Farm to Food Access Organization
Buying Exchange: Berkshire County

ENVI 302 Fall 2020
Sarah Levitt and Olivia Gomez
## Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Project Overview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Contextual Overview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-7</td>
<td>Research Plan and Questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-36</td>
<td>Interviews: Food Access Organizations, Exchange Programs, Farms, Pantries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37-42</td>
<td>Recommendations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>Next Steps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-52</td>
<td>Appendix</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Project Overview

- **Project Goal:** A year-round buying exchange between local farmers and food access organizations in Berkshire County
  - Includes food pantries and community kitchens

- **Berkshire Grown Goals for this Project:**
  - Keep farmers farming
  - Facilitate a relationship between farmers and food pantries
  - Help them adapt to the impact of Covid-19
**Contextual Overview**

**Berkshire County Farming:**
- 475 farms, 58,647 acres (2017)
- 10% decrease in farms, 5% decrease in farmland since 2012

**Berkshire County Food Access Organizations:**
- Covid-19 has exacerbated food insecurity
- Food pantries experiencing heightened demand
  - Especially for fresh and healthy options

**Economic Feasibility of an Exchange:**
- Creating connections to support both parties
- Bolstering and enhancing the regional food system
- The pandemic has emphasized the necessity to do this
## Research Plan

1. **Research existing models:**
   - Supply and demand
   - Purchasing models
   - Delivery logistics

2. **Interview farms and food pantries:**
   - Interest levels
   - Capabilities
   - Operations and logistics

3. **Final deliverable:**
   - Recommendations for a buying exchange model for Berkshire County
   - Present to the Berkshire Grown board
Guiding Research Questions

What community do they serve?
How many farms and food access points involved?

How do they function?
Order on demand or other model?
What staffing do they need?
How are they funded?

How are the orders aggregated?
Delivery from farms or pick-up at farms?
Is there cold storage for some produce?
Interviews: Food Access Organizations
Marty’s Local

Nick Martinelli, Phone Call, 10/16/20

Marty’s Local:

- Wholesale distributor in Berkshire County
- Experience connecting with local farms
- Farms provide availability lists for ordering
- Logistics fluctuate based on the farm partner

Recommendations for questions:

- Market channels of farms
- Processing capabilities of pantries
Berkshire Bounty

Jay Weintraub, Phone Call, 11/4/20

Berkshire Bounty:

- Hub between providers and users
  - Providers: supermarkets and farms
- Food brought to organizations in need
- Funding:
  - Donations from people
  - Used to purchase from local farms
- Experience partnering with organizations to establish distribution channels
- Envisions a ‘CSA on steroids’
  - Relationship between farm and pantry
Amanda Chilson, Phone Call, 10/29/20

Mass in Motion Program:

- Provide healthy options for local pantries
- Grant funded by Department of Public Health
- Work with local farms:
  - CSA donation
  - Businesses purchasing shares
  - Gleaning program
- Food bank farm project
Recommendations

● CSA model
● Coordination with storage and delivery
● Collaboration between multiple food pantries
● Facilitate strong relationship between local farms and local food pantries
Operation Better Start

Jenny Schwartz, Zoom Call, 10/28/20

Recommendations:

- Farmers send crop availability and deliver weekly
- Communal refrigerated shed in central location for pantries to pick up from
Interviews: Farm to Food Pantry Exchange Programs
Michael Berg, Phone Call, 10/19/20

Program Operations:

- Located in New York
- Volunteers take care of all the processing, delivery, storage, etc.
- Walk-in freezers around the county
- Funding: donations
- Food hub model
- Program handles funds
  - Buy whatever is available
American Friends Service Committee

Sayrah Namaste, Zoom Call, 11/6/20

Program Operations:

- Located in New Mexico
- Started with buying supplies for the farmers
- Volunteers take care of logistics
- 28 farms and 1 food bank that delivers to 12 food pantries
- Funding: donations
- Food hub model
- Program has purchasing power
  - Mainly buy whatever is available (with the exception of certain foods)
Program Operations:

- Located in Oregon
- CSA like model
  - Contracts between A Greener World and the farms
- Program has purchasing power
- Logistics of delivery and storage between the farm and food pantry
- Funding: cash donations
Vermonters Feeding Vermonters

Ruby Bertola, Zoom Call, 10/27/20

Program Operations:

● Bid process ahead of season
● 80 farms involved
● Funding from private foundations and fundraising
  ○ Looking at state grants
● CSA like Model
  ○ Contracts between farm and pantry
● Food pantries have the purchasing power
● Logistics between the pantry and farm
● Flexibility
Mainers Feeding Mainers

Nancy Perry, Zoom Call, 10/27/20

Program Operations:

- Started 10 years ago with a group of farmers
  Great Shepherd Food Bank
  - Around or below wholesale pricing
  - Farm partners grown from 18 to 78
- Farms provide availability to pantries, pantries pick up orders
- Yearly contract established in the winter
  - Pricing, quantity, types of crops
- Funding:
  - Foundations and grants
  - Seeking to include Mainers Feeding Mainers in the state budget
Program Operations:

- Squash Hunger: established donational program
- Recently piloted a farm to school exchange program
  - Grants supported by Cuomo
- Challenges involved:
  - Processing challenges
  - Limited ability of cafeterias to prepare local produce
  - Students not being in school with the pandemic
Local Food for Every Table:

- New initiative in response to Covid-19 connecting farms with community organizations on a local level in Hudson Valley
  - Involves farms with marginalized farmers to increase financial viability
  - Food donations
  - Affordable CSAs for SNAP families
  - Contracts to local farmers
- Past spring season:
  - 13 farms, 15 hunger relief outlets
- Challenges: communication between parties, pantries don’t have cold storage
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family of Woodstock</th>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Funding</th>
<th>Logistics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Food Hub - program purchases whatever available</td>
<td>Donations</td>
<td>Volunteers of the program handle all of it, walk-in freezers around county</td>
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<td>Vermonters Feeding Vermonters</td>
<td>Contract between farm and pantry - pantry purchases the food</td>
<td>Donations - looking into state grants</td>
<td>Logistics all between the farm and pantry pair</td>
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<td>Mainers Feeding Mainers</td>
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<td>A Greener World</td>
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<tr>
<td>Capital Roots</td>
<td>Food hub of farm to schools</td>
<td>State grants when applicable</td>
<td>Capitol Roots directors responsible for logistics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Glynwood</td>
<td>Food hub of farms to meal sites</td>
<td>Funded by Glynwood</td>
<td>Farm direct delivery to meal site</td>
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</table>
Interviews: Farms
Red Shirt Farm

Jim Schultz, Phone Call, 11/3/20

Operations:

- 13 acre farm, intensive vegetable production
- Market channels: direct order, CSA, farmers markets, restaurants

Considerations:

- An exchange would require a competitive price for his farm to be interested
- Central drop off point and pre-order system
- Winter CSA model
Colfax Farm

Molly Comstock, Phone Call, 11/5/20

Operations:

- Diversified set of vegetables on two acres of farmland
- Market channels: weekly CSA and farmers markets
- Farm is able to sell everything produced
- Has sold produce to People’s Pantry
  - Variety of greens
- Greenhouse recently constructed
- Interested in exploring more options to conduct business with pantries
Operations:

- Diversified range of crops
  - Salad greens, cooking greens, roots
- CSA: ⅔ of business, Wholesale: ⅓
- Contract with Berkshire Dream Center in Pittsfield, MA
  - Funding from Covid relief grant
  - Selected number of crops
  - Bulk of the contract mapped out in the beginning, adjusted based on supply
- Would love to be doing more work in this area, envisions a greater regional effort
MX Morningstar Farm

Max Morningstar, Phone Call, 11/23/20

Operations:

- Diversified vegetable:
  - Winter squash, potatoes, sweet potatoes, root vegetables, cold crops
- Majority of produce moved through wholesale channels to a few restaurants directly, other smaller farms
  - Marty’s Local and Hudson Valley Harvest
  - Farm store selling a ton of produce
- Able to move everything they grow
- Ideas: pairing pantries and farms for specific crops, prioritize competitive pricing because tight margins
Kim Wells, Phone Call, 12/2/20

Operations:

- Meat farm: beef, pork, chicken
- Distribution: farm store, pre-orders, farmers markets
- Demand increased since February
- Don’t have the capacity to participate in an exchange in the near future because of overwhelming demand
- Meat production margins are tight
  - High processing costs
Indian Line Farm

Elizabeth Keen, Phone Call, 12/11/20

Operations:

- Distribution: Great Barrington Farmers Market, stores, restaurants, People’s Pantry, Community Health Program
- Able to sell everything they grow, but have the capacity to grow more
- Open to either CSA model with contracts or pantries ordering specific crops weekly
Jen Salinetti, Phone Call, 12/11/20

Operations:

- Interested but has to build infrastructure for more storage first
- Hybrid model
  - Initial contract beginning of January
  - Order and deliver every 2 weeks throughout the year
- Each farm supply a different crop
- Central storage location
- Initial meet and greet between farmers and food pantries
Brattle Farm

Donna Chandler, Phone Call, 11/19/20

Farm Operations:

- CSA program
- Community Health Program (CHP)
- First United Methodist Church
- Share the Bounty Program

Not interested
- Don’t have any more capacity for growing and don’t have any extra produce to sell right now
Interviews: Food Pantries
Otis Food Pantry

Kendra Rybacki, Phone Call, 11/5/20

- Pantry Operations
  - Food donated -- not really funds donated yet
  - Store food at school down the road
  - Volunteers package food and can do transport

- Interested
  - Prefers contracts
Sheffield Food Pantry

Marsha Brolly, Phone Call, 11/24/20

● Pantry Operations
  ○ Currently use funds at the Big Y
  ○ Receive produce as donations
  ○ Have room for storing more food
  ○ Flexible with types of produce and timing

● Interested
  ○ Prefers contracts
Lee Food Pantry

Sue Gore, Zoom Call, 11/3/20

Operations:

- Donations: food and monetary
- Produce from Gideon’s Garden
  - Youth operated farm in Great Barrington
  - Two acres of land, variety of vegetables
- Purchased dairy and eggs from Highland Farm
- Cash donations usually used at Price Right grocery store to maximize purchases
- No way to store cold food

LEE FOOD PANTRY
OPEN Saturdays 10-NOON   413.266.1141

Operated by Grace Church of Great Barrington in association with The First Congregational Church of Lee, St. Mary’s Church of Lee & St. Paul’s Church of Stockbridge

Lee Food Pantry P.O. Box 335, Lee MA 01238-0335
People’s Pantry

Jenny Schwartz, Email Exchange, 12/11/20

Operations:
- Serves 100-200 people per week with a focus on South County residents
- Outdoor tabling grab and go
- Funding maximized at Guido’s
  - Fundraising system where people could make a donation that would ensure food purchased from local farm

Experience with Farms:
- Share the Bounty
- Additional orders from Indian Line, Colfax, and MX Morningstar
- Interested in working with more
Recommendations

1. Option A: Food Hub Model
2. Option B: CSA Model
3. Option C: Hybrid Model
Food Hub Model

● Purchasing and distribution occurs in an ongoing fashion
  ○ Not a yearly contract - more week to week
  ○ Utilizing whatever the farmers have available
  ○ Price lists provided by farmers and pantries place orders on a weekly basis
● More labor intensive – lots of moving parts
CSA: Community Supported Agriculture

- Pantries would purchase a number of CSAs in advance of a season
- Farms would supply CSAs with crops of their choice each week
- Farms would deliver CSA to pantry or pick up on site
Hybrid Model

- A more coordinated and structured CSA style approach
- Pantries input specific orders for farms
  - Crops
  - Volumes
- Money paid upfront and throughout the season
- Pantries guaranteed a regular share and farms guaranteed income
### Farm to Food Pantry: SWOT Analysis

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<thead>
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<th></th>
<th>Option A: Food Hub</th>
<th>Option B: CSA Exchange</th>
<th>Option C: Hybrid</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strengths:</strong></td>
<td>● Flexibility with orders and funding</td>
<td>● Security for farmers’ seasons</td>
<td>● Coordination and more flexibility with payment</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Less ability for farmers to plan in advance</td>
<td>● Limited agency from pantry once growing season begins</td>
<td>● Farms would prefer greater volume orders</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Customized purchases and quantities</td>
<td>● Farm expansion based on pantry requests</td>
<td>● A more established and direct contract if successful</td>
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<td></td>
<td>● Limited capabilities to support requests of smaller volumes</td>
<td>● Sustained funding needed for upfront costs</td>
<td>● Disinterest and unwanted produce at pantries</td>
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<td><strong>Weaknesses:</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Opportunities:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td><strong>Threats:</strong></td>
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## Our Recommendation: Flexible Hybrid Model

### Yearly Contract
- Early January
- Pantry needs and farm availability consolidated ahead of the season
- Partial upfront prepayment
- Assign each farm to different crops and orders

### Order Form Every 1-2 Weeks
- Pantries can tailor orders to their fluctuating needs
- Small payments with each order

### Logistics
- Depends on the farm and pantry
- Partnership with a wholesale distributor such as Marty’s Local
- Explore the idea of a central location hub
Business as Usual

Implications of doing nothing

● Farms:
  ○ Losing economic viability
  ○ Centralization of big agricultural enterprises running the market
  ○ Climate change and weather fluctuations and instability
  ○ Family ownership and succession

● Food Pantries:
  ○ Lacking a local and fresh option for families
  ○ Culturally relevant foods

Overall: lost opportunity to connect local farmers and producers with food access organizations
Next Steps

To be continued by Berkshire Grown and Kate Burke

- Continue to gauge interest levels of farms and pantries in the county
- Begin to establish relationships between the parties
- Explore different pathways of sustained funding
Acknowledgements

Margaret Moulton, Berkshire Grown

Professor Gardner and ENVI 302

Everyone who took the time to speak with us and provided valuable insight to our research and project
  ● Especially the farmers who we pestered over email all semester :)}
Any questions?
Appendix
Questions for farm to food pantry exchange organizations:

1) What community do you serve?
2) How many farms and food access points are involved in your exchange?
3) How does your system function - is it a CSA, order on demand, previously arranged contract, other model?
4) How long have you been in operation, and how have you seen your program grow?
5) What areas of staffing does your program rely on?
6) How are you funded?
7) How are the farmers paid for their produce?
8) How are orders processed and aggregated?
9) How does the transport, storage, and delivery work? Who processes the food?
10) How is the food packaged?
11) What have been the biggest logistical challenges?
12) What are some of the most important components of your model that have contributed to your success?
13) What do you think are the next steps for your program?
Questions for farms:

1. What crops do you grow?
2. How much would you estimate you are growing per week?
3. How do you sell your crops - are they processed and packaged, and does that change the costs?
4. Are your crops selling out, or do you find that you have an extra supply that you are still looking to sell?
5. Do you sell your products in bulk?
6. Do you have any interest in contracting with a local food pantry, and do you have the capabilities to do this and have pantries purchase from you?
7. Would you want to establish a contract ahead of season, or would you want to be paid upon delivery?
8. **Emphasize that we are working with Berkshire Grown (Share the bounty and donations), but this is a project investigating a business contract**
Interview Questions: Pantries

Questions for food pantries

1. What community do you serve, and how many people are served each week? What are the demographics of this community?
2. How do people visit and interact with the food pantry? How are people transporting the food back home i.e. bags?
3. Have you ever received products from local farmers or an organization that buys produce from the local farms to bring to the food pantry?
   a. What was the process? How would you recommend the process/model be smoother?
4. Would you be interested in contracting with a farm to order more produce for your food pantry?
5. Do you have the funds to purchase farm produce or do you need fundraising?
6. Does your food pantry have the ability to collect produce from the farms or help prepare it? Or would you need the produce delivered?
7. What specific types of food and produce does your pantry need?
8. How do you like to receive produce? Processed a bit first (sliced carrots vs raw for example or apples vs applesauce)? Do you have the capabilities to process and prepare certain foods?
9. If a farmer could only provide produce in bulk, do you have the capabilities to process this?
10. How has this year presented challenges to your food pantry, and the number of people you serve? If you compare that to a year ago how much has that changed? Do you think this number is going to stay or change?
11. If interested, how and when would you like us to contact you or the local farmers to contact you? How far in advance?
Key Themes and Takeaways

**Exchange Programs**
- CSA model vs seasonal contract
- Private vs public funding
- Facilitating relationship between farmers and food pantries
- State grants or mini grants

**Farms**
- Market price purchasing
- Flexibility with contracts
- Logistically feasible
- Winter shares

**Food Pantries**
- Packaging and processing capabilities
- Diversity of options
- Cultural relevance
Research Sources:

- https://foodprint.org/blog/connecting-farms-to-the-food-insecure/
- https://mainefoodstrategy.org/the-framework/case-studies/mainers-feeding-mainers
- https://www.vtfoodbank.org/gather-food/vermonters-feeding-vermonters
- https://www.farmlinkproject.org