



A Landscape Assessment of Wisconsin

FARM TO FOOD ASSISTANCE INITIATIVES

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A Landscape Assessment of Wisconsin Farm to Food Assistance Initiatives

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the past two decades, a growing number of efforts have emerged to link Wisconsin-grown foods with households in need. This report documents, maps, and assesses Wisconsin's farm to food assistance landscape, defined here as "any program that serves the dual objectives of increasing the availability and affordability of fresh foods to people experiencing food need while also creating market opportunities for Wisconsin producers." The assessment aims to identify needs and opportunities to improve our collective capacity to move more culturally relevant, Wisconsin-grown products to households in need.

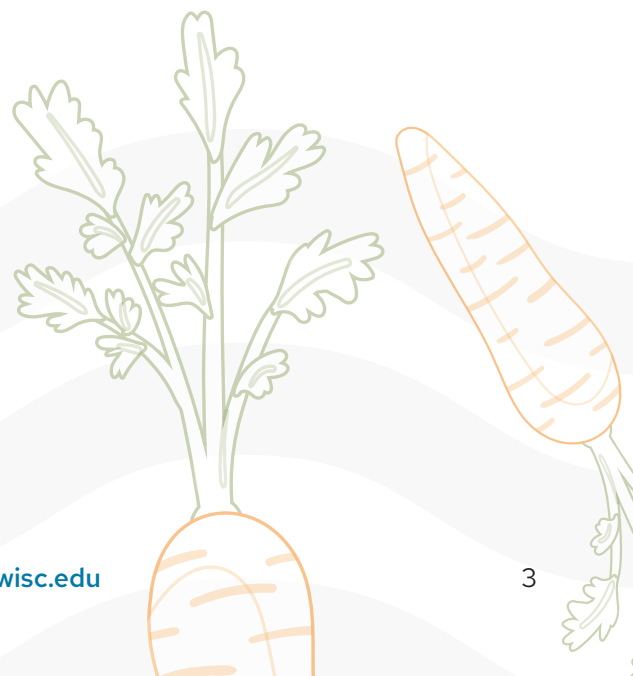
The findings and recommendations presented are based on primary data collected through semi-structured interviews. Five case studies provide examples of distinct approaches to farm to food access initiatives from regions across Wisconsin.

Themes:

- Covid-related funding was often catalytic for farm to food assistance initiatives, but it also sometimes disrupted preexisting network relationships
- Financial sustainability is an ongoing concern for many initiatives
- Existing partnerships are critical to program success, but more relationship and network development are needed
- Barriers to market access for small and less connected producers impede farm to food assistance network diversity and supply chain resilience
- It is challenging to center accessibility and cultural relevance while also moving large volumes of product
- It is more difficult for farm to food assistance initiatives to serve rural households, consequently, rural Wisconsin communities tend to have less coverage than metropolitan areas
- Many initiatives could increase their capacity if they had access to more storage and transportation infrastructure

Recommendations:

- It is important to continue to fund a range of program models and sizes to engage diverse farmer suppliers and to meet the needs and preferences of diverse Wisconsin communities
- Long-term funding for local procurement would improve program planning, and is necessary to advance market development for farmers
- Increased funding for infrastructure development would expand the individual and collective capacity of farm to food assistance initiatives in both urban and rural areas
- Farm to food assistance initiatives would benefit from third party value chain coordination and relationship building



INTRODUCTION

Wisconsin has over 13 million acres of agricultural land and is a top producer of commodities ranging from cheese to various types of fruits and vegetables. The state ranks 9th in the U.S. for value of agricultural sales, totaling \$11.4 billion according to 2019 data.¹ In addition to its commodity production, Wisconsin also has a vibrant local food system with approximately 8% of farms selling directly to consumers. The state also ranks second only to California in the total number of organic farms, many of which sell into Wisconsin markets. A number of the federally recognized Tribes of Wisconsin are also actively engaged in agricultural production as well as reclamation of traditional crops and the redevelopment of indigenous food systems.

Despite Wisconsin's agricultural abundance, more than 1 in 10 Wisconsinites is food insecure. Food insecurity is defined by the USDA as "a household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food."² Households with adequate amounts of food can still experience nutrition insecurity wherein households lack a diverse, consistent, and equitable access range of nutritious food.³ Both food and nutrition insecurity can have serious health consequences. Rates of food and nutrition insecurity vary considerably across different populations and regions. For example, the rate of child food insecurity is nearly double Wisconsin's average at 19.5%.⁴ Similarly, a 2020 Wisconsin county health rankings report notes: "Racial/ethnic minority populations, people with lower incomes and less education, [. . .] residents of Milwaukee County and of rural areas experience disparities in socioeconomic status, health risk behaviors, and health outcomes."⁵ For example, Tribal communities often experience higher rates of food insecurity and diet-related diseases.

Over the past two decades, a growing number of efforts have emerged to link Wisconsin farms with households in need. Whether these programs divert agricultural surplus

to food pantries or subsidize direct market sales through box programs or farmers market vouchers, these initiatives serve the dual objective of increasing the

availability and affordability of fresh products to food insecure households while creating markets for Wisconsin growers. In some cases, these initiatives also play an important role in diverting good food from the waste stream. In recent years, the Covid-19 pandemic has spurred further innovation in the farm to food assistance arena as federal dollars, such as CARES Act funding, have poured into communities in response to a spike in food insecurity and widespread disruptions in food supply chains due to heavy job losses and workplace closures in the early phases of the pandemic.

The purpose of this project was to capture lessons across a range of farm to food assistance initiatives throughout Wisconsin. The project included three central components:

1. **Documentation of the mechanics of farm to food assistance programs in Wisconsin**
2. **A map of the farm to food assistance landscape in Wisconsin**
3. **Identification of needs and opportunities to improve collective capacity to move more culturally relevant, Wisconsin-grown products to households in need**



¹ USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service, Wisconsin Field Office. n.d. "Wisconsin 2019 Agricultural Statistics." https://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics_by_State/Wisconsin/Publications/Annual_Statistical_Bulletin/2019AgStats-WI.pdf.

² USDA ERS - Definitions of Food Security. n.d. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-u-s/definitions-of-food-security/>.

³ "Food and Nutrition Security." n.d. USDA. <https://www.usda.gov/nutrition-security>.

⁴ Food Security Project Home. n.d. <https://foodsecurity.wisc.edu/background>.

⁵ Wisconsin Department of Health Services. 2020. "Healthiest Wisconsin 2020 Baseline and Health Disparities Report Executive Summary." 2020. <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/publications/p0/p00522a.pdf>.



DEFINITION & SCOPE

For the purposes of this project, we initially defined farm to food assistance as “any program that serves the dual objectives of increasing the availability and affordability of fresh foods to people experiencing food need while also creating market opportunities for Wisconsin producers.” A wide range of public and private food assistance programs fully or partially fit this definition and provide Wisconsin-grown product to individuals and households through a variety of distribution modalities

including food banks, food pantries, Farm to School and Early Care and Education programs, prepared meal programs, farmers market programs, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Farms, formal and informal community resource centers, and food waste recovery programs. Despite sharing the overarching goal of linking food insecure households with fresh produce, program eligibility, administration, funding, and product sourcing vary widely.

Several categories of farm to food assistance programs have already been evaluated. For example, there are a number of publications that document the relationship between Farm to School initiatives and food security,⁶ while others showcase the food access and economic impacts of farmers market nutrition incentive programs.⁷ At the time of publication, the UW - Madison Division of Extension Health and Well-Being Institute was working with the Wisconsin Department of Health Services to conduct a statewide assessment of the TEFAP program in Wisconsin. The resulting report will identify ways to improve the reach of the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) to underserved communities in rural, remote, Tribal, and low-

income areas of Wisconsin.

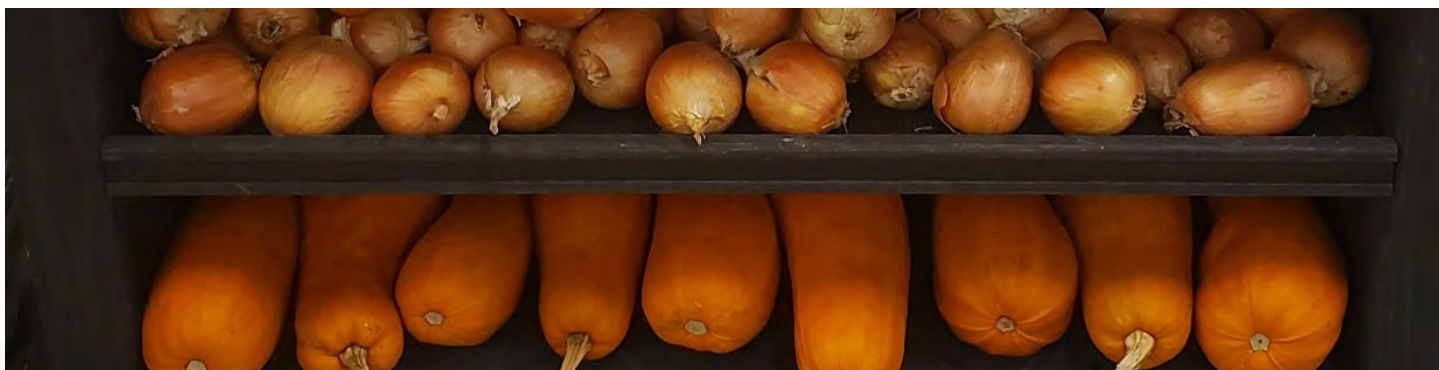
As we moved into the interview phase of our project, we narrowed our scope to focus on independent farm to food assistance initiatives rather than those mediated by federal programs, institutional food service operators, food retailers, and farmers markets. These independent programs have been among the least studied in Wisconsin, yet they have experienced some of the most growth and transformation in recent years due to increases in both need and funding during the Covid-19 pandemic.

METHODS

This report is based on primary data collected through two phases of semi-structured interviews. Interviews were transcribed and coded using a priori codes to analyze program mechanics and inductive codes to identify themes. Interview guides for both phases can be found in Appendix C.

The goals of the landscape assessment interviews were (1) to identify Wisconsin farm to food assistance programs and contacts, and (2) to document core elements of the farm to food assistance program landscape across Wisconsin. We interviewed forty-one food system stakeholders, representing food banks, food pantries, meat suppliers, dairy suppliers, aggregators, farmers, nonprofit organizations, extension agencies, state agencies, and individuals involved with Tribal food box programs.

The purpose of the case study interviews was to highlight five cases that exemplify distinct approaches to independent farm to food assistance initiatives across Wisconsin. Other factors influencing case study selection are geographic diversity, programmatic diversity, willingness to participate, and cases with unique strengths that merit additional study. The goals of the second round of interviews were (1) to dive deeper into specific project attributes, systems, and/or outcomes and (2) to move toward recommendations. Interviews were conducted with organizational representatives closely involved with farm to food assistance program administration. Though their official titles vary, to differentiate them from the other types of interviewees in this project, we refer to them as "program representatives."



⁶ Jessica A. Hoffman et al. 2012b. "Farm to Family: Increasing Access to Affordable Fruits and Vegetables among Urban Head Start Families." *Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition* 7 (2-3): 165-77. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19320248.2012.703522>; Christine McCullum et al. 2005. "Evidence-Based Strategies to Build Community Food Security." *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* 105 (2): 278-83. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jada.2004.12.015>; Nancy M. Wells, et al. 2018. "The Carry-over Effects of School Gardens on Fruit and Vegetable Availability at Home: A Randomized Controlled Trial with Low-Income Elementary Schools." *Preventive Medicine* 112 (July): 152-59. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ypmed.2018.03.022>.

⁷ GusNIP NTAE. 2023. "Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP): Impact Findings Y3: September 1, 2021 to August 31, 2022." 2023. <https://nutritionincentivehub.org/gusnip-ntae-y3-impact-findings>; "Double Up Food Bucks 2021 Annual Impact Report - Fair Food Network." 2023a. Fair Food Network. January 26, 2023. <https://fairfoodnetwork.org/resources/double-up-food-bucks-2021-annual-impact-report/>.

THEMES

Theme 1: Covid-related funding was often catalytic for farm to food assistance initiatives, but it also sometimes disrupted preexisting network relationships

Although a number of farm to food assistance programs have existed for a decade or more, the Covid-19 pandemic spurred an increase in funding, activity, and interest in this work. This occurred in large part through federal dollars made available by the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act and the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), which were distributed in response to increased food insecurity and widespread disruptions to food supply chains. Other pandemic-related factors also contributed to rapid expansion and innovation in the farm to food assistance arena, namely: a rapid increase in need, the development of Covid-related safety precautions, and a resurgence of public interest in local food. These in turn, also led to expanded funding and the emergence of new delivery modalities inside and outside of traditional emergency food networks.

Covid-relief funding created opportunities for innovative responses to pre-existing challenges. The pandemic put food insecurity and supply chain vulnerabilities in the



spotlight, attracting resources that made it possible for organizations to explore new ways to address persistent access issues. As a result, many of the organizations interviewed reported that programs catalyzed by Covid-related funding have become ongoing organizational priorities. As one program representative described, the “Covid era of funding and programming created some great opportunities to pilot programs, but these are not [uniquely] Covid era issues.” Another explained “It’s not just about food purchasing, it’s about strengthening the local food system in the local economy, and we want to





keep doing that. It costs more to do this type of work, and so finding the funding for this is really important to us,” and “those hunger needs were there before Covid. It just highlighted what people’s needs really were and those needs haven’t gone away. So we’re really trying to secure consistent alternative funding to keep the program going and keep the program evolving.”

Although program representatives noted that program financing was a challenge as Covid-relief dollars waned, while available, these funds allowed for farm to food assistance providers to make transformative investments in hard infrastructure, operational systems, and procurement relationships that had lasting positive impacts, as evidenced by the continuation of a number of these programs. For example, one food bank president noted that, in addition to funding local purchases, their food bank leveraged federal pandemic relief funds “to build up our team over time. And now those team members, those positions are part of our organization.” Another program representative noted that Covid-relief funds were used “to support both pantry infrastructure and storage handling [and] distribution costs, [such as] freezers, coolers, trucks, [and] vans to ... support moving [Wisconsin-grown] food.” One food pantry was “able to get a small cargo van through a previous ARPA grant. And the more we’ve been doing deliveries, we’ve discovered there’s a greater need [for home delivery] than what we even knew about.” This pantry continues to apply for grants to increase their home delivery capacity to reach rural and transportation-limited audiences.

However, not all stakeholders reported equally positive perceptions of the impact of Covid-relief funds on farm to food assistance networks. Some network partners were hesitant to collaborate with large scale organizations that lacked local credibility while others found new, pandemic-funded programs disruptive to preexisting network relationships. For example, a county-scale food assistance initiative housed in a food pantry was hesitant to pursue funding from the statewide Covid-relief funded programs. “Programs that aren’t at the local level, as well-intended as they are, can actually be more disruptive than helpful if it’s a local program that has local roots... the program only continues as long as that structure and that funding is there... and I think it might be disruptive if it’s not done in the right way.” Similarly, a farmer-supplier noted how a statewide initiative “came in and took the place of all the fundraising and efforts to buy local food and distribute it [for food assistance].” And a representative of an aggregator food hub shared that sourcing directly from individual farms—as was required in some statewide initiatives—“did feel like it was moving in a backward motion. That was the model that had existed... before we had developed into aggregator market models as a hub [to create efficiencies for growers and buyers].”

Theme 2: Financial sustainability is an ongoing concern for many initiatives

Many program representatives identified a lack of stable, long-term funding as the biggest challenge facing their farm to food assistance programs. They reported that program budgets often change over the course of a year, making it difficult to plan or implement strategic improvements. While budget fluctuations and ongoing fundraising are not new to food assistance organizations, they present acute obstacles to local procurement because of the time sensitivity of pre-season planning, planting, and harvest. As one interviewee noted, “[Winter] is the time we should be chatting with our producers about what we are hoping they might grow for the program. But we can’t quite do that quite yet” --because they couldn’t guarantee the purchases until they had secured funding.

Another program representative shared similar concerns about being able to deliver on growers’ expectations: “We have built such strong relationships with these producers, and we certainly don’t want to leave them high and dry for next year. Some have expanded their production because there’s a demand in food banks being, you know, a newer, larger institutional buyer than we ever had been before.”

Because of these concerns, some organizations are hesitant to grow to meet the need, even when short-term funding allows for growth.

Organizations also discussed the importance of consistent funding as it affects food recipients. This was especially true of initiatives that launched new community-focused distribution points and formats during the pandemic. As one program representative explained, “I think that the more the program exists, and the longer it exists, the more people will feel comfortable relying on it. Right now, people know that it’s unsure... for people to feel assured that they are going to be able to rely on these centers, these community hubs to have this fresh, local produce, it’s going to have to be around for a little bit longer, and more consistent.”

Most initiatives have pursued alternative sources of funding to replace pandemic-relief dollars. This includes drawing from their operating budgets, bringing in additional grant funding, and conducting targeted fundraising campaigns. One initiative has received annual funding through a county budget and is exploring partnering with other county governments in its service region to sustain programming in their jurisdictions. At least two programs were also considering defraying expenses by requiring that households pay a subsidized cost for the fresh products. As one program representative explained, “[The program] can’t be completely reliant upon funding from outside sources.”

Theme 3: Existing partnerships are critical to program success, but more relationship and network development are needed

Interviewees consistently emphasized the importance of trusting relationships in farm to food assistance work. Trust with producers, collaborating organizations, and food recipients were all seen as critical for success. For farm to food assistance programs, trust with producers is largely based on a program’s ability to anticipate the demand for specific volumes and types of products, and to pay fair prices on time. Because few initiatives that we examined use advanced contracts for producers, many seasonal procurement arrangements rely heavily on relationship building and informal pre-season planning, including conversations about what products to increase or reduce based on feedback from program partners and participants. Since it is common for these arrangements to operate on estimates of future purchasing capacity,



farmers’ trust is critical.

Trusting, communicative, and flexible interorganizational partnerships are also crucial to success. This is especially true for partnerships between dissimilar organizations, and initiatives with many partners. For example, one initiative brought together multiple culturally specific resource centers that implement highly customized food distribution, a health-centered nonprofit that manages funding acquisition and project oversight, and a vegetable aggregator that procures produce from a county-level network of local producers with a wide range of products. In this case, it is particularly important for each partner to be clear about their role (e.g., production, aggregation, breaking down bulk deliveries, distribution to households) in relation to other partners in the value chain. This in turn, enables them to focus on their own niches and strengths. Organizations also underscored the importance of having the trust of program participants. After all, it is their feedback about preferred product types, distribution channels, and product usage that make these programs worthwhile.

While interviewees underscored the importance of their existing partnerships, some of them also identified the need for further network and partnership development. They shared that identifying, developing, and maintaining critical relationships is time and labor intensive, noting that some of their strongest and most valuable relationships took shape over long periods of time. Finally, they described a need for external support in developing relationships with new food value chain partners in light of their often-

limited internal capacity to pursue additional relationship building opportunities.

Theme 4: Barriers to market access for small and less connected producers impede farm to food assistance network diversity and supply chain resilience

Interviewees observed that the Wisconsin farm to food assistance landscape is highly relationship-driven, and that some farm to food assistance initiatives have a tendency to privilege relationships with existing suppliers. This can result in missed market development opportunities for smaller and less established producers and missed opportunities to diversify networks by forging new partnerships with the organizations, businesses, and program participants who are not already engaged.

Our interviews surfaced a number of specific barriers to partnership development between farm to food assistance initiatives and small or less connected farmers. These include lack of internal programmatic capacity for relationship-building, lack of trust or interest from farmers, language access issues, lack of farm capacity, and incompatibility between fast-paced program implementation (especially in the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic) and the much slower pace of relationship development. One farm to food assistance program representative acknowledged that one of the reasons her organization hasn't sourced from more BIPOC producers is that "during the pandemic, we just didn't slow down for stuff, and we needed to. So that's one big area [where] we need to do better." Others also noted the tension they felt between operationalizing programs quickly to meet households' acute food needs and a desire to create meaningful market opportunities for small and mid-sized local producers, which typically requires more coordination and relationship-building.

For other farm to food assistance initiatives, the central challenges of purchasing from local farmers were associated with scale or complexity. Some initiatives that move high volumes of products have experienced barriers to purchasing directly from farmers because of the quantities they need. One interviewee based at a county-level food pantry explained that the organization chose not to pursue partnerships with additional producers because it preferred slow and incremental growth based on collaboration between a few very invested partners. They believe that this contributed to the initiative's reliable, community-focused distribution of high-quality products.

Many interviewees are aware of the ways these challenges lead to exclusion and reported that their organizations are working to address them. For example, several initiatives are specifically working to build relationships with a wider range of local farmer suppliers. In some cases, this involves partnering with local food aggregators to procure local products from new farmer suppliers. One statewide program aims to build the connectivity and capacity of socially disadvantaged and historically underserved farmers. This initiative has prioritized time and resources for relationship building with these farmers. An initiative that serves Tribal Nations specifically works to source products from Tribal producers. Between 2021 and 2022, this initiative worked hard to increase the percentage of procurement dollars that went to Tribal producers and achieved a nearly 60% increase. In other instances, programs invested directly in on-farm equipment or infrastructure to make it possible for producers to become their suppliers. For example, a food bank that encountered challenges associated with on-farm capacity simply addressed the equipment needs by providing funding to purchase tools such as a bushwacker, fence post driller, and label maker.



Theme 5: It is challenging to center accessibility and cultural relevance while also moving large volumes of product

Providing dignified and relevant service to individuals experiencing food insecurity is a foundational priority for all of the initiatives we examined. However, each initiative operationalizes these values differently depending on their structure, strengths, and partnerships. In general, we found that larger programs appear to be more effective at moving large quantities of food, and consequently, serving larger numbers of people. In contrast, more localized programs and/or programs with more specific target audiences were better able to tailor product offerings, distribution modalities, and other factors to the needs and preferences of specific communities.

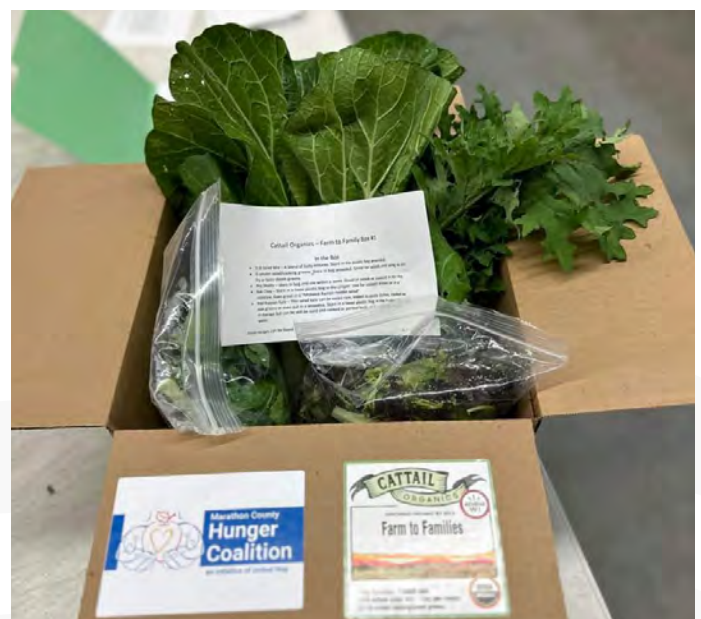
Larger initiatives are not only able to move more products to more people, but they also benefit from more expansive networks and greater overall resources. As one food bank representative explained, “I think being able to offer operationalized funding at a statewide level creates a lot more opportunities, flexibilities, ways for us to in the most equitable way possible, serve folks in the state.” A food pantry director echoed this remark, noting that “[Food banks] focus is on taking the network and building our capacity so that we boots-on-the-ground folks can get more food to more people... it behooves anybody to be connected to these other resources, because their job is really to help us build capacity and grow.”

In contrast, more localized programs and/or programs with more specific target audiences often focused on program designs that respond to specific communities’ needs and preferences. As such, these initiatives work hard to provide foods requested by specific communities and to locate distribution sites in convenient locations like apartment complexes and community resource centers. As one interviewee remarked, “No two households experience food insecurity the same way and having flexibility in how food is distributed, how it’s picked up, and what produce people have access to is going to be really important in the success of those programs.” Another noted that the goal is “creating that [fresh food] access in ways that people can get the food that they know that they want... It’s just constantly [about] identifying access barriers and trying to eliminate them.”

These initiatives strive to give the community a high degree of influence over them and view this as central to

their success. They serve as conduits between program participants, partner organizations, and farmer suppliers and use participant feedback to understand how distribution systems can be improved for customers and to inform what products will be grown the next season. For example, in one program, a farmer began growing jicama after a community center made the request. These initiatives also highlighted ways in which their smaller size allowed them to be nimble and flexible, which was especially important throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.

Distribution formats were another central way farm to food assistance programs tailored their design to meet the distinct needs and preferences of various program participants. Examples of distribution formats include pre-packed boxes, integration into regular food pantry offerings, pop-up market-style stands at community sites, home delivery, integration into CSA distribution sites, and others. Distribution format design tended to focus on two dimensions of the customer’s experience: convenience and dignity. Some initiatives prioritized convenience, partnering with distribution sites that could serve a dual purpose for clients, such as community resource centers and apartment buildings while others identified locations that were trusted by undocumented community members. Others conceptualized dignified food assistance in terms of reducing stigma. For example, a drive-through pre-boxed food distribution model maximizes anonymity and efficiency while grocery-style pantries emulate the grocery shopping experience by allowing customers to choose products for themselves. While distinct, these approaches demonstrate that farm to food assistance initiatives can



provide a range of distribution methods to meet program participants' diverse needs and preferences.

Theme 6: It is more difficult for farm to food assistance initiatives to serve rural households, consequently, rural Wisconsin communities tend to have less coverage than metropolitan areas

Farm to food assistance program representatives noted that there is an unmet need for fresh food access in much of rural Wisconsin, and they expressed interest in increasing their impact in these regions. Representatives of statewide initiatives highlighted the need for improving fresh food access in northern Wisconsin, while representatives of initiatives operating at the county-level emphasized the need to improve access outside of urban centers. Interviewees often described rural food access as a transportation problem, echoing findings from a forthcoming report by the UW-Madison Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems on transportation issues affecting fresh food distribution⁸. Multiple program representatives also noted that some rural populations, such as seniors, face additional access barriers.

As of spring 2023, several initiatives were expanding, implementing, or planning new rural farm to food assistance efforts through mobile pantries, pop-up pantries, and home delivery. One program representative noted that, after incorporating locally sourced fresh produce into an existing mobile pantry operation, the organization "received phone calls of extreme gratitude simply because some [food recipients] have gone a year or two without seeing a vegetable simply because the mobile pantry has never brought it." While programs operating in rural areas are proud to fulfill this need, interviewees also noted that rural distribution methods require additional infrastructure and investment, such as refrigerated vehicles, computer management systems, and staffing. This can place strain on programs and pantries with already tight budgets. As another program representative shared, despite community need and staff interest, they are not able to include locally-sourced fresh produce in their pop-up pantry program at present due to limited organizational capacity.

Multiple interviewees also noted the dual-benefit of rural farm to food assistance initiatives, which can increase fresh food access in rural areas while benefiting rural farmers by expanding local sales and market development opportunities. Although some programs have successfully implemented local sourcing practices to serve rural clientele, the uneven distribution of fruit and vegetable production across the State results in fewer opportunities for local produce sourcing in some of the rural regions with the greatest need. This is especially true for many of Wisconsin's northern counties, which experience some of the State's highest rates of food insecurity.

Theme 7: Many initiatives could increase their capacity if they had access to more storage and transportation infrastructure

Interviewees from farm to food assistance initiatives ranging in scope and scale noted that increased storage and transportation infrastructure would expand their capacity to move more product, and through a wider variety of distribution channels. Some interviewees reported significant infrastructural deficits, such as no cold storage at their distribution centers or no refrigerated trucks. Others reported having insufficient warehousing space or an inadequate number of loading docks.

Interviewees also expressed interest in more flexible storage infrastructure that allows programs to more easily implement a variety of distribution methods (e.g., pop up markets, mobile markets, and home delivery models). One food bank representative reflected on how the food bank's physical infrastructure constrains its food distribution model, "It's possible that we could distribute more if we had the capacity... our building limits our ability to distribute food." A representative from a pantry interested in expanding its range of delivery models shared, "We can't keep up with the demand. And so we've kind of done a soft launch. We haven't shouted from the rooftops that we do this yet. But as soon as we do, we know it's - the floodgates will open." In short, evidence suggests that the demand for fresh products through a range of distribution channels is outpacing both programmatic capacity and the physical infrastructure that supports it.

⁸ Michelle Miller et al. forthcoming 2024. "Transportation Issues Affecting Fresh Food Distribution: A Comparison Study of Rural vs. Urban America." Report for USDA Agricultural Marketing Service, Transportation Services Division. <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1793/84841>

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: It is important to continue to fund a range of program models and sizes to engage diverse farmer suppliers and to meet the needs and preferences of diverse Wisconsin communities

Providing farm to food assistance for Wisconsin communities is not a one model fits all situation. While the range of program models result from the distinct circumstances and organizations that created them, we have found that different programs excel in different dimensions of the work. For example, food banks are able to move large volumes of product while community-based programs excel at tailoring product offerings and delivery modalities to meet the needs of specific populations. Similarly, farmer-led initiatives succeed at aligning distribution with existing direct market channels and engaging a larger number of smaller growers. This redundancy within the farm to food assistance system helps address the field's multifunctional goals of building markets for local and regional growers, improving access to fresh produce for food insecure households, and doing so in a convenient and culturally relevant way. As such, this diversity of programs enhances the collective capacity of Wisconsin's farm to food assistance landscape. Communities and funders should continue to invest in a range of program models.

Recommendation 2: Long-term funding for local procurement would improve program planning, and is necessary to advance market development for farmers

Funding is a central challenge for a majority of the farm to food assistance initiatives. All of the case study initiatives that were started or expanded in response to rising food insecurity at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic have continued because of high demand, despite other signs of an economic recovery. Without reliable funding sources, farm to food assistance programs are neither a reliable source of fresh products for food pantries or

households, nor are they reliable markets for regional growers. As discussed in the Farm to Food bank case study, one food bank secured funding from county government, which shares its commitment to both local economic development and community food security. Further exploration of public, philanthropic, and non-profit partnerships could help identify other long-term funding strategies to not only sustain but improve farm to food assistance programs by ensuring practices such as pre-season planning and contract development with their grower suppliers.

Recommendation 3: Increased funding for infrastructure development would expand the individual and collective capacity of farm to food assistance initiatives in both urban and rural areas

Interviewees noted that the demand for fresh food assistance regularly exceeds capacity. Challenges associated with inadequate physical infrastructure (e.g., insufficient building size, lack of refrigerated storage and



transportation) are well-documented across a range of local and regional food supply chains and represent a persistent barrier to scaling up local and regional food distribution in both emergency food networks and traditional marketing channels.⁹ Public, private, and philanthropic investment in scale-appropriate food systems infrastructure could improve our systemic capacity to aggregate, store, process, and distribute a variety of local products through a range of distribution channels. Terminal markets and public markets offer models of shared public infrastructure that facilitate market access and self-organization by providing affordable warehousing, cross-docking, and vending spaces.

Recommendation 4: Farm to food assistance programs would benefit from third party value chain coordination and relationship building

Interviewees emphasized that the relationships they have built with their food value chain partners are critical to the success of their farm to food assistance initiatives. These relationships are also a crucial component of the Wisconsin farm to food assistance landscape because they build connectivity and capacity within the State’s local and regional food systems.

Most of the partnerships highlighted in this report were developed directly by farm to food assistance programs and their value chain partners (e.g., farmers, food pantry directors) without the involvement of supporting or “third party” actors (e.g., food system planners, Extension educators, non-profit staff). As one interviewee shared, a primary strength of their initiative was the relationships built by two staff members who were deeply embedded and respected in the farming community. However, they acknowledged that losing

those staff members would likely upset the functionality of the entire initiative, noting that “relationships are strength, but relationships aren’t systems.”

Enhancing the relationship-based dimensions of this work and investing in roles that support value chain coordination by third party actors would create opportunities to build more resilient and equitable networks while hopefully reducing vulnerabilities associated with professional relationships that are held by a single staff member. Third party actors, based in agencies like local government, nonprofits, or Extension could increase Wisconsin’s collective capacity by strengthening network connectivity and opportunities for collaboration. They could provide context-specific technical assistance, organize, and convene stakeholder meetings, and provide organizational capacity for market matchmaking, relationship building, and supply chain development. Importantly, third party value chain coordinators and conveners can also prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion by collaboratively addressing the needs and priorities of farmers and households from underserved communities. Third party food value chain coordinators can lead stakeholders in coordinated planning for long-term growth at local and system scales.



⁹ ACDS LLC. 2020. “Madison Terminal Market Final Report.” August 20, 2020. https://cias.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/194/2022/04/MTM-Final-Report_082020.pdf; Sift Consulting LLC. 2023. “Dane County Pandemic Food System Study.” Dane County Food Council. March 22, 2023. <https://foodcouncil.countyofdane.com/documents/Dane-County-Pandemic-Food-System-Study---Final-Report.pdf>.

CASE STUDIES

CULTIVATING COMMUNITY PRODUCE PROGRAM AT WELLO

PRIMARY OPERATOR(S)	Wello
CORE PARTNER(S)	Seasonal Harvest, We All Rise African American Resource Center, Casa ALBA Melanie Hispanic Resource Center, Crusaders of Justicia Mobile Pantry
IN OPERATION SINCE	2020
TARGET AUDIENCE	Inclusion criteria are determined by partner organizations that are directly responsible for distributing the food. This allows for each distribution channel to meet the specific needs of the populations they serve including African American and Latinx communities.
SERVICE AREA	Brown and Manitowoc Counties
PRODUCTS	Vegetables, minimally processed vegetables, fruits
FUNDING SOURCES	Foundation grants, public funding
IMPACT MEASUREMENT	In 2022, \$26,000 paid to local farmers, 11,000 lbs of produce distributed. In addition, \$9,000 in Farmers Market incentives were distributed to program participants.
DISTRIBUTION CHANNELS	In 2022, two community resource centers and one mobile pantry
GROWER REQUIREMENTS/ PROCUREMENT REQUIREMENTS (OR OBJECTIVES)	Locally Sourced. Seasonal Harvest food hub aggregates locally produced foods for the program from approximately 12 farm members
WEBSITE	https://wello.org/

The Cultivating Community Produce Program is a project of Wello, a non-profit based in Green Bay, Wisconsin that works to “co-create community conditions that are fair and just to drive high levels of health and well-being for all.” In 2022, Cultivating Community Produce Bags project partners included the Seasonal Harvest food hub, We All Rise African American Resource Center, Casa ALBA Melanie Hispanic Resource Center, and Crusaders of Justicia Mobile Pantry.

Background

Since 2014, Wello has operated SNAP and Double Buck programs at Brown County farmers markets. In early 2020, Wello began Cultivating Community Produce Bags in anticipation of disruptions to these programs due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Its initial intent was to support the continuation of farmers markets and to expand access through additional “Double Bucks” that were not SNAP-affiliated.

Wello's flexibility and inventiveness enabled the organization to adapt its program structure and expand its target audience in response to the changing Covid-19 landscape and community food access needs identified by its partners. The program has continued to evolve as a complement to local emergency food outlets and nutrition incentive programs. In the current program model, Wello procures local products from a local food hub that are then distributed to households in food bags through community resource centers and a mobile pantry. These food bags include non-SNAP-affiliated market vouchers that can be used in the local Double Bucks program. This allows recipients, including residents who are ineligible for SNAP due to their immigration status or other factors, to buy additional produce at participating farmers markets.

Funding

In 2020, Cultivating Community Produce Program was funded through a Wisconsin Partnership Program (WPP) Covid Response Grant. The flexibility of this funding was important for catalyzing a food access program responsive to community-identified food access needs. In 2021, Wello received funding for Cultivating Community Produce Bags through US Venture Foundation, Brown County United Way, and internal funds. In 2022, Wello received an Advancing a Healthier Wisconsin (AHW) Community-led System Change Grant to increase the scale of the Cultivating Community Produce Bags

program and finetune its distribution methods. In 2023, the project continues to be funded through the AHW grant. Wello received an additional AHW Seed Grant that enables it to source products from 3-5 established Hmong growers through Seasonal Harvest food hub. This helps build the wholesale market for their produce while increasing the supply of fresh, locally grown products reaching food insecure households. Wello's Director of Strategic Partnerships, Beth Heller, notes that access to flexible funding sources has been key to the success of the program and has allowed the program to grow in ways that respond to and meet communities' specific needs.

Programmatic Sustainability

The Cultivating Community Produce Program has developed trustful relationships with community-based distribution partners and program participants, which have contributed to ongoing feedback and program improvement. As such, Heller is confident that there will be both funding opportunities and community buy-in that allow for programmatic sustainability. For Wello, community buy-in is an essential component of program sustainability. To develop additional community-buy-in for the Cultivating Community Produce Program, Wello plans to pilot EBT terminals at farmers markets hosted at community resource centers.



Distribution

This program serves Brown and Manitowoc Counties through the reach of organizational partners—namely community resource centers and a mobile food pantry—that distribute Wello produce bags to their clients. Wello coordinates the acquisition and distribution of products between the food hub and the various distribution sites, solicits feedback on product offerings, engages in pre-season planning with the food hub, and maintains highly communicative relationships with partner organizations that identify opportunities to address household needs and improve organizational alignment. Rather than establishing its own eligibility requirements for its food bags, Wello defers to its community-facing distribution partners to determine how to best serve their specific audiences. Heller shared her belief that strong, trusting, and communicative partnerships are essential to the program’s success, noting that Wello’s partners have deep knowledge of the communities they serve and know who is in need.

Food bag distribution methods vary across resource centers. In some cases, they are distributed through cohort groups based on topics such as health or rebuilding African American food culture. Others distribute bags to households on call lists on a first come first served basis. The bags are also incorporated into a mobile food pantry. Each year, Wello has expanded the program’s reach through additional partnerships and sites, each operating a distribution model that best suits its structure and audience.

As the Cultivating Community Produce Bags Program has evolved, Wello has experimented with ways to use the program to expand the reach of its market vouchers. Initially, Wello found that market vouchers distributed through produce bags had low rates of redemption. As Heller reflected, “It’s been interesting to see the barriers of EBT market programs. I love farmers market EBT programs, and [Wello’s EBT program] has been increasing exponentially in the last couple years, but it’s not a practical way to get food for many people.” Drawing on qualitative and quantitative data, Wello determined that its SNAP-affiliated Double Bucks program does not reach the full range of local households in need. Specifically, it learned that some residents aren’t comfortable at farmers markets or have transportation or logistical barriers that make it impractical to shop at farmers markets. Additionally, SNAP ineligible populations, such as undocumented residents, are excluded from SNAP-associated farmers market food access programs.



To address these access barriers, in 2022, Wello initiated a round of on-site farmers markets at community resource centers. This innovation was well-received by program participants. Wello anticipates that on-site farmers markets could become an additional component of the Cultivating Community Produce Program distribution in the future. By co-locating participating farmers market stands at sites where the food bags were being distributed, bag recipients could immediately redeem the Cultivating Community Produce Program market vouchers without making a separate trip. This increased voucher redemption rates, results in more sales for local growers, and puts more produce in the hands of food insecure households. Wello hopes that tested innovations like these will lead to increased funding for programs like the Cultivating Communities Produce Program that address barriers to accessing fresh produce both directly and indirectly through tailored distribution channels and through strategic coordination with other market voucher and nutrition incentive programs.

Local Procurement

Produce for Cultivating Community Produce Bags is sourced from Seasonal Harvest, a farmer-led food hub that aggregates produce from approximately twelve farms. As described in the 2021 National Food Hub Survey Report, a food hub “aggregates and distributes regional food

products.” Seasonal Harvest and Wello have developed a strong relationship through previous grant collaborations, and both are committed to compensating farmer suppliers fairly. Procurement plans are established through the development of a pre-season contract between Wello and Seasonal Harvest. Seasonal Harvest prioritizes sourcing from small farms and helps them grow to serve larger wholesale markets, and Wello trusts Seasonal Harvest to set fair prices for the produce.

This communication and trust between partners has also allowed for changes and improvements to delivery systems. For example, in the beginning, the produce was originally delivered to Cultivating Community Produce Program distribution sites by Seasonal Harvest in CSA boxes. Over time, produce packing responsibilities shifted. Now, Seasonal Harvest delivers produce in bulk to participating resources centers where the product is repackaged into bags for clients. This change minimizes on-farm pack time to benefit the farmers.

Identifying opportunities for growers to shift or expand into wholesale markets is another way in which Wello and Seasonal Harvest are creating new and beneficial linkages between area growers and residents. Wholesale distribution can result in significant operational savings for growers, especially if they are receiving fair prices. In fact, Heller noted that some of Wello’s farmer suppliers have stopped selling at farmers markets because of the logistical advantages of selling through intermediated channels like the food hub.

Lastly, through an AHW seed grant, Wello is working with Seasonal Harvest to incorporate established Hmong growers into the Cultivating Community Produce Program and Seasonal Harvest’s wholesale aggregation and distribution system. Heller noted that this dimension of the program is important for building relationships between local farmers and BIPOC communities. At present, the

distribution channels available to many local farmers, including farmers of color, are not those which meet the needs of some communities of color. Wello hopes that having voices from both growers and eaters at the table will enable them to continue to generate win-win solutions to distribution challenges.

Products

Cultivating Community Produce Bags include unprocessed vegetables and fruit, and minimally processed vegetables (e.g., zucchini noodles, sweet potato noodles, cubed squash). The Cultivating Community Produce Program has made changes to their product offerings over time due to partner and participant feedback. For example, bag contents have evolved to include more products that are culturally relevant for participants, such as jicama and mustard greens.

Additional Highlights

While the Cultivating Community Produce Bags Program is relatively new, several of the partnerships at the foundation of the program date back to 2016. As Director of Strategic Partnerships, Heller’s primary role is to invest in relationship building and network development. Heller believed that the Program’s success is possible through the presence of, and Wello’s partnerships with, resource centers and other distribution entities that represent and serve populations of color. “We could not do it without the strength and leadership of all the partners. Our resource centers are bringing that strategic vision and commitment based on the lived experiences of their populations. We’ve got this amazing farm hub. We’ve got Wello that serves as the ... backbone keeping the wheels moving and writing the grants,” said Heller.

¹⁰ Noel Bielaczyc et al. “2021 National Food Hub Survey Report.” 2023. Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems. 2023. <https://www.canr.msu.edu/resources/2021-national-food-hub-survey>.

PARTNER SHARES AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS AT FAIRSHARE CSA COALITION

PRIMARY OPERATOR(S)	FairShare CSA Coalition
CORE PARTNER(S)	Coalition member farms
IN OPERATION SINCE	Partner Shares established 1996, Community Partnerships formalized in 2021
TARGET AUDIENCE	Limited-income households
SERVICE AREA	3-5 midwestern states with the majority of the network in Wisconsin
PRODUCTS	Vegetables, fruits, meats, eggs, maple syrup, legumes, and grains
FUNDING SOURCES	Private donations, public funding, farmer fundraising
IMPACT MEASUREMENT	In 2022, FairShare administered \$62,000 of food assistance. Partner Shares included 35 farms serving 500 households. Community Partnerships supported 8 farms in implementing community-specific initiatives.
DISTRIBUTION CHANNEL(S)	Partner Shares leverages pre-existing CSA distribution channels to serve limited-income households through hundreds of distribution sites across Wisconsin. Community Partnerships supports a variety of locally sourced distribution formats including home delivery, pick-up at a farmers market, incorporation into pantries' offerings, produce cooked for sliding-pay scale meals, and pop-up markets at low-income housing sites.
GROWER REQUIREMENTS/ PROCUREMENT REQUIREMENTS (OR OBJECTIVES)	Growers must be endorsed members of the FairShare CSA Coalition network. To qualify for endorsement, farmers must have Organic certification (or be in transition), operate a CSA, produce the vast majority of products on farm, and demonstrate a high level of customer service.
WEBSITE	https://www.csacoalition.org/community-partnerships

FairShare CSA Coalition (FairShare) is a non-profit organization with the mission “to support and connect farmers and eaters through Community Supported Agriculture (CSA).” CSA is a type of direct-to-consumer sales system “that consists of a community of individuals who pledge support to a farm operation... with the growers and consumers providing mutual support and sharing the risks and benefits of food production” as defined by the USDA.¹¹ FairShare operates two farm to food assistance initiatives: Partner Shares and Community Partnerships. These initiatives source from and are implemented through the non-profit’s network of member farms. The Partner Shares program provides assistance for households to reduce the cost of participating in a CSA box subscription program operated by one of FairShare’s member farms. The Community Partnerships Program financially assists partnerships between community institutions and farms to implement food assistance efforts in their communities.

¹¹ “Community Supported Agriculture | National Agricultural Library.” n.d. <https://www.nal.usda.gov/farms-and-agricultural-production-systems/community-supported-agriculture>.

Background

FairShare has connected low-income households with fresh, local produce since the mid-1990s, first through its Partner Shares initiative, and more recently, through its Community Partnerships Program. While funding spurred by the Covid-19 pandemic catalyzed an era of growth for both initiatives, this period also highlighted the unique niche each initiative fills in relation to distinct segments of local growers, partner organizations, and households.

Partner Shares was launched in 1996 to increase low-income consumers' access to CSA farm membership by reducing financial barriers, such as the high upfront cost structure. In a typical CSA program, a household will pay upwards of \$500 a year for a subscription to regular produce deliveries throughout the growing season. In some cases, these payments are divided between an upfront and a mid-season payment. While the upfront payment is an important source of revenue for many growers during a time of year when input costs (e.g., seeds) are high and farm revenue is typically low, this payment structure can be a major barrier to participation by limited-income households. Partner Shares provides a high-touch, flexible service that works one-on-one with households to create individualized payment plans that allow for variable timelines and payment methods, including the use of SNAP benefits. While the administration of the program is centralized, it otherwise retains the strengths of the community-centered CSA model, especially the direct relationship between specific farms and the households they supply.

In contrast, the Community Partnerships Program facilitates a wider range of distribution channels that move locally-sourced products to limited-income households. Through Community Partnerships, FairShare provides up to \$3,000 of applicant-matched funding to support a variety of community and farmer-led food assistance efforts. Eligible applicants include farmers and "community institutions (e.g., schools, food pantries, community centers)." Most applications involved a partnership between a farm and a community institution that distributes the food. Community Partnerships "initiatives all look really different [from each other], and I think that is important to them being successful because... decisions [are] being made by a trusted community partner," shared program representative Liv Froehlich. Examples include home delivery vegetable distribution to recent immigrant populations, distribution through pantries, and distribution through pop-up farmers market stands at community centers. While FairShare provides matching funding, "the relationship remains between the farmer and an organization, [and the] farmer and community."

Funding

Partner Shares and Community Partnerships are funded by grants and donations secured by FairShare, fundraising by coalition member farms, and (since about 2017) the Dane County annual budget.

FairShare initially pursued an incremental growth strategy for both initiatives because the majority of program funding was historically raised through a single, annual fundraising



event. However, Covid relief funding was catalytic for both initiatives' growth and highlighted the extent of the demand for these programs. As Froehlich explained, "Receiving that CARES Act funding... really did show us that yes, with very little change in our existing infrastructure, we can quite easily and effectively disseminate these funds and there is the demand for it.... We also saw that there was just a huge need that we could fulfill. And so I think now we are feeling an obligation to meet the demand."

Programmatic Sustainability

Despite the demand, funding remains a limitation for both initiatives. In recent years, Partner Shares dispersed all programmatic funding within two weeks of opening the application. Similarly, for Community Partnerships, FairShare has "seen a lot of interest... from new farms that want to start similar initiatives beyond the capacity that we currently have."

To keep up with demand, FairShare anticipated that large grants will be central to the continued success of both initiatives. While the organization has found few grant opportunities that are well-aligned with the direct and operational costs of sustaining these programs, it has had some success in securing public funds to support this programming. For example, the Dane County annual budget funds approximately 50 CSA boxes, which are only available to residents of Dane County. As a regional organization, FairShare would like to secure ongoing funding through municipal and county budgets in other parts of its service area with high numbers of FairShare farms and Partner Shares members. Dane County funding "has been a really good model for consistent and sustained support, which is hard to find in grants and hard to find in other funding avenues."

Distribution

Partner Shares uses the distribution channels of participating CSA farms. This includes options such as on-farm pick up, farmers market pick-up, drop-site delivery, and at-home delivery. By incorporating food assistance options into existing CSA distribution models, Partner Shares leverages the strength of the CSA model—direct-to-consumer distribution of high-quality produce—to increase access to hundreds of existing distribution points across the state, including locations where it is



otherwise difficult to distribute food. Partner Shares uses a sliding scale model to subsidize up to \$350 of a CSA share for households. "While we have suggested income guidelines set at 200% of the [federal poverty level], it is not prescriptive if other circumstances are impacting household need." The fee structure is based on a combination of participant feedback and many years of experimentation with program administration. As Froehlich explained: "I think that has been really important for serving folks that ... have different life circumstances where they might not get federal assistance [but still face economic hardship] ... having flexible sliding scale guidelines for this type of program is really important."

The Community Partnerships Program uses the same income-based guidelines but employs distinct distribution channels to meet the needs and priorities of various "community led and dictated" fresh food assistance efforts. Examples of distribution through Community Partnerships include home delivery, farmers market pick up, produce incorporated into food pantries, produce cooked for sliding-pay scale meals, pop-up markets at low-income housing sites, and others. Froehlich noted that the "Community Partnerships [Program is] also where we were seeing the largest racial and ethnic diversity of program participants. We wanted to prioritize funding for BIPOC applicants, [so] reserving assistance to support Community Partnerships is the first step in doing that."

Local Procurement

Partner Shares supports CSA farms by expanding the range of households that can afford to purchase a CSA share. Meanwhile, Community Partnerships creates alternative distribution channels for direct market growers to reach low-income community members through collaboration with community partners including affordable housing developments and food pantries.

Financial assistance through Partner Shares and Community Partnerships is available to farms that are members of FairShare's endorsed farm network. To be eligible for membership, these farms must be "certified organic (or in transition), sell through CSA, produce the vast majority of their products on farm, and demonstrate a high level of customer service." Individuals and households interested in receiving a subsidized CSA share through Partner Share can do so as a customer of any FairShare endorsed farm.

Products

Any food product produced on a coalition-member farm is eligible for support. This includes vegetables, fruit, meat, eggs, and specialty items such as maple syrup, legumes, and grains.

Additional Highlights

Partner Shares and Community Partnerships support CSA farmers while increasing access for low-income community members to engage in this community-centered local food distribution model. Partner Shares benefits from "an individualized approach that can... center the person within the program." The Community Partnerships model recognizes that "no two households experience food insecurity the same way, and that having flexibility in how food is distributed, how it's picked up, and what produce people have access to is really important." Both initiatives center community needs by providing resources without intervening in community relationships.

Farmers play a leading role in the Partner Shares and Community Partnerships programs, and in some ways, this differentiates these programs from some of the other initiatives highlighted in this report. As Froehlich reflected, "Farms that are really enthusiastic about the Partner Shares program are generally the ones that have the most members and that's because they're communicating about it on social media, on their website and their CSA farm, you know, they're making the opportunity very known within their community."



FARMLINK AT FEEDING AMERICA EASTERN WISCONSIN

PRIMARY OPERATOR	Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin
CORE PARTNERS	Medical College of Wisconsin, partner pantries, farmers
IN OPERATION SINCE	2016
TARGET AUDIENCE	Specific inclusion criteria are determined by each food program partner
SERVICE AREA	35 counties of eastern Wisconsin
PRODUCTS	Fruits and vegetables
FUNDING SOURCES	Foundation grants, general operating funds
IMPACT MEASUREMENT	229,747 lbs of produce distributed in 2022
DISTRIBUTION CHANNEL(S)	Food pantries pick up produce from farms. The produce is incorporated into each pantry's distribution system.
GROWER REQUIREMENTS/ PROCUREMENT REQUIREMENTS (OR OBJECTIVES)	The program currently works with a small number of eastern Wisconsin growers; it specifically aims to source from more BIPOC farmers in future contracts
WEBSITE	https://feedingamericawi.org/our-initiatives/farm-link/

FarmLink is an initiative of Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin, a food bank that serves 35 counties in eastern Wisconsin (roughly half of Wisconsin counties). Through FarmLink, Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin purchases produce from local growers. Program partners within Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin's network of food pantries, shelters, and meal sites pick up produce from local and regional farms. In this way, the initiative moves fresh product directly from farms to pantry shelves by facilitating direct connections between farmers and fresh food assistance providers.

Background

FarmLink was initiated in 2016 through a partnership between Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin and the Medical College of Wisconsin "with the aim to improve the health and well-being of Wisconsin communities" by "increasing access to fresh fruits and vegetables at pantries by building economically viable and socially responsible relationships with local farmers."¹²

The implementation of these goals has evolved significantly since FarmLink was launched. In the beginning, the initiative focused on increasing access to produce and building procurement opportunities with local farmers through an e-commerce platform. Over time, the initiative shifted its focus to facilitating relationship development between Wisconsin farmers and local food assistance providers.

¹² Feeding America - Eastern Wisconsin. 2023. "Farm Link - Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin." Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin. March 8, 2023. <https://feedingamericawi.org/our-initiatives/farm-link/>.

Funding

The program has been funded by grants from Advancing a Healthier Wisconsin as well as general operating funds from Feeding America of Eastern Wisconsin.

Programmatic Sustainability

Now in its seventh year, FarmLink has had time to refine its structure. As a result, there are more farmers and food pantry partners interested in participating in the initiative than Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin has the resources to engage. Despite Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin's commitment to sustaining FarmLink, year-to-year fluctuations in the initiative's budget and costs make it difficult to plan for growth. Kara Black, Procurement and Programs Manager, spoke about the challenges of operating the program without a consistent funding source. "Right now, it's just tricky because I don't have a budget yet, so I don't know how many [farmers] we can increase to [next season]."

Distribution

Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin provides food assistance to nearly half of Wisconsin's 72 counties, and through FarmLink, affiliated food pantries receive produce from farms in their vicinity. As Black recalled, this wasn't

always the case: "Before this year, all the farmers would bring their produce to our warehouses. So, we needed farms that were located close enough to our warehouses that they would be able to do that. And then we would divvy up [produce] to whatever pantry could receive and distribute the produce. But I noticed that [we would] be sitting on produce at our facility longer than we'd like. We [couldn't] get it out the same day or straight off the farm. So that's why we started having pantries just pick up directly from the farm."

In its current iteration, FarmLink "requires the producers to be located within our [35 county] footprint so we can match the grower with network partners within a 5-10-mile radius." Black notes that distribution works in the favor of the farmers. Farmers are supplied with all the packing materials needed for their participation, and the food is picked up on a schedule that accommodates farmers' needs. Once network partners are matched with a farm, they pick up product from the farm on a scheduled weekly or biweekly basis. As Black notes, "It's really cool because our pantry partners will pick up produce off a farm on a Tuesday morning at 6am. And then they have it available at a pantry at 2pm that same day. So, people are getting produce that came off a field that morning. So, they're getting the freshest, best stuff coming from five miles away. So that's the really cool part of that program."

FarmLink does the initial match-making between farms and pantries and then turns product pick-up coordination





over to them. Because participating farms and pantries vary in size, anywhere from three to six pantries will pick up produce from a single farm. While much of FarmLink's product is harvested and distributed locally, due to the connectivity and size of Feeding America of Eastern Wisconsin's network, in some instances, produce is redistributed across the Food bank's larger footprint.

Despite its success, the Program continues to face challenges that impede its ability to fully meet the demand. Limiting factors for pantry participation in FarmLink include insufficient cold storage space for produce, limited volunteer capacity to repackage produce from bulk deliveries, and an insufficient number of drivers to acquire the produce from participating farms on a weekly basis.

Local Procurement

Procurement arrangements between FarmLink and its farmer suppliers are made through contracts. In 2022, five farmers contracted with the FarmLink program. Contracts are negotiated in advance of the growing season and establish (1) the price per pound of produce, (2) how

much acreage each farm will grow for the program, and (3) anticipated yield per acre. Organic and conventional produce are purchased at different prices, but within these categories, all varieties of produce are acquired at the same price per pound.

Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin prioritizes providing upfront funding for farmers and pays farmers half of the agreed contract sum in March. The second half of the sum is paid in December after the season is complete. As Black explains, "that helps the grower have money for upfront costs, you know, have money to buy seeds, have that funding throughout the growing season that we've already paid them ahead of time."

The program is also exploring ways to be more equitable in its approach to farmer supplier selection. Many of its current farmer suppliers became involved with FarmLink through preexisting relationships. As Black explained, "Having the same five growers doing the same acres, it doesn't seem equitable to me." If the program is not able to grow to include new farmers, it may establish a three-year limit for participating farms. This would create

market opportunities for a wider range of farms both through program participation and by fostering direct relationships between more farms and food assistance providers. In 2023, FarmLink specifically encouraged historically disadvantaged farmers to apply for contracts. Black shares, “My goal moving forward is to focus on when we bring in new producers, bringing in BIPOC folks and emerging farmers to hopefully bolster them.”

Products

FarmLink primarily purchases vegetables. In specific instances, it also purchases fruits like melon, apple, and pear. FarmLink’s farmer suppliers have been responsive to requests for culturally relevant foods by specific pantries on behalf of their clientele.

Additional Highlights

FarmLink purchases fresh produce directly from local farms to distribute through its network of food pantries.

The program is designed to support local growers while providing exceptionally fresh produce to food pantry clientele. As Black notes, “The pros of the program [for farmers] are that we pay half the contract upfront, we coordinate all of the transportation, we coordinate all of the repacking supplies, and all the relationships.” Moving forward, FarmLink aims to not only to support local growers, but to create opportunities for historically disadvantaged growers to expand their businesses. “We have a lot of producer training opportunities that we can connect people with. Developing more connections with producers can help me figure out what needs they have and either connect them myself or with DATCP, who can connect them with more resources.” Black realizes that in order to do this work there is a need for relationship building with historically disadvantaged growers as well as additional resources for non-English speakers to access FarmLink. “I really hope to hire another assistant to help facilitate relationships, and hopefully a first speaker of language of the community we reach out to.”





FARM TO FOODBANK INITIATIVE AT SECOND HARVEST FOODBANK OF SOUTHERN WISCONSIN

PRIMARY OPERATOR(S)	Second Harvest Foodbank of Southern Wisconsin
COLLABORATING PARTNER(S)	Dane County, Garden to Be, Feeding Wisconsin, Feeding America, Wisconsin farmers
IN OPERATION SINCE	2020
TARGET AUDIENCE	Inclusion criteria are determined by each pantry partner
PRODUCTS	Produce, eggs, dairy, and meat
FUNDING SOURCES	Public pandemic-relief funding (CARES, ARPA), general operating budget, and directed funds
SERVICE AREA	16 counties of Southern Wisconsin
IMPACT MEASUREMENT	In 2022, the program provided 3.8 million meals with more than \$12 million of local economic impact.
DISTRIBUTION CHANNEL(S)	Second Harvest distributes a majority of local products to food pantries through its existing network operations; there is also some direct farm to food pantry distribution.
GROWER REQUIREMENTS/ PROCUREMENT REQUIREMENTS (OR OBJECTIVES)	The organization created a vendor matrix to align organizational values with procurement.
WEBSITE	https://www.secondharvestsw.org/f2f/

Farm to Foodbank is an initiative of Second Harvest Foodbank of Southern Wisconsin. It aims to purchase produce, eggs, dairy, and other foods, such as small quantities of meats and grains, from local producers at market rate. It then distributes the products to households through its network of food pantries and partners at no cost to the food recipients. Headquartered in Madison, Second Harvest is a member of the Feeding Wisconsin food bank network and serves a 16-county region in southwestern and south-central Wisconsin. While initiated in response to the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic, the initiative has since become an ongoing program of the Foodbank.

Background

Second Harvest's Farm to Foodbank Initiative was catalyzed by federal pandemic relief funding in 2020. Second Harvest received federal and county funding to support local food procurement in response to the increased need for household food assistance and a decrease in markets available to local producers.

Second Harvest was well positioned to meet this intersection of needs and move large quantities of perishable food because of its preexisting warehousing, distribution, and operational infrastructure. As Michelle Orge, President and CEO of Second Harvest Foodbank of Southern Wisconsin recalled, "The [program] logistics were something that had to be figured out at a time when we were already scrambling to do a lot of things," including implementing new health and safety procedures internally, developing no contact distribution systems, and working with new supply chain limitations. Being able to build on existing systems and infrastructure made it possible to launch the initiative relatively quickly.

Funding

During the pandemic, Second Harvest received federal pandemic-related funding through CARES and ARPA. Initially, funding was provided incrementally with opportunities to renew. As Orge explains, "The longer we knew [the funding] would be extended, the more we could figure out how to invest [in the program]. And the longer we did, the more we thought, okay, how can we make... this something we do long term?" As the initiative has transitioned from a pandemic-relief initiative to an integral part of Second Harvest, the Foodbank has identified



additional funding sources. For example, Dane County contributed funding to Farm to Foodbank in its 2023 annual budget. Second Harvest also funds the program through its own operating budget and fundraising efforts.

Programmatic Sustainability

Although Second Harvest is committed to continuing to source and distribute local products through the Farm to Foodbank Initiative, "the size of the program depends on the investment of resources that the community makes," explained Orge. She also noted that to sustain public support for the initiative, "we're going to have to continue to show the relevance of this program, and I think it's really relevant" --largely because of its direct benefits to both Wisconsin growers and food insecure households. Orge noted that a central limitation of the Farm to Foodbank Initiative is limited physical space at the Second Harvest

distribution center: “We need more space... Our building is a barrier to doing what we need to do.”

Distribution

As a food bank of Feeding Wisconsin, Second Harvest distributes to a network of food pantries and partners within its 16-county service region. Each pantry then operates independently to distribute the foods to households. Pantries have different distribution modalities ranging from pre-packed boxes to guest choice models. Participating pantries also have varying eligibility requirements for pantry-goers.

Local Procurement

Second Harvest purchases products directly from a small number of larger farms as well as through the local aggregator Garden to Be. Orge noted that relationship building with local producers is a valuable yet complex piece of the Farm to Foodbank Initiative: “There’s a lot of

identifying where they’re at, finding out what they’ve got. It is building relationships and understanding how they fit in, and then incorporating them in logistics.” As such, Orge underscored that the Foodbank’s partnership with an aggregator is critical to its ability to source from a range of local farms, including smaller operations. Second Harvest is also developing a vendor matrix to help it prioritize vendors based on a variety of organizational values and considerations, including the development of relationships with socially disadvantaged growers.

Products

Although its product offerings have changed over time, at present, the Farm to Foodbank Initiative procures primarily local produce, eggs, and dairy for distribution through its network member pantries. Supplemental funding from the Dane County budget allows Second Harvest to procure additional food types (e.g., meats, dry goods, grains) from producers in Dane County and the surrounding region for distribution through the Second Harvest pantries network of Dane County.

Additional Highlights

Second Harvest is exploring new models of distribution that center community access, while acknowledging that their role is not direct distribution but instead to support their network of pantries. Orge described the indirect role of the food bank in food distribution: “We have a different role to play than [pantries and other food assistance partners], and we should leverage the role that we have in size, structure, infrastructure, resources, and expertise in things like food safety and logistics.” Second Harvest knows that input from pantries and other organizational partners is crucial to the success of the operation. As such, Orge shared that Second Harvest is committed to “listening better” to support the provision of effective and efficient food assistance so the folks who [distribute food] really well, can do it better.”

The scale of Farm to Foodbank’s market rate purchases from local farms is largely unparalleled by comparable food banks across the US. This is because most food banks prioritize efficiency “to maximize our donated dollars, to get the most pounds for the least amount of dollars.” In contrast, the Farm to Foodbank Initiative prioritizes additional factors, such as increasing the availability of fresh product for food pantry clients while also investing in the region it serves by keeping money in the local community by purchasing from Wisconsin growers.





TRIBAL ELDER FOOD BOX PROGRAM

PRIMARY OPERATOR(S)	Great Lakes Intertribal Food Coalition (composed of all 11 federally recognized tribes of Wisconsin), Feeding Wisconsin, Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin, Wisconsin Tribal Conservation Advisory Council, Wisconsin Food Hub Cooperative, DATCP, UW-Madison, and healthTIDE
IN OPERATION SINCE	2021
TARGET AUDIENCE	Tribal elders from the 11 tribes, each tribe sets eligibility criteria with most tribes distributing to elders 55 years and older
SERVICE AREA	Statewide to each tribe, plus one distribution site in Milwaukee
PRODUCTS	Vegetables, fruits, meats, eggs, grains, shelf stable foods (e.g., jam, apple sauce), traditional tribal foods (e.g., wild rice, corn mush, maple syrup, white fish)
FUNDING SOURCES	Foundation grants, public funding
IMPACT MEASUREMENT	In 2022, more than \$1 million paid to Indigenous and local producers, with 24,400 boxes distributed, reaching all 11 federally recognized Tribes in Wisconsin
DISTRIBUTION CHANNELS	To Tribal food distribution sites of the 11 tribes and one urban tribal health center
GROWER REQUIREMENTS/ PROCUREMENT REQUIREMENTS (OR OBJECTIVES)	Prioritizes purchasing from Indigenous farmers, with next priority to other small growers
WEBSITE	https://greatlakesintertribalfood.org/

The Tribal Elder Food Box Program is a highly collaborative program (see all partners in chart above) that distributes locally produced and traditional foods to the elders of the 11 federally recognized Tribes in Wisconsin. At the same time, the Program promotes intertribal food trade and creates market opportunities for Indigenous producers.

Background

Founded in 2021, the Tribal Elder Food Box Program began as a means to improve access to culturally and nutritionally appropriate foods for Tribal elders while supporting Tribes' food economies. As Dan Cornelius, Outreach Program Manager at Great Lakes Indigenous Law Center, shared, "In 2021, the average life expectancy for native populations dropped to 62.5. With preexisting health conditions, COVID hit Native people harder." USDA emergency food shipped to Tribal populations contained large amounts of high-sugar and/or high-sodium processed foods and dairy. These foods did not meet the nutritional needs or priorities of Tribal communities because of the high rates of diabetes, heart disease, and lactose intolerance in these populations. To address this mismatch, Tribal leaders collaborated with the Feeding Wisconsin foodbank system, and with funding from a Feeding America Regional Agri Food Distribution Grant, they launched the Tribal Elder Food Box Program pilot distributing to between three and seven Tribal Nations by the end of the first season.

Since its pilot year, the Tribal Elder Food Box Program has grown substantially. The Program more than doubled its distribution capacity, expanding from a total of 10,800 boxes in 2021 to 24,400 boxes in 2022. This growth has not only extended the Program's reach to all 11 federally recognized Tribes in Wisconsin, it has also expanded market access for Tribal growers and food businesses.

In 2023, spurred by the momentum and collaboration of the Tribal Elder Food Box Program, Program leaders incorporated as a non-profit called the Great Lakes Intertribal Food Coalition. Headquartered at the Menominee Nation Department of Agriculture and Food Systems, the organization's mission is to "heal our communities by strengthening our Indigenous food networks."¹³ The Coalition serves as the oversight body of the Tribal Elder Food Box Program. While the Tribal Elder Food Boxes have become its central programmatic endeavor, the Coalition has also mobilized intertribal collaboration in pursuit of funding for integrated multi-Tribe food systems infrastructure projects and other efforts.

Funding

Between 2021 and 2022, the Program was funded by a combination of public funds (including ARPA funding)



and foundation grants. From the outset, the Tribal Elder Food Box Program invested a portion of these funds in feasibility studies and planning activities for infrastructure and equipment. These early investments in planning and data collection have contributed to quality impact data and reporting.

Programmatic Sustainability

"I will say the biggest challenge to running any program like this is not having stable multi-year funding," shared Steph Dorfman, former Executive Director of Feeding Wisconsin. Like other farm to food assistance programs that were catalyzed in part by pandemic-related funding, the Tribal Elder Food Box Program is pursuing stable, long-term funding. To support programmatic sustainability, Program collaborators have been very intentional about documenting and communicating the Program's return on investment, and they have proactively engaged in advocacy work and educated policymakers about the value and impact of the Program.

The Program pursues programmatic sustainability through state and federal budget allocations. Gary Besaw, Director of the Department of Agriculture and Food Systems Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin, shares that the

¹³ "About Us." 2024. Great Lakes Intertribal Food Coalition. March 27, 2024. <https://greatlakesintertribalfood.org/about-us/>.



Tribal Elder Food Box also works towards programmatic sustainability by rebuilding food sovereignty through increased intertribal food system capacity. As one example, Tribal Elder Food Box Program leaders are exploring ways to transfer the administrative authority associated with federal funding for the USDA's Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) to the Tribes via Public Law No. 93-638, 88 Statute 2203. Also known as "638 Authority," this statute is "a legal tool for Tribal self-determination that gives Tribes the ability to take over control of eligible federal government programs."¹⁴ As Besaw explained, "We know the community... and can serve the community better. We would rather have the ability to feed the clients in our food distribution programs fresh foods bought from Indigenous producers. We want to shorten the food chain, reduce the pollution, and make a more resilient system." Besaw has helped work to familiarize the USDA with 638 Authority.¹⁵ While 638 Authority has been used for services such as Tribal police departments and housing, it has not historically been used by the USDA for food distribution programs. Then, the 2018 Farm Bill created an opportunity for this to change by authorizing pilot programs to bring 638 contracts to the USDA.¹⁶ Wisconsin Tribes were involved in piloting 638 Authority "to distribute the tribally procured food... in the [FDPIR] food packages distributed to their tribal members."¹⁷ Besaw is interested in expanding this authority and would also like to explore the potential for the Tribal Elder Food Box Program to interface with other state or federal programs such as produce prescription programs.

Stable funding would not only advance the food access

goals of the Program, it would also significantly improve the Program's ability to serve as a reliable customer for Tribal producers. As Besaw remarks: "We want farmers to know that funding is sustainable and ongoing, because it is hard for Indigenous farmers to invest in their business growth." Similarly, Cornelius highlights the importance of sustainable funding sources for nurturing burgeoning farm and food systems development in Tribal communities. As he explains, it's important to Indigenous producers that the food they produce is going to the elders in their communities, and they have already begun to grow their operations to supply the Tribal Elder Food Box Program.

Distribution

All elders, 55 or older with Tribal IDs, are eligible to receive a food box. The 55-year age criteria is informed by the life expectancy of Tribal members, which is lower than the average life expectancy for the American population overall. There are no other eligibility criteria. Dorfman notes that these participation criteria really reduce



¹⁴ Richelle Grogg. 2019. "A Primer on 638 Authority: Extending Tribal Self-Determination to Food and Agriculture." Congressional Hunger Center. March 26, 2019. <https://www.hungercenter.org/publications/a-primer-on-638-authority-extending-tribal-self-determination-to-food-and-agriculture/>.

¹⁵ ibid.

¹⁶ ibid.

¹⁷ "FDPIR Self-Determination Demonstration Project | Food and Nutrition Service." n.d. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/fdpi/self-determination>.

stigma while still ensuring that the Program serves a high priority population. As she elaborates, “I think in a lot of food distribution programs, there’s a lot of stigma in participating and showing up to receive food. But there are folks like Tribal councilmen that come to receive that food, and [they] have been great mouthpieces and done outreach... [still] most of the [food recipient] surveys that we receive indicate that these are folks who do experience food insecurity and that this is helping their grocery bill, helping their budget. So we know that the overall impact is addressing food insecurity. It’s just we’re doing so in a way that’s hopefully more dignified.” As Besaw shared, “Socially and culturally, elders are those knowledge keepers, and it’s so important to keep them here. It’s our turn to be modeling that respect and value not just in words but in action.”

With regard to the mechanics of food distribution, the Wisconsin Food Hub Cooperative aggregates and delivers food purchased for the Program to Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin to be repacked into individual boxes. Wisconsin Food Hub Cooperative then delivers prepared boxes to the 12 distribution sites where Tribal elders receive them.

Local Procurement

In addition to facilitating culturally and nutritionally appropriate food access, the Tribal Elder Food Box Program works “to support the economic development of Indigenous and local food producers in the Great Lakes region”¹⁸ and to rebuild an intertribal food system. Specifically, the Program works to expand markets for Indigenous producers, which it prioritizes through its



sourcing practices. Supporting Tribal food producers is a foundational component of the Tribal Elder Food Box Program both because they produce many products that are well aligned with the Program, and because they have faced unique barriers to accessing capital and other resources. As Amy Meinen, Director of healthTIDE, explains, “These Indigenous farmers have not had access to loans historically... there’s been racist policy... they have not had access to capital.” Besaw adds “It’s hard for many Tribal producers because they’re predominantly on trust land. They can’t use their land as collateral in most loans.”

Dorfman notes that sourcing from numerous producers can be challenging when also “trying to get uniform product in each box.” The Program works to maintain product consistency and maximize participation of Indigenous suppliers. In 2022, a total of \$654,811.73—nearly 60% of the Program’s annual procurement funds—went to Indigenous producers.¹⁹ This represented a 23.6% increase from the previous year in funds going to Native producers.²⁰ Meinen notes, “We’re regularly checking in with... the producers and finding out what they need and how much they can produce.”

A 2023 Great Lakes Intertribal Food Coalition report on the Tribal Elder Food Box Program identifies transportation, packaging, and equipment as some of the top challenges that producers are facing in supplying the Program.²¹ Network partners have tried to address some of these issues. For example, in 2022, Feeding Wisconsin launched the Native Producer Capacity and Investment Fund. The fund issued a total of \$42,000 in awards to 8 Indigenous producers who serve as suppliers to the Program. “These awards enabled the purchase of a range of equipment – a canoe to harvest wild rice, a mobile range chicken coop

¹⁸ Great Lakes Intertribal Food Coalition. n.d. “Tribal Elder Food Box Program.” <https://greatlakesintertribalfood.files.wordpress.com/2023/10/2022-tefbp-report-lfpa.pdf> ibid.

¹⁹ ibid.

²⁰ ibid.

²¹ ibid.

to expand poultry production, a potato planter and corn planter easing labor demand for spring planting, two corn washing machines that will enable quicker processing of hominy, instant corn mush, and other corn products, and more.”²² The grant process demonstrated the significant need for additional infrastructure funding for Native farmers. As Meinen shares, there were “over a million dollars of equipment requests... and we only had \$42,000 [to disburse].”

Products

Every Tribal Elder Food Box contains vegetables, fruits, protein (such as meat, fish, and eggs), and shelf stable items (such as white corn, maple syrup, and wild rice). Incorporating traditional Indigenous foods is a foundational element of the program. “There were some issues with the first round of funding where we couldn’t buy non-perishable items like maple syrup and wild rice, which are really key... And those are foods that the Tribal elders wanted so we had to privately fundraise for money to be able to buy those for the [first round of] boxes,” shares Meinen.

To ensure that the boxes are fulfilling the needs and priorities of the intended beneficiaries, the Program seeks feedback from Tribal elders through a year-end survey that informs procurement plans for the following year. In reflecting on survey findings, Meinen shared that the surveys have indicated that Tribal elders “were really

satisfied with the food variety, overall food quality, and... how it’s really helped them with food access and food security issues.”

Additional Highlights

The Tribal Elder Food Box Program is an example of a highly collaborative initiative across a large number of partners and with multiple levels of outcome objectives. Its immediate objective is to provide nutritious and culturally relevant food for Tribal elders. Yet, the Coalition approaches this work very deliberately so as to develop the production capacity and the physical and relational food supply chain infrastructure necessary to reestablish Tribal food sovereignty. Collaborators identified these as key strengths of the Program. As such, partnerships are important for both the day-to-day mechanics of the Tribal Elder Food Box Program and for building capacity over the long term. As Besaw remarks, “I always share that adage that you can give a man a fish or you can teach him to fish. Our ancestors did this [intertribal trade routes] before, now we have new types of tools. We are asking the systems like Feeding America and Wisconsin Food Hub to teach tribes to use these modern tools to sustainably feed higher volumes of people.” Besaw envisions the Great Lake Intertribal Food Coalition “at the size and sophistication [and with] food hubs with enough product” to submit bids for food distribution contracts to schools, casinos, and other institutions.

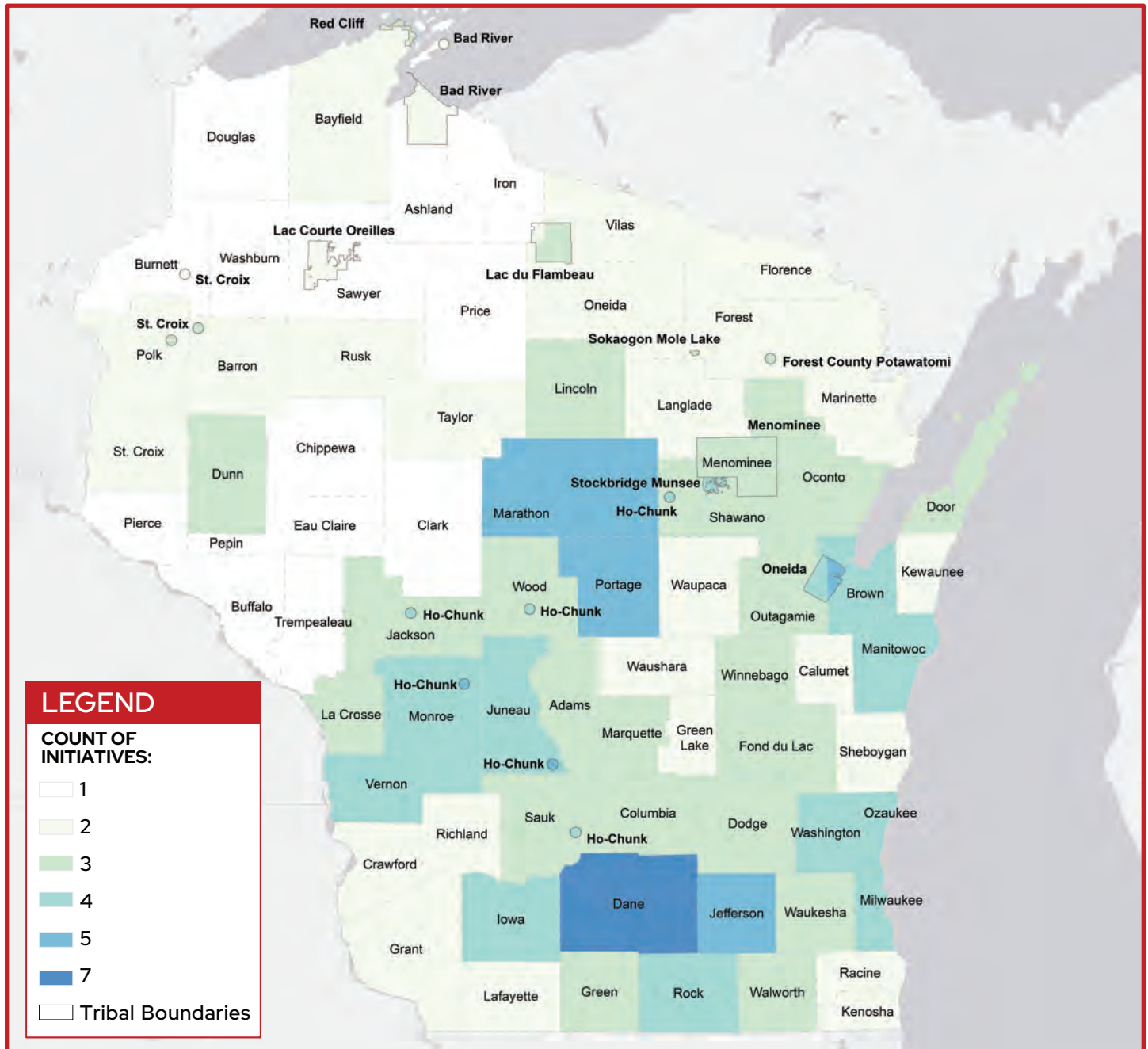


²² “Tribal Food Security · Feeding Wisconsin.” n.d. <https://feedingwi.org/programs/tribalfoodsecurity/>.

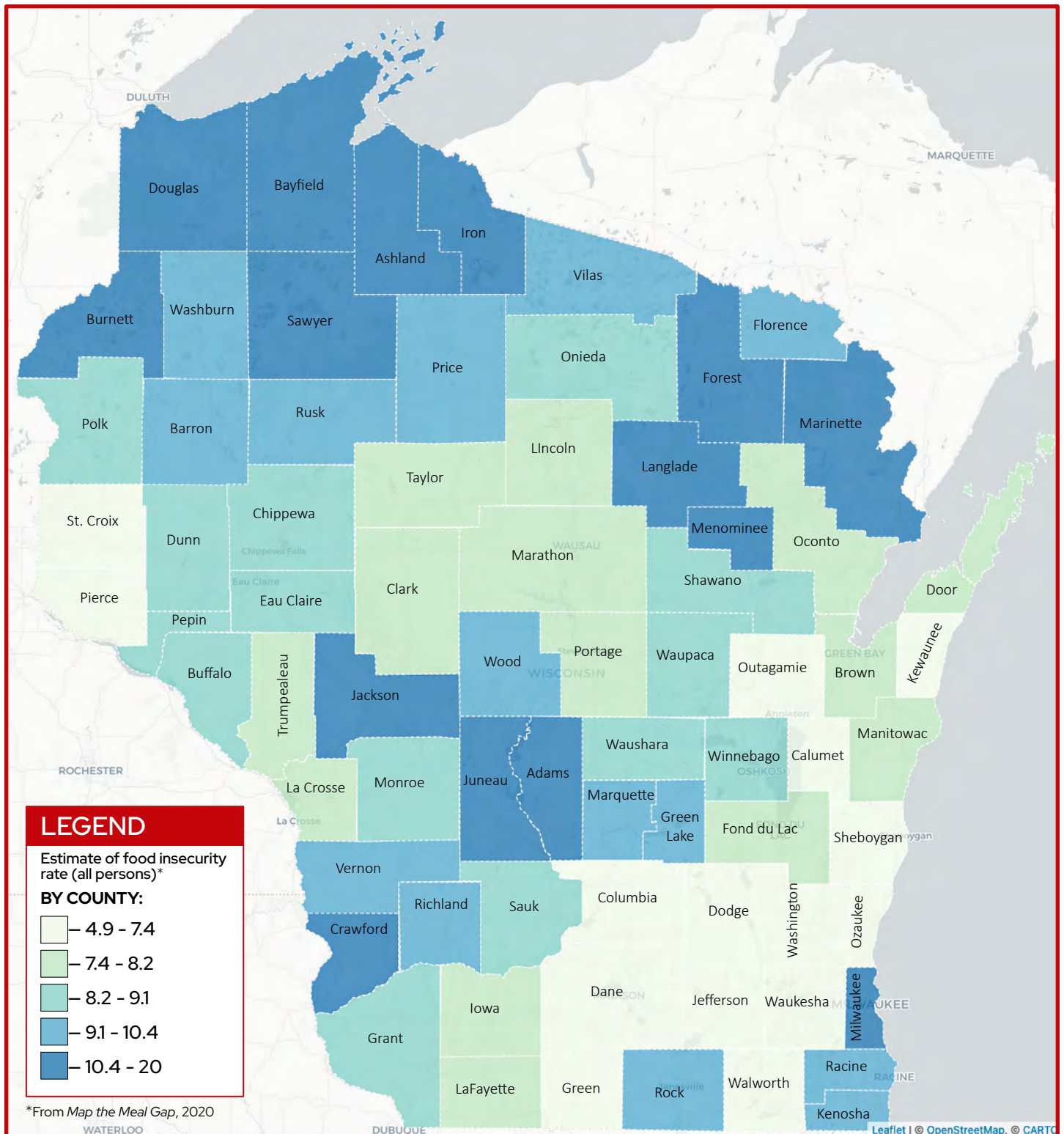
APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: MAPS

NUMBER OF FARM TO FOOD ACCESS INITIATIVES INTERVIEWED PER COUNTY



Native Nations boundaries are taken from U.S. Census data with visual representation influenced by “Tribal Lands Map.” We referenced the “Tribal Lands Map” representation of Native Nations on a state-scale map, which uses circles to represent geographically smaller tribal lands. From this starting point, we adjusted the number and location of the circles so that there is one circle for each instance a geographically smaller Tribal Nation and county share the same geographic area. Circles on the map are placed at the geographically largest area of the Native Nation within each county.



ESTIMATE OF FOOD INSECURITY RATE BY COUNTY

Created by the Wisconsin Food Security Project foodsecurity.wisc.edu

APPENDIX B: MATRIX OF PROGRAMS

Farm to Food Access Program	Lead Organization	Year Started	Region Served	Target Audience / Inclusion Criteria	Funding	Products	Program Impact Measurements in 2022	Website
Farm to Foodbank	Second Harvest of Southern Wisconsin	2020	16 counties	eligibility criteria determined by food program partners	public funding, general operating funds	vegetables, fruits, eggs, dairy, meat	3.8 million meals provided, more than \$12 million of local economic impact	secondharvestsw.org/f2f
FarmLink	Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin	2016	35 counties	eligibility criteria determined by pantry partners	foundation grants, general operating funds	vegetables, fruits	229,747 lb of produce distributed	feedingamericawi.org/our-initiatives/farm-link
Food Security Initiative *not a program, but a specific significant channel of funding	DATCP	2020	statewide	food banks and other eligible non-profit organizations	public funding	-	-	datcp.wi.gov/Pages/News_Media/Covid19FoodSecurityInitiative.aspx
Wisconsin Local Food Purchase Assistance Program (LFPA)	DATCP	2022	statewide	supports socially disadvantaged and historically underserved producers	public funding	vegetables, fruits, meats, minimally processed and value-added foods	n/a, program implementation began in 2023	wilocalfood.org/
Farm to Families Produce Program	United Way Hunger Coalition	2020	Marathon County	low income populations, with efforts to serve marginalized populations specifically	foundation grants, private donations, general operating funds	vegetables in CSA box format	100 CSA boxes a week through the growing season	unitedwaymc.org/marathon-county-hunger-coalition
Cultivating Community Produce Bags	Wello	2020	Brown and Manitowoc Counties	inclusion criteria are defined by the partners distributing food and specific to the community	foundation grants, public funding	vegetables, minimally processed vegetables, fruits	\$26,000 paid to local farmers, 11,000 lb of produce distributed, an additional \$9,000 Farmers Market incentives were distributed to program participants	wello.org
Farmers Feed Dunn County	Stepping Stones of Dunn County	2021	Dunn County	the food insecure	foundation grants, general operating funds, producer food donations	vegetables, fruits	over 40,000 pounds of high-quality locally-grown food, distributed to more than 4,000 food insecure individuals	steppingstonesdc.org/programs
Partner Shares	FairShare CSA Coalition	1996	Wisconsin and the midwest	limited-income households	private donations, public funding, farmer fundraising	Vegetables, fruits, meats, eggs, maple syrup, legumes, and grains	consisted of 35 farms serving 500 households, with FairShare administering \$60,000 of food assistance	csacoalition.org/partner-shares
Community Partnerships	FairShare CSA Coalition	1996	Wisconsin and the midwest	limited-income households	private donations, public funding, farmer fundraising	Vegetables, fruits, meats, eggs, maple syrup, legumes, and grains	supported 8 farms in implementing community-specific initiatives	csacoalition.org/community-partnerships
Community Vegetable Box Program	Rooted	2020	Madison, WI	guided by City of Madison Food Access Map, no metrics asked from partners	foundation grants, private donations	vegetables and fruits	pre-boxed and bulk equivalent of 75 CSA boxes a week through the growing season	n/a
Purpose Grown Project	Rooted, Crossroads Community Farm, Healthy Food For All, Neighborhood House of Madison	2020	Madison, WI	distribution determined by community partners	farmer fundraising, public funding	vegetables, fruits	100 CSA box equivalents each week through the growing season	crossroadscommunityfarm.com/food-access-work/
Tribal Elder Food Box	Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, Forest County Potawatomi, Ho-Chunk Nation, Lac Courte Oreilles, Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin, Oneida Nation, Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, Stockbridge-Munsee Community Band of Mohican Indians, Great Lakes Intertribal Food Coalition, Feeding Wisconsin, Feeding America Eastern Wisconsin, Wisconsin Tribal Conservation Advisory Council, Wisconsin Food Hub Cooperative, DATCP, UW-Madison, and healthTIDE	2021	statewide, to members of the 11 tribes	Tribal elders from the 11 tribes, each tribe sets eligibility criteria with most tribes distributing to elders 55 years and older	foundation grants, public funding	Vegetables, fruits, meats, eggs, grains, shelf stable foods (e.g., jam, apple sauce), traditional tribal foods (e.g., wild rice, corn mush, maple syrup, white fish)	more than \$1 million paid to Indigenous and local producers, with 24,400 boxes distributed, reaching all 11 federally recognized Tribes in Wisconsin	greatlakesintertribalfood.org/
Farms to Families Resilience Box	REAP, Roots for Change	2020	Madison, WI	Roots for Change Clients, WIC eligibility	foundation grants, private donations	vegetables, beans, tortillas, honey, bread, salsa, eggs, Mexican-style cheese	in 2020: 35-50 families receiving food weekly, delivered 6,000 boxes to Latino and Indigenous families, supported 53 local farmers, invested \$142,283 into local produce purchases	reapfoodgroup.org/farms-to-families-2/

This is not an exhaustive list; not all identified Farm to Food Assistance initiatives chose to be represented in the chart or interviewed for the report.

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDES

Round 1 – Landscape Assessment Interviews

The 2 goals of this conversation are (1) to document core elements of the farm to food assistance landscape and (2) to identify other potential projects and contacts.

After this phase of the project, we will select a handful of cases for follow up interviews that will allow us to dive deeper into specific project attributes, systems, and/or outcomes and move toward recommendations.

QUESTIONS

1. I was referred to you by <ABC> because of your knowledge of <XYZ> program(s). [If more than one] Let's start with <insert X>.
2. What's the nature of your involvement with X?
3. Who is the organizational lead on the project?

[If key informant is the organizational lead or closely involved with the project, advance to Qs 5-13. If not, advance to Qs 3a-4b, then skip to Q13]
 - a. If key informant is not the project lead or closely involved, would they be willing to make an email introduction to the primary contact?
4. Based on what you know of the program, is there anything about it that particularly stands out about it?
 - a. What do you see as the program's strengths?

Examples for probing: culturally relevant products, partners with small producers, partners with local/WI-based distributors, pays fair prices, served historically underserved pop or region, gets favorable reviews from participating households, etc.
 - b. What do you see as the program's weaknesses?

Internal note: Reflections on weaknesses may help us weed out programs for Phase 2.

Examples for probing: Poor quality product, inefficient/inconvenient delivery system, prohibitively expensive to operate, sources little WI-grown product, poor range of products, poor use of funds, lack of transparency, low-levels of engagement in local/WI-based partners.
5. How many years has the program been in operation?
6. What is the program's main sources of funding?
 - a. If pandemic relief funding is the sole or primary source of funding, are there plans to continue the program in the future?
7. What is the region served by the program?
8. Who is the target audience? (e.g., seniors, Tribal members, children)
 - a. And what are the inclusion criteria? (e.g., SNAP eligibility)
9. What range of products does the program offer?
 - a. Roughly what percentage of these products are sourced from WI growers?
10. Who are the key organizational partners of the program (e.g., suppliers, distributors, food pantries/ food banks, haulers, Tribal agencies, state/local agencies, churches, etc.)
11. Does the program (a) pay for product, (b) source gleaned ag surplus product, (c) receive other donated product or (d) a combination?
 - a. Who makes decisions about what products will be included in the program?
 - b. If product is paid for, how are prices set?
 - c. Do suppliers grow on contract?

- d. If product is gleaned, who retrieves and cleans it?
 - e. Who moves the product to the final distribution sites?
 - i. How are they compensated for hauling the product? (If in house, answer may be NO)
 - ii. Do they own or lease the distribution vehicles?
 - f. Is there anything else I should know about how the product is acquired?
12. In your perspective, what are some of the program's strengths?
 - a. In what ways could it improve?
 13. What would you like to learn from other farm to food access programs around the State?
 14. Are you aware of other farm to food access programs that are in operation in Wisconsin?
 - a. If so, what are they called?
 - b. What region do they serve?
 - c. Who is the organizational lead for the project?
 - d. Who would you recommend contacting for more information about the project?
 - e. Do you know them personally? If so, would it be possible to make an email introduction for me to reach out to them?

Round 2 – Case Study Interviews

The purpose of the second round of interviews is to highlight 4 cases that exemplify distinct approaches to farm-to-food access initiatives from various regions across Wisconsin.

Interview questions will focus on the following objectives:

1. Refining our understanding of the mechanics and impact of select programs.
2. Fine-tuning the themes that characterize farm-to-food access initiatives (based on findings from the first round of interviews); and
3. Soliciting feedback from participants on opportunities for program and network improvement.

QUESTIONS

PROGRAM MECHANICS & IMPACT

1. Interview 1 Follow-Up (Approximately 5-10 minutes per interview)

CH will ask clarifying questions specific to each case study concerning the fundamental components of the program not gathered or fully understood through the primary interview(s), e.g., How is the food delivered from the farms to households in need?

2. Who are your primary stakeholders?
 - a. How do you know if you're meeting their (a) needs and (b) priorities?
3. How do you measure your impact?

Sample probes:

- How many pounds of local food were purchased annually?
- How many clients received food through this program?
- How much money was spent on the food items purchased through local procurement?
- How much did WI farmers receive through this program?
- How did your 2020–2022 (pandemic era) metrics compare to previous years?
- What, if any, other indicators/metrics did you track?
- [If tracking did not occur or was difficult] What made it difficult to track impact data? What would have made it easier?

FARM-TO-FOOD ACCESS THEMES

The purpose of the next several questions is to share themes that emerged from the first round of interviews and to gauge their accuracy and relevance. After stating and summarizing each theme, I will ask you whether it's something you have experienced or observed and whether you have any examples that illustrate or challenge the theme.

Sample probes for the following set of summary theme statements:

- Can you speak more to how that played out?
- Can you provide an example / counter-example?
- What would make this statement more accurate or meaningful?

THEME 1: COVID-RELATED CATALYTIC FUNDING

In some cases, pandemic-related funding was catalytic for farm-to-food access initiatives. Was this something you experienced or observed?

THEME 2: DISRUPTIONS OF PREEXISTING NETWORK RELATIONSHIPS

While pandemic-related funding could be catalytic, some stakeholders also saw this influx of funding as disruptive to preexisting relationships. Was this something you experienced or observed?

THEME 3: PROGRAM SUSTAINABILITY CONCERNS

Most interviewees have expressed concerns about program sustainability and acknowledged that ongoing fundraising is necessary to sustain farm-to-food access programs. Concerns about program sustainability have tended to be more acute for smaller initiatives. Is this something you experienced or observed?

THEME 4: TRUSTING NETWORK RELATIONSHIPS ARE CRITICAL TO PROGRAM SUCCESS

Relationship building between producers/farmers and food access programs appeared to be critical to the success of the programs we have looked at. What have been the key ingredients in successful relationships you have had with your suppliers or other partners? Are there partners you wish you had who aren't yet at the table?

THEME 5: BARRIERS TO ACCESS INHIBIT NETWORK DIVERSIFICATION

Some interviewees observed that a tendency to privilege existing relationships (with suppliers and other partners) resulted in missed opportunities for less established potential stakeholders. In other words, "Who wasn't already at the table, wasn't invited." Is this something you experienced or observed?

THEME 6: BALANCING VOLUME WITH DIGNIFIED FOOD ACCESS

Relevant and dignified food distribution was a goal across many of the food access programs we spoke with. Within this goal, more localized programs and/or programs with more specific target audiences were able to be more tailored in meeting specific communities' exact needs. <For example...?> In contrast, larger programs seemed to be more effective in moving large quantities of food, and consequently serving a larger number of people. Was this something you experienced or observed?

THEME 7: NEED FOR MORE STORAGE INFRASTRUCTURE

Farm-to-food access initiatives ranging in scope and scale noted that increased storage infrastructure would benefit their program. Was this something you experienced or observed? Can you provide an example of the types of storage or distribution infrastructure that would benefit your program?

Are there any major issues or themes from your program experience that I haven't already captured?

PROGRAM AND SYSTEM IMPROVEMENT

1. All of the programs we selected for case studies are strong examples of farm-to-food access programs. In our previous interview, you described some of your program's strengths, such as <insert a few examples>... What could make your program even better?
2. Please describe 1-2 major challenges your program has faced.
 - a. What lessons have you learned as a result?
3. Which of your program's innovations or successes could be transferable to other farm-to-food access initiatives?
 - a. What advice would you give to a new farm-to-food access initiative just getting started?
 - b. What do you wish you would have known five years ago that would have made this program successful from the start?
4. What would it take to successfully expand or replicate your program?
 - a. Beyond funding and staff—what physical infrastructure, technology, information, training, policy changes, and/or relationships would be necessary?
5. Funding and infrastructure (physical and relational) often come up as barriers to program sustainability or improvement.
 - a. Can you think of ways funders could invest in types of shared infrastructure or system-level improvements that could make a difference for farm-to-food access programs across Wisconsin?
 - b. With regard to network development, what would make it easier for your program to connect with or source from more WI farmers/suppliers?
6. Is there anything else you would like to share?



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