 41-60 □ 61-90 □ 91+

If you primarily get your food outside of Lake County, in what community do you get food?
□ Klamath Falls □ Bend □ Medford □ Alturas, CA □ Other: ________________ □ N/A

What are your primary reasons for purchasing food outside of Lake County?
□ Lower cost □ More variety □ Higher quality food
□ Access to cultural food □ Healthy/organic options □ Other: ________________ □ N/A

What factors, if any, affect your ability to get the food you need? (Check all that apply)
□ High fuel/heating costs □ Cost of food □ Transportation
□ Lack of Time □ High rent □ Availability of quality/variety of food
□ Childcare costs □ Medical costs □ Other: ________________ □ N/A

Are you eligible for government food assistance?
□ Yes □ No □ I don’t know

If you are eligible, which government food assistance programs do you (or your children) use?
□ SNAP (Food Stamps) □ WIC □ Meals on Wheels
□ Free or reduced school lunch/breakfast □ Other: ________________ □ None □ N/A
Appendix C

Do you produce any of your own food?
☐ Yes    ☐ No

If yes, what do you produce (Check all that apply)?
☐ Fruit    ☐ Vegetables    ☐ Milk    ☐ Poultry    ☐ Meat    ☐ Eggs    ☐ Other: ___________    ☐ N/A

Would you be interested in participating in a community garden in your area?
☐ Yes    ☐ Maybe    ☐ No

What factors would make you most likely to participate:
☐ Close location    ☐ Gardening instruction/classes    ☐ Low fees    ☐ Access to seeds/tools
☐ Access to a greenhouse or other season extension    ☐ Accessible/table height garden beds
☐ Other: __________________

Would you like to learn more about how to cook or how to shop on a budget?