

Earthscan

Tools for Community Planning



Growing Livelihoods

Local Food Systems and
Community Development

Rhonda Phillips
Christopher Wharton

earthscan
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Growing Livelihoods

Local food systems and community development

Community Planning is starting to include a broader food systems focus, spanning topics such as nutrition and health outcomes, sustainable farming practices, economic and social implications of local food production, distribution, and consumption. Together, these issues are a driving force for the passions of those seeking positive change in their communities through healthy food. The purpose of this book is to explore how and where local food and farms, as part of a local or regional food system, can positively impact both economic development and overall well-being of communities. Across North America, there are good examples of the ways in which innovative local food systems provide opportunities for: increasing job growth and entrepreneurship; retaining local farmers on their land while nourishing their community; and providing communities places to congregate, bond, and become closer-knit. Six such examples are highlighted, each illustrating a novel model offering unique contributions to community economic health and well-being. These important cases offer practitioners, advocates, academics, and student's insight into how applications can be built or studied in their own communities.

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Earthscan Tools for Community Planning Series

There is increasing global demand for more local involvement in the planning of the environment. This is the only way that communities will get the surroundings they want and make the transition towards a sustainable future. This series of short, accessibly priced, practical books have been written by the world's leading planning professionals to provide tools to support community planning wherever it occurs. Each book is a stand-alone, but together they create a compelling resource for planning professionals, community groups, activists, planning students, and anyone looking to facilitate engagement in a community context.

Growing Livelihoods

Local food systems and community development

Rhonda Phillips and Christopher Wharton

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From Chris:

I would like to dedicate this book to my wife, Kelsey, who not only changed my life personally, but also set me on the professional path I am on now and that has led to the writing of this book.

From Rhonda:

This book is dedicated to my mother, Iris Phillips, whose joy of growing, cooking, and sharing good food has always inspired me. It is in memory of Corley and Vera King, my grandparents, two of the best farmers I've ever known.

within local food systems while also leveraging a diverse array of market outlets to reach more consumers, especially those in underserved communities. There are many examples of these efforts, including collaborative efforts across sectors and interests. The Detroit Food and Fitness Collaborative pushes for policy, business, and community changes to support a local and equitable food system. The organization represents over 40 community stakeholders throughout the city working together (The Detroit Food and Fitness Collaborative 2015). This city has come alive again, in part due to the significant efforts around local food and food access. Much of these efforts are grassroots, and the public, non-profit, and private sectors have joined in on some of the efforts. There's the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network, which operates a seven-acre farm right in the city, and the group Greening of Detroit operates the two-and-a-half-acre Detroit Cooperative Farm. A Green Grocer Project and the Detroit Grocery Incubator Project help encourage more access for the city's residents. Text Box 3.1 provides insight into another of the city's grassroots effort to bring healthy food sources to food-insecure neighborhoods in Memphis, Tennessee. The project has gained momentum, and shows the impact of bringing together concerned citizens around food access and security issues.

Text Box 3.1 The Green Machine Mobile Food Market: A flexible response to food insecurity in the Bluff City (aka Memphis, Tennessee)

Antonio Raciti and Kenneth M. Reardon
The University of Memphis

When residents of Memphis's historic Vance Avenue neighborhood began working with city officials on the preparation of a comprehensive revitalization plan, planners were surprised when access to fresh, affordable, and culturally appropriate foods was identified as one of the community's top priorities (see Photos 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3).

Moved by the residents' food security concerns, a grassroots organization comprised of local businesses, churches,



Text Box 3.1 Photo 3.1 Creating the Green Machine

Source: Photo courtesy of Davide Darra, an Italian photographer who followed the entire process of the bus transformation

block clubs, tenant associations, and human service organizations called the Vance Avenue Collaborative (VAC) formed a Food Security Taskforce staffed by University of Memphis anthropology and planning students to investigate creative solutions to this problem.

Within days of its formation, the Taskforce discovered Chicago's Fresh Moves project, which had adapted a retired city bus for use as a mobile food market. When Taskforce members contacted Fresh Moves, their leaders, eager to see their effort replicated in another city, offered to provide planning, design, and development assistance to their Memphis colleagues.

In the process of preparing a preliminary proposal for the establishment of a Memphis mobile food market, University of Memphis planning students attempted to determine the nature and extent of the Bluff City's food security problem. Using US Census Data they determined that only seven of the city's high-poverty Census Tracts benefited from the presence of a full-service supermarket. This finding prompted the Taskforce to re-conceptualize their mobile food market as a city-wide rather than a neighborhood-scale initiative.



Text Box 3.1 Photo 3.2 Creating the Green Machine

Source: Photo courtesy of Davide Darra, an Italian photographer who followed the entire process of the bus transformation



Text Box 3.1 Photo 3.3 The Green Machine in action

Source: Photo courtesy of Davide Darra, an Italian photographer who followed the entire process of the bus transformation

Using data provided by Fresh Moves and university planners, the Taskforce developed a business, finance, and operational plan for implementing this important new food security initiative. Following the plan's completion, Taskforce Representatives asked the Memphis Area Transit Agency (MATA) to provide one of their recently "retired" city buses to the

project. The regional transportation agency responded positively to the Taskforce's request, offering to rent one of the retired buses to the project for \$1 a year. They also offered to consult on ADA issues during the conversion process, and assist in planning the bus's routes and stops and in maintaining the vehicle.

With a detailed plan highlighting how the bus would address the Memphis's pervasive food security problem, the Taskforce succeeded in raising more than \$200,000 from area foundations, corporations, and philanthropists to retrofit the vehicle and keep it operating for two years. By mobilizing several dozen local schools, churches, universities, and businesses, the Taskforce was able to transform a 20-year old transit bus into a beautiful retail food store complete with a multimedia nutrition/health/wellness education corner offering the best information regarding the critical connection between health eating and living. As Father Tim Sullivan, president of Saint Patrick Community Outreach Center (the leading organization of the VAC) stated, "The bus is much more than a source of affordable fruits and vegetables; it is also an active teaching space focused on health promotion and wellness."

On July 22, 2013, more than 200 Vance Avenue residents and leaders and dozens on community and corporate volunteers gathered in the sanctuary of Saint Patrick Church for the dedication of the Green Machine Mobile Food Market. While Ken Reardon presented the history of the mobile food project, community volunteers drove the completely reconditioned bus in front of the church and "gift wrapped" it in a large blue tarp and green ribbon. When local residents followed Fr. Sullivan to the front of the church they broke out in spontaneous applause upon seeing this enormous "surprise."

After reciting St. Francis of Assisi's prayer, which invites Christians to become "seeds of His peace," Fr. Sullivan invited members of the Vance Avenue Collaborative's Food Security Taskforce to cut the ribbon anchoring the tarp covering the bus. He then asked elders who had served as the volunteer staff of the church's long-standing food pantry

and soup kitchen to help him unveil the bus, which provided a loud series of cheers as people saw the vibrant food- and music-themed mural created, during the past months, by the hard work of community members, students, and faculty from the University of Memphis, coordinated by Antonio Raciti.

During the past 15 months, the Green Machine Mobile Market has made more than 800 regular stops in underserved communities. More than 20,000 residents have purchased more than \$60,000 worth of high-quality fruits and vegetables, more than 75% of which have been grown within a 250-mile radius of the city of Memphis. During their shopping experience, these residents have also had the opportunity to view a series of one-minute health videos highlighting the critical connection between health eating and living produced by Baptist Memorial Health and Hospital Corporation and WMCTV of Memphis.

In addition to its 18 weekly stops, the Green Machine has been in great demand at local community events, including the Southern Heritage Classic Parade, the Grizzlies' playoff series and block parties, and the city's annual Night Out events. More than 30,000 Memphians have been introduced to the origins, consequences, and possible solutions to the city's food security through the Green Machine's education materials that are regularly updated by University of Memphis planning students and faculty.

The local press has consistently covered the activities of the Green Machine, which received international coverage as part of a Thanksgiving Weekend news special highlighting successful responses to "Hunger in the American South," produced by Al Jazeera International News Service. In recent months, the Green Machine has provided "starter packets" to eight other American communities interested in initiating a similar mobile food market. Most recently, representatives of Nigeria's largest NGO requested the starter packet and an opportunity to visit the Green Machine in January in hopes of initiating a similar mobile market project in West Africa.