Conversations across the Food System

A Report on Food, Agriculture and the People of Southeast Oregon

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Southeast Oregon Regional Food Bank

In cooperation with Oregon Food Bank and Resource Assistance for Rural Environments
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The United States is one of the wealthiest countries in the world, yet accessing enough healthy, fresh food to meet basic nutritional needs is a critical issue faced by millions of Americans. There are a number of reasons for food insecurity in the United States, the primary causes being lack of employment opportunities, low wages and increases in the cost of living, energy and health care. But to truly understand food insecurity, one must recognize the vital role the structure of food system plays. Over the last 50 years our food system has become increasingly global in its extent; leading to the industrialization and consolidation of agriculture and the decline of small, embedded local farms, ranches and food systems. This leaves Americans vulnerable to forces beyond their control. The loss of vibrant, local food systems and the day-to-day reality of people’s inability to afford food have a significant impact on food security throughout the country.

Southeast Oregon faces many unique challenges. Harney and Malheur Counties are the two largest counties in the state; dominated by a harsh and varying climate, isolated mountains and communities, great distances and few people. The region struggles with some of the highest poverty rates in the state of Oregon, with both children and elderly being particularly vulnerable groups. Outside of the population centers of the Burns-Hines area in Harney County and Nyssa, Ontario and Vale in Malheur County, most people live far from grocery stores or food pantries. This isolation and the lack of a local food system infrastructure paired with the persistent poverty and unemployment that plague the region have made food insecurity a critical issue faced by many people throughout southeast Oregon.
Community Food Security

Few people know where their food comes from, the conditions under which it is grown and raised or how it gets to the supermarket shelves. While the disconnect between producers and consumers continues to grow, many people across the country are working towards creative, localized solutions to the current problems with our food system. This community food security movement is working towards building strong and resilient food systems through innovative and diverse community partnerships.

Community food security is defined as a “condition in which all community members obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance and social justice” (Pothukuchi et al., 2002). A food system can be broadly described as all of the processes involved with feeding people. It includes growing, harvesting, processing, distributing, accessing, consuming and disposing of food. These processes, in addition to the social and cultural characteristics of a community and relevant government policies, define a food system.

Food security exists when all people have physical, social and economic access at all times to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life via non-emergency sources. It also means that food is produced, processed and distributed in ways that respect and protect the environment and workers who produce it.

Community Food Assessment

To overcome the narrow scope of conventional food security work, the Community Food Assessment (CFA) has emerged as a research method to provide a more holistic and comprehensive approach to understanding and improving food security at a local or regional level. A Community Food Assessment is defined as “a collaborative and participatory process that systematically examines a broad range of community food
issues and assets, so as to inform change actions to make the community more food secure” (Pothukuchi et al. 2002).

A CFA tells the story of what is happening with food in a community using varied and diverse methods. It is a powerful tool to explore a range of food system issues, to provide opportunities for broad community involvement and to create positive, lasting change. A CFA can help highlight the connections between the various sectors of a food system including production, processing, distribution, storage, consumption and disposal.

*Conversations across the Food System* begins to tell the story of the journey food takes from seed to plate in the region. It is not just identifying what we eat; understanding how we grow, raise, process, distribute, access and recycle food is also important. This research intends to help us to better understand the current food system in Harney and Malheur Counties by identifying the existing strengths, weaknesses and future needs. This report will be used to bring together diverse stakeholders from throughout the region to initiate a dialogue around food-related issues and to begin work on developing potential solutions for a more food secure region.
CHAPTER 2
Conversations across the Food System

From October 2008 to July 2009 interviews were conducted with targeted individuals throughout southeast Oregon and several communities in southwest Idaho. Additionally, six focus groups were conducted in Malheur County in the communities of Jordan Valley, Nyssa, Ontario and Vale. The information gathered from these interviews and focus groups is organized and analyzed in this section, revealing many strengths and weaknesses in the regional food system.

This research was designed to gather unique perspectives and insights from individuals across the food system. Our goal was to answer the question, “is food available, accessible and affordable?” The solutions offered in this report are built upon themes that emerged from that process.

Introduction

Southeast Oregon is deeply rooted in its agricultural history. Many of the first white settlers to the region were ranchers. Over the years agriculture continued to grow in importance and today it is the second largest employment sector in both Harney and Malheur Counties. Yet despite this rich history, many producers throughout the region struggle to be profitable as they are vulnerable to policies and global market forces beyond their control. Furthermore, poverty, unemployment and food insecurity continue to plague the region.

While these issues are a critical piece of this report, it is also important to highlight success stories and to focus on the existing assets and strengths. In advocating for the rebuilding of the local food system it is important to examine the existing food system. Many critical infrastructure pieces already exist in the region and it is important to build...
upon these. Using these assets and strengths to maintain momentum can help create a food system that benefits and respects all people and parts of the system.

Producers Speak Up

“Without our agricultural economy we would be nothing.”
Dan Joyce, Malheur County Judge

Farming and ranching are fundamentally important to the economic, social and cultural fabric of southeast Oregon. Several targeted interviews and numerous informal conversations were had with gardeners, farmers and ranchers. The size of the gardens, farms and ranches ranged from thousands of acres to small, backyard gardens.

The majority of ranchers interviewed identified the lack of local USDA-inspected processing facilities as a critical problem. Most ranchers in the region ship their cattle to processing plants in Prineville, Oregon or Nampa, Idaho. To a lesser degree, cattle from Harney and Malheur Counties are shipped to Painted Hills Natural Beef in Fossil, Oregon or Strawberry Mountain Natural Beef in John Day, Oregon. All of these facilities are far from the ranch, affecting both the cost of production and quality of the product.

On the other hand, farmers in Malheur County have good access to processors and storage facilities. Yet farmers that grow commodity crops are vulnerable to the unpredictability of the commodity markets. The owner of an onion packing shed shared his perspective on the last decade of onion farming in the region saying there has been “over production for the last ten years; three out of ten years were disastrous and two years were good.” An onion grower voiced his concern that the current system is not working, as some years the cost of production is higher than the price paid for the crop. He voiced his frustration of being at the mercy of the market, yet admitted he does not know what an alternative would look like.

While many of the crops grown in the region are commodities, there are numerous farmers

“We cut out the middle man and enjoy dealing with the public.”
Local small-scale farmer
that grow specialty crops, oftentimes on a smaller scale. Some of these growers sell directly to consumers, restaurants and grocery stores. Small-scale growers have also set up farm stands and signs in front of their homes advertising fruit, vegetables and eggs for sale. These direct-marketing ventures have proved successful for many growers. Several of them explained direct sales require more work, but described it as more enjoyable and profitable, and beneficial to have direct control of their product and price. Interestingly, three of the small-scale producers interviewed were hesitant to share too much information because they are worried about competition and want to protect their niche.

**Retailers Reach Out**

Southeast Oregon has several independent grocers that feature local products, primarily seasonal fruit and vegetables. Although this is promising, many consumers interviewed still shop at the large chain supermarkets because of lower prices.

“Local growers are independent businesses and I feel their pain and glory. Out of respect of what they’re doing, I do the same.”

Logan Hamilton, independent grocery store owner

It is much more difficult, and oftentimes impossible, for local growers to sell their products to the chain supermarkets. Even the independent grocers have issues with featuring locally grown and produced products. Interviews with grocery store owners and produce managers revealed the biggest barriers to featuring local products are quantity, quality, consistency and safety.

Building relationships with local grower leaves grocers much more vulnerable to inconsistencies than depending on the industrial food system. Barring a major catastrophe, an order placed with a wholesaler assures the delivery time and date. Small, local growers can have a bad year or lose their entire crop in one day, yet wholesalers can assure a crop because they have contracts with hundreds, if not thousands, of growers throughout the country and world.
While retailers acknowledge that quality in the form of freshness, taste and nutritional value can be superior from small, local growers, consumers may not agree. Ultimately, grocers must carry products that consumers will buy. Many consumers believe that appearance is representative of quality and taste. Local fruit and produce is not as uniform as the produce that comes from the industrial food system.

With the increase in food borne contaminations nationally and globally, there has been a heightened public awareness concerning food safety. The Food Safety Enhancement Act of 2009, recently passed in the U.S. House of Representatives, attempts to address safety issues in our food system, but it may be detrimental to small farms and local food systems. These contaminations have originated in the industrial food system, yet in the rush to assure food safety this legislation has the potential to undermine small farmers and local food systems. These issues have not originated with small processors or direct market growers, yet this is a serious issue that retailers confront when buying directly from local growers.

**The Consumer and Those At-Risk**

“"It used to be that around here there was work. If you didn’t have a job in the summer, you didn’t want one. Now, even if you’re out looking for a job, and you go to the sheds, you’re in a line with 50 other people, just waiting."

Nyssa Food Pantry focus group participant

In every community visited, people talked about the lack of jobs and the lack of living wage jobs as the most serious issue they face. There was also much discussion about the historical importance of employment in the agricultural sector and the unfortunate decline in those opportunities over time. As one resident put it, “We used to go out there and weed onions for 10 hours a day. Now you don’t see it. Now you see tractors going back and forth, spraying, killing the weeds.”
Many of the jobs held by focus group participants are in service industries and do not pay a livable wage. This leaves many families facing the tough decision of what bill will go unpaid each month or what need will have to go unfulfilled. Focus group participants were forthcoming with stories about frequent sacrifice. Health care insurance, prescription drugs and food are items that are consistently sacrificed by people throughout the region.

“We live within our means; we just get by. We’ve had to cut back in the last year and really budget.”

Gleaners focus group participant

Going without food is a serious issue many people throughout the region face. In the rural communities many people plan bi-monthly or monthly trips into the larger population centers to do their grocery shopping because they do not have access to food in their town or the food that is available is very expensive. One such town is Jordan Valley. It does not have a grocery store and the only choices are a convenience store or small store that primarily carries staples and accepts only cash or check. A surprising fact uncovered was that many people living in towns with grocery stores drive to other communities to buy their groceries because of the cheaper prices. Many people in Nyssa and Vale drive into Ontario and people throughout the region drive to Caldwell, Nampa or Boise, Idaho to save money. Even more surprising, was the drive the owners of a small store in Fields, Oregon make every month to buy supplies in Bend, Oregon, a 468 mile round-trip.

We’re not considered rural, we’re considered isolated. The western part of the state, they don’t want to claim us. Idaho don’t want to claim us. So we’re on our own. And it’s been that way ever since I’ve been here.”

Jordan Valley Food Pantry focus group participant

Isolation is a way of life for many people in southeast Oregon. What is most concerning about this isolation is most of these communities currently do not have the capacity to grow their own food nor do they have a grocery store. By definition, each of these communities are food insecure, making the people that live in them food

“We’re retired. We wouldn’t make it if we had to have jobs here.”

Jordan Valley Food Pantry focus group participant
insecure. While many rural families are more prepared than people in urban areas, they are also much more vulnerable to forces beyond their control such as a rise in gas prices or a natural disaster like a winter storm that makes roads impassable for a long period of time.

Many of the people that shared their stories talked about the importance of growing their own food. While not all of them have gardens, gardening was identified as an important piece of individual food security. The reasons given for not gardening include the lack of gardening knowledge, lack of resources, high cost of city water, health issues, lack of space or landlords not allowing gardens.

**Advocates’ Insights**

“It’s been bad here for a long, long time. This is not an economically vibrant place and so people get defeated, they get used to it and they get into the mentality that this is the way it always is and it’s always going to be. They get caught in that cycle.”  
Pastor Frank Moloney, First Christian Church

The lack of employment was echoed by advocates as the main cause of food insecurity in southeast Oregon. Advocates had many stories to share about people sacrificing health care, rent, utilities and food on a monthly basis because they either do not have jobs or the jobs they have do not pay a livable wage. The type of employment in the region is limited and there are few opportunities for people in all sectors of the economy.

“Those that have a higher education are not coming back because there is nothing to come back for.”  
Angie Uptmor, Malheur County Commission on Children and Families

The social service and hunger advocates interviewed all stressed the importance of emergency food supplies. Many echoed the sentiment that most people that access emergency food are in an emergency situation, meaning their income does not cover all their living expenses and needs in a month. Many people face the reality of choosing to forego essentials or not pay bills each month. The food bank and food pantries ensure
people will not go without food for the month. Emergency food also frees up money so low income families can pay their bills. And while there were stories of abuse of the system, by and large they were identified as exceptions, not the rule.

The lack of awareness, knowledge and interest in local food was another issue highlighted in interviews with social service and hunger advocates. Many people do not know where their food comes from or understand the opportunities and advantages of a more localized food system. Not consciously thinking about food issues and not understanding the connections between individual and community food security is the norm, not the exception, in southeast Oregon.

The lack of interest in local food may be tied to the lack of opportunities to access local food. Except for a few farm stands and emerging farmers’ markets, access to fresh food is primarily in grocery stores. Of the farm stands in the region, many of them are in Idaho. The most widely known and accessed farm stand is eight miles from the closest Oregon community and not on a public transportation route.

The disconnect that exists between food system sectors was another issue raised and confirmed by interviews with people across the food spectrum. There is a lack of communication between different sectors. Many people within the agricultural community and food economy do not approach or view the food system as an interconnected system. If we are to increase opportunities in agriculture and create a more food secure region, farmers, rancher, processors, distributors, retailers, advocates and consumers need to communicate with each other and work together around these issues.

“I come across a constant struggle of not making enough money to meet the bottom line.”
Pastor Frank Moloney, First Christian Church
Food System Assets

There is a strong agricultural economy in southeast Oregon. Many natural and human forces converge to make this region important. These regional assets and strengths provide the foundation and opportunities to increase food security throughout the region.

The climate in Malheur County is favorable for growing fruits and vegetables. The hot, dry summers provide excellent conditions for growing a great variety of crops including cherries, peaches, onions, melons, corn, tomatoes and numerous others. Additionally, the damming of the Owyhee River created an extensive irrigation system that made the region an important vegetable growing region. This enormous public investment makes 118,000 acres of Malheur County and neighboring Idaho highly productive farm land (U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, 2009).

In general, Harney County has a harsher climate and lesser access to irrigation than Malheur County, although the Drewsey and Diamond Valleys are two areas in the county that have favorable conditions for growing fruits and vegetables. There is also geothermal activity that creates microclimates well suited for vegetable and fruit production. A Harney County Farmers’ Market vendor has one such operation, growing over five acres of fruit and vegetable on ground that is heated by underground geothermal activity. At one time there was a large tomato greenhouse operation that was powered by geothermal energy near Crane, Oregon that couldn’t keep up with local demand for fresh vegetables. Several years ago it was bought out by an Idaho businessman that tore out the greenhouse structures and moved them to Parma, Idaho (Figure 5.1).

Processing is a strong sector of the agricultural economy. There are many large vegetable processors in the region including Chiquita, Seneca and Ore-Ida/Heinz. One of the less visible assets in the processing sector is HomeGrown Poultry, a small poultry and rabbit processing plant in New Plymouth, Idaho. Few people know of its existence, yet this fall it will become a USDA inspected facility, opening up a market for producers in Oregon.
as well as Idaho. The real value in this asset is that it does not exclude small scale producers; HomeGrown Poultry will process as few as one bird or rabbit at a time.

![Image of geothermal-powered greenhouses near Crane, Oregon]

**FIGURE 5.1** What remains of once successful geothermal-powered greenhouses near Crane, Oregon. (Photo: Katie Weaver, 2009)

In recent years several farmers’ markets have been sprung up in southeast Oregon. Farmers’ markets play an important role in the local food system because they provide opportunities to backyard gardeners, small-scale farmers and entrepreneurial ventures. They are an outlet for producers to connect with consumers, see greater income and increase awareness in the community around local food and food security. They can also be an economic development tool, bringing in consumers that oftentimes also shop at local businesses. By selling products directly to the consumer, producers set their own price and retain most or all of the profit. Additionally, farmers’ markets are creating more access to fresh fruit, vegetables, meats and value-added products in a region that is greatly underserved by such outlets.
Community gardens are another recent addition to the local food system. There has been an increased interest in community gardening and several communities now have or are in the process of planning community gardens. Ontario’s garden is a communally run garden with the goal of increasing food security in the region (Figure 5.2). It provides opportunities to share gardening knowledge and resources and to educate those interested in learning skills for home gardening. Half of the garden’s harvest goes to local agencies that supply emergency food to the community, increasing the amount of fresh, healthy, local food available in area food banks and pantries. This effort, and others like it, is important in providing an environment where people who are unable to garden at home or uncertain on how to begin gardening can learn the skills to become more self-sufficient.

![Four Rivers Community Garden](image)

**FIGURE 5.2** Four Rivers Community Garden in Ontario, Oregon.

(Photo: Katie Weaver, 2009)

Another innovative community-based project that is being discussed in Vale is a geothermal-powered community kitchen. Several people interviewed in the last ten months expressed interest in processing and value-added ventures, but lacked access to a commercial kitchen. If this project were to get off the ground, it could provide many new
entrepreneurial opportunities for people throughout the region. As demand for local products increases, this project and other community-based projects will play an important role in increasing food security throughout the region.

**Opportunities in the Food System**

The opportunities outlined in this report are issued with the hope that they will generate a dialogue about the future of food and agriculture in southeast Oregon. The most significant issue that was revealed by the Community Food Assessment was the need for increased public awareness and dialogue around food and agriculture-related issues.

**Create a multi-stakeholder coalition that addresses individual and community food security and the needs of the agricultural community.**

1. Review and prioritize the recommendations of the Community Food Assessment.
2. Identify additional assessment needs.
3. Identify and engage community partners (e.g. producers, non-profit organizations, public agencies, business community, agricultural community) to implement specific recommendations or projects.

**Increase public awareness and education of food and agriculture-related issues and opportunities.**

1. Identify existing efforts and build collaborative relationships.
2. Develop a marketing campaign that highlights local success stories; encourage retailers to highlight local producers and products.
3. Develop and distribute a local food guide.

**Create connections that build a food system that is supported by and benefits local producers, processors, retailers and consumers.**

1. Inventory producers and retail establishments; identify those interested in selling food locally or featuring locally produced foods.
2. Inventory greenhouses.
3. Assist in the creation of direct relationships between producers and retailers (e.g. Farm to Restaurant Collaborative, individual introductions).

4. Encourage institutions (e.g. schools, hospitals, SRCI) to source food locally.

**Increase and maintain access to a stable food supply in underserved areas, particularly in Harney County.**

1. Identify potential food pantry hosts and establish food pantries in communities not currently served.

2. Develop and distribute outreach materials to food insecure populations about food assistance programs.


4. Develop and distribute a “how-to guide” for businesses interested in becoming food stamp retailers.

**Increase access to healthy, fresh, locally-grown food throughout the region, particularly in rural communities and food insecure populations.**

1. Promote participation in programs that address nutrition and self-reliance.

2. Establish WIC voucher, senior voucher and food stamp access at all area farmers’ markets and farm stands.

3. Increase the amount of fresh food in emergency food programs.

**Support existing community-based food projects and encourage the development of new projects.**

1. Promote the creation of community gardens.

2. Promote the creation of farmers’ market and farm direct sales.

3. Promote the creation of community processing kitchens.

4. Provide support for producers and entrepreneurs in value-added ventures.
CHAPTER 3
The People of Southeast Oregon

Demographics

The population of the state of Oregon was 3,747,455 in 2007. Much of that population is centered in the western half of the state, along the Cascades and in the Willamette Valley (MAP 3.1). At that time the median age of Oregonians was 39. Harney County was the ranked 33rd in population out of Oregon’s thirty-six counties. It had a population of 6,767 and median age of 45. Malheur County was ranked 28th in population statewide. In eastern Oregon it is the second most populous county, after Umatilla County. It had a population of 31,135 and a median age of 36 years (Northwest Area Foundation, 2007).

MAP 3.1 Total population in 2007 (Northwest Area Foundation).
The state of Oregon’s population grew by 8.7% from 2000-2007 (MAP 3.2). As the map illustrates, the counties with the highest growth were primarily in the Willamette Valley and along the length of the Cascades. Every county that experienced negative population growth rates is east of the Cascades. Except for Morrow, Umatilla and Union counties, every county in eastern Oregon lost population between 2000 and 2007. Harney and Malheur Counties lost -12.4% and -1.5% of their population, respectively (Northwest Area Foundation, 2007, U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

MAP 3.2 Change in total population from 2000-2007 (Northwest Area Foundation).

In 2007, 90.3% of the total population of the state of Oregon was white. Minorities made up 9.7% of the total population. Asian and Pacific Islander were the largest minority population group at 3.9% (MAP 3.3). Both Harney and Malheur Counties had a smaller percentage of minority populations than the state as a whole. Harney County had an 8.0% minority population, with American Indian or Alaska Native being the largest
minority group at 4.9%. Malheur County had a 6.5% minority population, of which the largest group was Asian and Pacific Islander at 2.2% (Northwest Area Foundation, 2007).

MAP 3.3 Minority population in 2007 (Northwest Area Foundation).

In 2007, 10.6% of the total population of the state of Oregon was of Hispanic origin\(^1\) (MAP 3.4). Eastern Oregon had six counties with low Hispanic populations, all below 4.5%. Harney County had a 4.4% Hispanic population, the eighth lowest in the state. Interestingly, eastern Oregon also had the two counties with highest Hispanic population in the state. Morrow County was the highest at 29.2%, followed by Malheur County with 27.7% of its population Hispanic (Northwest Area Foundation, 2007).

\(^1\)“Origin can be viewed as the heritage, nationality group, lineage, or country of birth of the person or the person’s parents or ancestors before their arrival in the United States. People who identify their origin as Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino may be of any race” (U.S. Census Bureau).
MAP 3.4 Hispanic population in 2007 (Northwest Area Foundation).

Income and Employment

The state of Oregon had a median household income of $50,606 in 2007 (MAP 3.5). Statewide, this indicator presents a significant trend. The seven counties with the highest median household income, all over $50,000, are in the western half of the state; six are located in the Willamette Valley and the other, Deschutes County, is home to Bend. The nine counties with the lowest median household income, all less than $40,000, are in southwest and eastern Oregon, specifically the southeast corner of the state. Median household income in Harney County was the seventh lowest in Oregon at $37,432. Malheur County had the third lowest median household income in the state, after Wheeler and Grant Counties, at $36,100 (Northwest Area Foundation, 2007).
Per capita income in 2006 for the state of Oregon was $35,562 (MAP 3.6). Statewide, this indicator generally followed the same trend as median household income. The ten counties with the highest per capita incomes, all over $32,000, are in the western half of the state. Eight of these counties are in the Willamette Valley. The nine counties that had a per capita income less than $28,000 all lie east of the Cascades. Harney County had a per capita income of $26,358 in 2006, the eleventh lowest in the state. Malheur County, after Sherman County, had the second lowest per capita income in state of $21,137 (Northwest Area Foundation, 2007).

In 2007 the state of Oregon had 2,320,043 jobs. The average wage per job was $40,212. Government services were the largest employer in the state, employing 12.5% of the work force. Only 3% of the workforce statewide is involved in farming. Harney County had 4,451 jobs in 2007 with an average wage of $29,691. The largest industry employer
in Harney County was government services, employing 23.7% of the workforce, followed by farm employment at 19.7% and retail employment at 11.1%. Malheur County had 18,674 jobs with the average wage of $28,267, the third lowest in the state and nearly $12,000 less than the state average. The largest employers by industry were government at 18.1%, farm employment at 14.9%, retail at 13.7% and health and social services at 10.3% of the workforce (Northwest Area Foundation, 2007).

MAP 3.6 Per capita income in 2006 (Northwest Area Foundation).

Unemployment for the state of Oregon was 10.7% in January 2009 (MAP 3.7). This was an increase of 81.7% from the previous January. Harney County had the highest unemployment rate in the state at 19.7%. This is an increase of 70.8% from January 2008. In recent years Harney County has lost several large employers, including Louisiana Pacific and, in March 2009, the Monaco Coach Motorhome factory. Malheur
County had an unemployment rate of 11.7% in January 2009, a 47.2% increase from the previous year (Oregon Employment Department, 2008, 2009).

MAP 3.7 Unemployment rate in January 2009 (Oregon Employment Department).

Poverty

In 2007 the state of Oregon had 13% of its total population living at or below the poverty level (MAP 3.8). This is an increase from 12.4% in 1999. Harney County had 16.1% of its population living in poverty in 2007, the eighth highest poverty rate in the state. This was an increase of 4.3%, up from 11.8% in 1999. Malheur County had 17.6% of its population living in poverty in 2007, the fourth highest rate statewide. While the state as a whole and many individual counties experienced an increase poverty rates, Malheur County had a 1% decrease between 1999 and 2007 (Northwest Area Foundation, 1999, 2007).
The percentage of children statewide living at or below the poverty level in 1999 was 14.0%. This percentage saw an increase between 1999 and 2007, growing to 17.2% (MAP 3.9). In Harney County the childhood poverty rate was 12.7% in 1999 and nearly doubled by 2007 to 24.2%, the eighth highest rate in the state. Malheur County had a 25.8% childhood poverty rate in 1999. This increased to 26.3% in 2007, the fourth highest in the state (Northwest Area Foundation, 1999, 2007).

The most recent data on poverty rates for people age 65 and over was recorded in 1999. Oregon had an elderly poverty rate of 7.6%. Harney County’s elderly poverty rate was 13.9%, the highest in the state, and Malheur County’s was 1.6%, the third highest rate statewide (Northwest Area Foundation, 1999).
Food Assistance Programs

The National School Lunch Program provides low cost or free lunches to students nationwide based on the student’s family size and income. Those children from families with income at or below 130% of the poverty level are eligible for free meals at school. Those students whose families’ income falls between 130% and 185% are eligible for reduced-prices meals. In the 2006-2007 school year 41.3% of students in Oregon were eligible for this program.

In the 2006-2007 school year Harney County had ten school districts that reported statistics for the National School Lunch Program. The percentages of students eligible for free or reduced-price meals ranged from a high in South Harney School District of 78.6%
to low in Harney School District of 45.5%. South Harney School District has the fifth highest eligibility rate statewide, of 199 districts reporting, followed by Diamond School District with the sixth highest percentage. Of the ten districts in Harney County, six have at least 55.6% of students eligible and five have at least 72.7% of students eligible.

In the 2006-2007 school year Malheur County had nine school districts report free and reduced-price meal eligibility percentages. These ranged from a high in Harper School District of 75.9%, the ninth highest percentage statewide, to low in Juntura School District of 20%. Of the nine school districts reported, seven have at least 49.8% of students eligible and five have at least 65.5% of students eligible (Northwest Area Foundation, 2007).

In January 2009, 535,066 people received food stamp benefits in Oregon. By May 2009 that number has risen to 601,706, a 12.5% increase. The number of children under the age of 18 receiving food stamp benefits was 218,938 in January, increasing to 242,595 by May, a 10.8% increase. The number of people age 60 and older receiving benefits in January statewide was 45,877. By May, this had increased by 6.0% to 48,648 people.

In January 2009 Harney County had 1,287 total people receiving food stamp benefits. By May 2009 that number of people had increased to 1,443, a 10.8% increase. The number of children 18 and under receiving benefits countywide was 455 in January, increasing to 500 in May, a 9% increase. The number of people age 60 and older receiving benefits in January was 146. By May, this had increased by 4.6% to 153 people.

In Malheur County, there were 5,995 individuals receiving food stamp benefits in January 2009. By May 2009 6,594 people were receiving benefits, a 10% increase. The number of children under the age of 18 receiving food stamp benefits was 3,058 in January, increasing to 3,278 by May, a 7.2% increase. The number of people age 60 and older receiving benefits in January was 497. By May, this had increased by 8.9% to 541 people. (Oregon Department of Human Services, 2009).
Statewide, total distribution of emergency food boxes between August 2008 and July 2009 was 896,228. This was 53.9% increase from the 482,760 boxes distributed in 1999-2000. Emergency food box distribution in Harney County between August 2008 and July 2009 was 999, up from 462 in 1999-2000. This is was 46.2% increase in the nine year time span. Malheur County had 10,188 emergency food boxes distributed between August 2008 and July 2009, a large jump for the 4,784 boxes distributed in between August 1999 and July 2000. This was a 47.0% increase in nine years (Oregon Food Bank, 1999, 2009).
CHAPTER 4
The State of Agriculture in Southeast Oregon

To provide for a comparative, contextual analysis, many of the agricultural indicators are compared to state of Oregon data. All data in this section comes from the 2002 and 2007 U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Census of Agriculture.

Farm Numbers and Acreage

In 2007 there were 38,553 farms in the state of Oregon, encompassing a total of 16,399,647 acres. Both of these indicators experienced a 4% decline between 2002 and 2007. Oregon was one of only eleven states nationwide, and the only state in the West, that experienced a decline in the number of farms.

In 2002 there were 524 farms in Harney County encompassing over 1.5 million acres. By 2007, Harney County had only lost one farm and experienced a decrease in farm acreage to 1,461,508, a 7% decline over five years. Malheur County had 1,272 farms in 2007 covering 1,170,664 acres of land. The county lost 22 farms between 2002 and 2007, a 2% decrease. Overall, there was a loss of 4,616 total acres of farm land in Malheur County.

In Oregon the average farm size in 2007 was 425 acres, a slight decrease from the average of 427 in 2002. The median size of farms statewide was 29 acres, with the greatest number of farms between 10-49 acres. The average farm in Harney County was 2,794 acres, down from 3,006 acres in 2002, a 7% decrease. The median size of farms in Harney County was 325 acres (FIGURE 4.1). Most farms were 1,000 acres or greater in size. Malheur County farms were an average of 937 acres in 2007, a slight increase from the average size of 924 in 2002. The median size farm in Malheur County was 101 acres, with most farms having between 50-179 acres.
In 2007 the greatest type of land in farm production in Harney and Malheur Counties was pasture land, 79.8% and 77.0%, respectively (FIGURE 4.2). Statewide the percentage of farm land in pasture was 55.8%. Oregon had 30.6% of farm land in crops, Harney County had 16.7% and Malheur County had 20.5%.

**Farm Operators and Tenure**

The average age of principal farm operators in Oregon in 2007 was 57.5 years old. Harney and Malheur Counties average age of farm operators was 56 years old. There were 38,553 operators statewide; 78.6% were male and 21.4% female. Both Harney and Malheur Counties had more male principal operators than the statewide average. In Harney County 84.7% of farm operators were male and 15.3% female. Malheur County had 89.6% male and 10.4% female.
Statewide less than half of principal operators, 17,825, identified farming as their primary occupation; 53.8% of single farm operators had off-farm employment that was their primary occupation. Harney County had 302 principal operators; 57.7% of them identified farming as their primary occupation. Malheur County had 778 principal operators; 62.2% of them identified farming as their primary occupation.

Statewide 30,160 farmers, or 78.2%, were full owners of their farms, 16% were part owners and 5.8% were tenants. Harney County had 380 farmers that were full owners, 114 that were part owners and 29 that were tenants. Malheur County had 857 farmers that were full owners, 299 that were part owners and 94 that were tenants (FIGURE 4.3).

Statewide, the average number of years that principal operators have owned their current farm is 19.5 years. By a large margin, 71.2%, most farms have been under current ownership for ten or more years. In Harney County the average number of years that principal operators have owned their current farm is 16.3 years. Most farms, 64.1%, have been under current ownership for more than ten years. In Malheur County the average...
number of years that principal operators have owned their current farm is 20.6 years, slightly higher than the statewide average. Nearly 70% of farms have been under current ownership for more than ten years (FIGURE 4.4).

FIGURE 4.3 Farm tenure in 2007 (USDA Census of Agriculture).

In 2007, Oregon had 364 farms with Asian operators. Of those, 267 farms had Asian principal operators on farms totaling 31,202 acres. Statewide there were 48 farms that had Black or African American operators, of which 36 were principal operators farming a total of 2,738 acres. There were 1,182 farms statewide that had operators of Spanish, Hispanic or Latino origin. Of these, 789 were principal operators on 116,117 acres. There were 703 farms that had American Indian or Alaska Native operators, of which 497 were principal operators on 577,470 acres.

In 2007 Harney County had no Asian operators and neither Harney nor Malheur Counties had Black or African American operators. Malheur County had 41 farms with Asian operators, of which 35 had Asian principal operators on 15,055 acres. Harney County had 21 farms with Spanish, Hispanic or Latino operators, of which 12 were run by principal operators over 7,672 acres. Malheur County had 63 farms with Spanish, Hispanic or
Latino operators, of which 46 were principal operators over 18,800 acres. Harney County had 4 farms with American Indian or Alaska Native operators; all four of them were principal operators. Malheur County had 21 farms with American Indian or Alaska Native operators, 11 of which were principal operators over 1,458 acres.

FIGURE 4.4  Number of years on farm, 2007 (USDA Census of Agriculture).

Market Value of Agricultural Products

The estimated market value of Oregon farm land and buildings in 2007 was more than $31 billion dollars, a 51.2% increase in estimated value from 2002. This was an average of $804,145 per farm (FIGURE 4.5) and $1,890 per acre (FIGURE 4.6). The market value of all agricultural products sold statewide in 2007 was over $4.3 billion, a 37% increase from 2002. This was an average of $113,769 per farm (FIGURE 4.7). The total value of crops was nearly $3 billion and livestock and poultry were $1.4 billion. Government payments were a total of $76,491,000 statewide in 2007, a 47% increase from 2002. The average per farm was $14,954 (FIGURE 4.7) and $4.66 per acre (FIGURE 4.8).
The estimated market value of farm land and buildings in Harney County in 2007 was more than $764 million dollars, a 78% increase in estimated value from 2002. This was an average of $1,461,377 per farm and $523 per acre. The 2007 market value of all agricultural products sold in Harney County was over $51.7 million, a 45.5% increase.
from 2002. This was an average of $98,919 per farm. The total value of crops was $13.3 million and livestock and poultry were $38.4 million. Government payments were a total of $535,000 in Harney County in 2007, a 47% decrease from 2002. The average per farm was $6,863 and $0.37 per acre.

The estimated market value of farm land and buildings in Malheur County in 2007 was nearly $1.3 billion dollars, an 83.7% increase in estimated value from 2002. This was an average of $1,028,826 per farm and $1,099 per acre. The market value of all agricultural products in Malheur County was over $306 million, a 32.4% increase from 2002, the sixth highest value statewide. This was an average of $245,436 per farm. The crops value was nearly $115 million and livestock and poultry were over $192 million. Government payments were a total of $2,113,000 in Malheur County in 2007, a 13% increase from 2002. The average per farm was $4,814 and $1.80 per acre.
FIGURE 4.8  Average government payments per acre, 2007 (USDA Census of Agriculture).

**Agricultural Indicator Rankings**

In 2007 Harney County was ranked first in the state for acres of forage land. This is all hay and haylage, grass silage and greenchop. It is ranked third in the number of cattle and calves. Both of these indicators rank in the top 4% of all counties nationwide (FIGURE 5.1). These rankings, in combination with anecdotal evidence, reveal the significant importance of ranching to Harney County’s economy.

Malheur County has several agricultural indicators that rank high state and nationwide. Most notably, it has the most acres planted in dry onions statewide and nationally. The County is also ranked first statewide in the number of cattle and calves and in the top 2% of counties nationwide. Malheur County has the second highest value of livestock, poultry and their products in the state and is the top 5% nationwide. The number of pheasants in the county rank it second statewide and in the top 6% nationally (FIGURE 5.2).
Harney County Agricultural Indicator Rankings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>State Rank</th>
<th>Universe</th>
<th>U.S. Rank</th>
<th>Universe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total market value of agriculture products sold ($1,000)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>1,531</td>
<td>3,076</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value of crops including nursery and greenhouse</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>1,704</td>
<td>3,072</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total value of livestock, Poultry and their products</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>979</td>
<td>3,069</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cattle and calves (number)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>3,060</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forage- hay and haylage, grass silage and greenchop land (acres)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>3,060</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FIGURE 5.1 Select Harney County agricultural indicators, as compared to counties state and nationwide (USDA Census of Agriculture, 2007).

Malheur County Agricultural Indicator Rankings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>State Rank</th>
<th>Universe</th>
<th>U.S. Rank</th>
<th>Universe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total market value of agriculture products sold ($1,000)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>3,076</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value of crops including nursery and greenhouse</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>3,072</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total value of livestock, Poultry and their products</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>3,069</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cattle and calves (number)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>3,060</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pheasants (number)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>1,544</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheep and lambs (number)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>2,891</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forage- hay and haylage, grass silage and greenchop land (acres)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>3,060</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vegetables harvested, all (acres)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>2,794</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onions, dry (acres)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1,013</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FIGURE 5.2 Select Malheur County agricultural indicators, as compared to counties state and nationwide (USDA Census of Agriculture, 2007).
CHAPTER 5
Development of the Study

This chapter describes the research design and methodology. The data sources are outlined followed by the methodology by which the project was designed and implemented. Finally, the limitations and value of the project are summarized.

Data Source

Data for this study was collected from multiple sources. The economic and demographic data came from the Northwest Area Foundation Indicators website, Oregon Department of Human Services, Oregon Employment Department, Oregon Food Bank and U.S. Census Bureau. Agriculture data came from the United States Department of Agriculture Census of Agriculture.

Empirical data was collected from a series of informal interviews and conversations and focus groups in communities throughout southeast Oregon.

Methodology

The CFA of southeast Oregon used a mixed methods approach that combines the use of quantitative and qualitative data. Qualitative data (focus groups and interviews) and quantitative data (census data) were collected simultaneously to create an integrated analysis that explored a wide range of food system issues. This approach provided a broad regional analysis of the existing food system and used interviews and focus group discussions as empirical evidence to identify assets and needs in Harney and Malheur Counties. The simultaneous collection and analysis of different data types provided a comprehensive examination of food-related issues. This method proved effective in involving diverse stakeholders across the food system, leading to the creation of suggestions for a more food secure region.
Limitations and Value of the Study

Due to the limited understanding of the existing food system in southeast Oregon, the CFA was used to gain better understanding of the existing structure and identify potential solutions to create a more food secure region. While this knowledge helps to identify many assets and needs in Harney and Malheur Counties, it is limited in its depth and scope. The CFA is meant to be a working document as many perspectives and questions remain unknown.

The CFA is the first project in the region to take a broad, community-based approach to examining southeast Oregon’s food system in its entirety. Specifically, the CFA explored socioeconomic and agricultural trends in Harney and Malheur Counties. By using numerous stakeholder interviews and focus groups the CFA identified issues and needs in the food system not readily apparent. The intent of this report is to increase awareness and understanding of these issues, engage diverse stakeholders in the process and collectively begin working on potential solutions for a more food secure region. This work is important because everyone should have access to healthy food regardless of their location or socioeconomic status.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

Sample Interview Questions

Producers:
What is the history of your farm/ranch?
Is it full time profession or do you work off the farm/ranch?
Acres farmed/ranched?
Method of farming or ranching?
Product (raw, finished)?
Profitable? Subsidies?
Whom do you sell to?
What is your product volume?
Do you donate product to anti-hunger efforts?
Do you sell locally or directly to consumers?
Do you market locally?
Do you know of any direct sale opportunities?
How would you define your local market?
Do you have any interest in selling locally?
Are you interested in being in a local growers guide?
Have you ever considered a farmers’ market, farm stand or website?
Is there any assistance that would help you sell locally?
What are the barriers to the direct sales?
Are there any laws or policies that affect food production, distribution or consumption?
Do you have any transportation issues?
Are there any farmland preservation efforts in your area?
What is the future of your farm/ranch?
Using the scales provided below indicate the degree to which the following factors limits your direct local sales.
Difficult to find, interact, or correspond with retailers or consumers
(low) 1 2 3 4 5 (high)
Unable to produce sufficient quantity to meet demand
(low) 1 2 3 4 5 (high)
Lack of distribution system for local products
(low) 1 2 3 4 5 (high)
Lack of local processing facilities
(low) 1 2 3 4 5 (high)
Requires too much time
(low) 1 2 3 4 5 (high)
Price premiums paid to farmer
(low) 1 2 3 4 5 (high)
Insufficient demand for local products
(low) 1 2 3 4 5 (high)

Retail:
How would you characterize your business?
How many employees do you have?
Amount of product sold in a year?
Do you donate product to anti-hunger efforts?
What is the geographic extent of your customers?
Who makes the purchasing decisions?
How would you define locally-grown product?
Do you sell local products?
Do you ever have requests for local products?
What barriers exist for people accessing food in your region?
What are the barriers to buying directly from producers?
Are there any laws or policies that affect food production, distribution or consumption?
Using the scales below, indicate the types of ‘locally grown/produced’ food products you would like to sell at this establishment?
Fruits, vegetables, and herbs
(low) 1 2 3 4 5 (high)
Meat, fish, and game
(low) 1 2 3 4 5 (high)
Dairy products
(low) 1 2 3 4 5 (high)
Bread, flour, and baked goods
(low) 1 2 3 4 5 (high)
Jams, preserves, honey, and sauces
(low) 1 2 3 4 5 (high)
Tinned, packaged, or pre-prepared goods
(low) 1 2 3 4 5 (high)
Drinks (alcoholic and soft)
(low) 1 2 3 4 5 (high)
Other _____________________________
(low) 1 2 3 4 5 (high)

Using the scales below, indicate the degree to which you perceive the following factors as limitations to your store carrying ‘locally grown/produced’ foods?

Connecting with producers
(low) 1 2 3 4 5 (high)
Insufficient quantity to meet demand
(low) 1 2 3 4 5 (high)
Inferior quality
(low) 1 2 3 4 5 (high)
Price
(low) 1 2 3 4 5 (high)
Inconsistent supply/seasonality
(low) 1 2 3 4 5 (high)
Transportation and receiving products
(low) 1 2 3 4 5 (high)
No demand for these types of products
(low) 1 2 3 4 5 (high)
Other _____________________________
(low) 1 2 3 4 5 (high)
Agency & Advocacy:
Do you think many people in the community have a problem with food security?
Who are the food insecure in your community?
Where do they live?
How do they cope with food insecurity?
Do you think food is accessible, available and affordable?
How do they access food?
What barriers do they encounter in accessing food?
How does the community address food insecurity?
What else could be done to address food insecurity?
What local agencies are involved in feeding people?
Who are the key players?
How do people access emergency food supplies?
Are there any meal sites in your community?
Do you know of anyone that would be interested in donating food, hosting a meal site or sponsoring a food pantry?
How would you define/describe your local food system?
Are there any laws or policies that affect food production, distribution or consumption that affect food security?
Are there any transportation issues?

Consumers:
Have you ever run out of food? How often does it happen?
Do you ever worry about running out of food?
What do you do if you don’t have enough food?
Do you think food is accessible, available and affordable?
Where do you get your food?
How do you get to the store?
What barriers do you encounter in accessing food?
What else could be done to address these barriers?
Are there any community gardens, farm stands or farmers’ markets in your community?

Do you grow your own food?

Are there any people that grow extra vegetables and share them with the community?

Are there any meal sites in your community?

What food assistance programs do or have you participated in?

How important are food assistance programs to your household? Why?

What are the best features of food assistance programs?

What are some problems you’ve had with food assistance programs?

If you are not using a program(s), why?

Do access emergency food supplies?

How often do you rely on this source?

Describe how you think your community could become more food secure.
APPENDIX A

Sample Focus Group Questions

I. What economic factors affect your ability to make ends meet each month?
   A. Is there enough work in this area?
   B. Is there safe and affordable child care?
   C. What are your modes of transportation?
   D. Do you have health insurance?

II. Do you think food is accessible, available and affordable?
   A. How do you feed the people in your household?
      i. Where do you get your food?
      ii. How do you get to the store?
   B. Are there enough community resources to prevent families from being hungry?
   C. Do you encounter any barriers in accessing food?
   D. What else could be done to address these barriers?
   E. Have you ever run out of food?
      i. Do you ever worry about running out of food?
      ii. How often does it happen?
      iii. What do you do if you don’t have enough food?

III. Have you participated in a food assistance program?
   A. How important are food assistance programs to your household? Why?
   B. What are the best features of food assistance programs?
   C. What are some problems you’ve had with food assistance programs?
   D. If you are not using a program(s), why?
   E. Do you use any emergency food supplies?
   F. How often do you rely on this source?
V. Do you or have you ever grown your own food?

A. Are there barriers to you growing food?
B. Do you buy food from someone directly?
C. Is there any knowledge, skills or resources that would help you to grow your own food?
D. Do you know of anyone that sells their food to the public?
E. Are you interested in buying any food locally or direct from the producer?
Conversations across the Food System
Second Year Report on Food Systems Work in Southeast Oregon

Chloe Rico
Southeast Oregon Regional Food Bank
RARE AmeriCorps
Acknowledgements

This work could not have been done without the support, vision and leadership of the Southeast Oregon community.

I am very grateful for the opportunity I had to work with many amazing people and organizations that truly care about their community. I am lucky to have been accepted and encouraged in such a welcoming place and am grateful for the relationships and experience that I gained.

A special thanks goes to Peter Lawson who guided, supported and advocated for the advancement of food systems work in the whole community.

Thank you
Sharon Thornberry
Emily Bowers
Shelia Hiatt
Wendi Banner
Nancy Gledhill
Barbara Brody
Anna-Marie Chamberlain
Faith Adams
Brandy Ashby
Jenny Blue
An important part of Southeast Oregon’s 2009 Community Food Assessment (CFA): *Conversations across the Food System* is the recommendations, which indicate opportunities that exist to strengthen the area’s food system. These recommendations informed the direction the second year of food systems work would take in Southeast Oregon.

The CFA’s recommendations were based on the ability of the present food system to meet the needs of the community and where there could be improvement. The major goals for the second year of food systems work were relationship building, organizing, increasing community involvement and jump starting projects. All of these revolve around the simple idea that there are many resources that already exist in the community that need to be harnessed, connected or highlighted in a certain way to better support the local food system. We were able to adjust to what other organizations were doing and adapt based on the dialogue that was coming from the community.
**Recommendation 1:** Create an action-oriented, multi-stakeholder coalition that addresses individual and community food security and the needs of the agricultural community.

1. Review the recommendations of the Community Food Assessment.
2. Identify additional assessment needs.
3. Identify and engage community partners (e.g. producers, non-profit organizations, public agencies, business community, agricultural community) to implement specific action steps or projects.

A formal coalition was not formed this year however an informal network of people interested and invested in the local food system has been created. This was achieved through identifying and engaging community partners. The emphasis was on relationship building and collaboration for projects, awareness, outreach and support. Some relationships that were fostered this year were with the Malheur County OSU Extension office, Jordan Valley School District, Ontario School District, Malheur Mentoring and Enrichment Coalition, the Malheur County Health Department and WIC Office and the City of Nyssa. These relationships demonstrate different ways partnership and collaboration have been used to advance many aspects of the food systems discussion. A good example of the possibilities that collaboration create is The Malheur Mentoring and Enrichment Coalition, which is a collective partnership formed between youth oriented organizations in the area. All of these organizations want to advance the options available to local youth afterschool. Through this coalition the Four Rivers Community Garden, Malheur County OSU Extension Office, Southeast Oregon Regional Food Bank (SEORFB) and Boys and Girls Club of the Western Treasure Valley connected to work together to make a garden and nutrition education summer program available to the club members. They were able to combine resources and efforts together to make the program possible without needing to seek extra resources or grants. Because of the initial work and the coalition’s network, it would be easy to expand this program to schools or other youth organizations.
Another important step during the year to connect different invested stakeholders was the Community FEAST (Food, Education, Agriculture, Solutions, Together) Workshop held at the end of May 2010. This event helped to sum up area’s food networks with a diverse cross section of the community being represented. Over 40 people attended that were farmers, retailers or restaurant managers, individual consumers, social service advocates, faith-based leaders, city government and educators. The workshop highlighted the usefulness of a network of people or a coalition and its ability to determine projects desired by the majority. By the end of the FEAST Workshop it was clear that there were two ideas that the majority wanted to explore: Farm to School and new ways to market and support area producers. These two topics are places where more formal assessments could help determine the right direction to go with these ideas. By assessing the possibilities more stakeholders could get involved to expand the potential for these projects – for example having more economic development people involved could expand the opportunities for producers (such as creation of a community kitchen).

Creating a formal coalition has been a difficult step to put together this year. There was a gap, at first, between the completed assessment and community investment and involvement with this work. The step that needed to be reached was where community members saw the value of this work and were seeking out solutions and guiding the process themselves. This step has not been completely achieved but it is much closer than before. For the past two years, an informal network of people working on food systems issues or interested in this work has been identified and the solidifying of this group has helped many realize the benefit of information sharing and working together. At the present moment, there is an opportunity with the Four Rivers Health Communities Coalition and an initiative around preventable diseases including obesity where a “food coalition” could fit in well. It will be important to continue the momentum of the community food workshops that happened over the past year (Community Food Forum in September 2009 and the Community FEAST Workshop in May 2010) where diverse stakeholders came together to represent a broad spectrum of viewpoints and ideas to create action plans.
**Recommendation 2: Increase public awareness and education of food and agriculture-related issues and opportunities.**

1. Develop a series of events that highlight local food and agriculture (e.g. on-farm tasting tours, progressive dinners, Farm-to-School events).
2. Create an asset map of the local food system.
3. Develop a marketing campaign that highlights local success stories; encourage retailers to highlight local producers and products.
4. Develop and distribute a local food guide.

One of the major achievements this year has been raising public awareness and education of local foods and agriculture issues. Not only were there events that revolved around these topics but local foods and related projects were represented or highlighted at many other community activities, fairs, and workshops. This ultimately has helped all aspects of this work and allowed the advancement of projects, participation and engagement. But this is also where more work needs to be done; as more become aware, the more that will be able to happen. Both events that highlight local food and educational workshops have been equally effective in increasing public awareness. There was not a formal series of events this year however there are plans to repeat many of the events from this year in the future or make them annual.

The Local food events that happened this year: Ranchers Feeding Kids, the Four Rivers Community Garden (FRCG) anniversary, Community FEAST workshop, Ken Meter’s presentation on the economic impacts of local foods development in the Treasure Valley (including Malheur and Harney Counties). The educational food workshops that happened during the past year: Seed to Supper workshop with OCDC (migrant and seasonal head start), Operation Frontline Cooking Class, and the FRCG/OSU Extension/SEORFB Garden and Nutrition Program for the Boys and Girls Club of the Western Treasure Valley.

The Ranchers Feeding Kids event is a good example of how both highlighting local foods and offering educational opportunities provide a platform for engaging community
members. This day focused on beef donations ranchers from Jordan Valley made to the school district’s lunch program to help keep the program running (the school district is unable to get the full cost of providing lunch reimbursed by the federal lunch program because of the high cost of running a lunch program in Jordan Valley). The event highlighted a small donation of 5 head of cattle from Jordan Valley ranchers which provided 3,900 beef lunches that helped keep the program running. Having the hot lunch program secures at least one hot meal for all the Jordan Valley schoolchildren every school day. This event combined a free community lunch provided by the school that honored the ranchers who participated and the Malheur Cattleman’s Association (who supports the program), education opportunities for both students and community members (there were stations before and after lunch that discussed nutrition, gardening, ranching and meat production) and student participation (the FFA students grew tomato plants to hand out for the gardening station and student leaders wrote short speeches to thank the ranchers). A pre and post evaluation from the event demonstrated increased education and awareness about where food comes from and healthy eating habits.

Because of this event, Jordan Valley community members expressed their desire for a gardening class in their area (and an OSU Extension agent was able to host a class later in the spring in Jordan Valley) and the community and school’s response has the cattleman’s association interested in partnering with other Malheur County schools to donate beef to their lunch programs. Right now the Adrian, Nyssa, Ontario and Vale school districts are interested in participating in this program during the 2010-2011 school year.
Anna-Marie Chamberlain, Livestock and Range Specialist, Malheur County Extension Office, 2010
Through events such as those described above, there is more awareness in Southeast Oregon of the local food system and this has been reflected in increased visibility, in stores and on menus, of local foods and farms. Though a formal marketing campaign has not been developed yet these organic instances of advertising have set up many possibilities for the future. These include interest in bringing back the Onion Festival to the Malheur County Fair (the county fair at one time celebrated onions, which are being harvested during fair time, and are a top commodity grown in the area) and including a Harvest Festival in the annual October Fair that happens in Ontario. The Local Food Guide and Community Cookbook to come out in the region’s newspaper, The Argus Observer, is an important step in highlighting local producers. The food guide is meant to engage those that have previously not been involved with local foods in the community. It lists area farms, ranches, farmers’ markets, restaurants and stores that grow, sell or buy local foods making it an easy way for the community to connect to their food. The strategic partners that have made the guide happen, including The Argus Observer and DJ’s Family Restaurant, demonstrate the increased visibility of local foods in the community. The Local Food Guide and Community Cookbook will hopefully highlight the effect public awareness and education campaigns can have on increasing support and customers for local farms and bring about momentum for events that highlight producers in the area.

**Recommendation 3:** Create connections that build a food system that is supported by and benefits local producers, processors, retailers and consumers.

1. Inventory producers, retail establishments, direct marketers and supporting agencies to identify those interested in selling food locally or featuring locally produced foods.
2. Advocate for rules and regulations that support and promote the production, distribution and consumption of local foods with local, state and federal agencies.
3. Assist in the creation of direct relationships between producers and retailers (e.g. Farm to Restaurant Collaborative, cooperative marketing).
The ultimate goal of this work is to create a strong local food system and the base of a strong local food system is farmers who can make a living from their work. If there is a healthy network of local producers and the retailers and consumers that support them, that is a strong start to a thriving food system and from there opportunities for new ideas and expansion can form.

This year has been a bit of a trial and error about what works when helping to support producers. Though there have been great strides in establishing some of the structures that make direct-sales easier for local producers such as the creation of farmers’ markets in the area, there has not necessarily been an increase in the customer base. Because the farmers’ markets in our area are small, in order for direct-market farmers to make a living off of this work they need to have a variety of avenues for selling their products. One of the goals with the publication of the Local Food Guide is highlighting the relationships between retailers and producers in the area. When putting together the guide, we were able to conduct an initial inventory of the area – who is selling and who is buying. There are some restaurants and retail stores where it is well-known that they feature local food, however, through reaching out to producers in the area for the food guide, we were able to discover other retailers, previously unknown, that also purchase locally. Some producers have taken it upon themselves to seek out these relationships; a recent success story with direct sales to restaurants in the area is Ashby Family Farms. They approached area restaurants about purchasing their goods and from this formed solid relationships with Bittercreek Alehouse and Red Feather Lounge in Boise and two restaurants in Nyssa, where they live and grow, Bob’s Steaks N’ Spirits and Thunderegg Coffee Co. (both locally owned restaurants). Ashby Family Farm’s success indicates the potential that exists for other area growers in these direct relationships.

It is also important to see restaurants themselves, such as Mackey’s Steakhouse and Pub and DJ’s Family Restaurant, highlight on their menu that they purchase locally or even (in the case of DJs) highlight what that local item is and where it came from. It is also important for stores like Red Apple Marketplace that have many contracts with different growers in the area to mark which of their products are locally grown or made and even
let growers highlight their products with a sign (such as Kevin Corn marking his sweet corn with his logo and name in the store). By identifying these relationships in stores, on menus and in a publication like the Local Food Guide, the hope is to encourage more of these connections, increase direct sales between producers and retailers and ultimately have the customers ask for more of these local products.

The largest role SEORFB has taken so far in assisting in the creation of direct relationships between producers and buyers is the farm to school relationship. Interest in the Farm to School movement will continue to encourage these direct relationships between producers and buyers. Food directors have expressed that they do not have time to do research and seek out producers (some relationships have formed over the years between schools and growers – Garrard Farms and Becks supply produce, when they have extra, to the schools). For the directors, a networking meeting would be ideal where both groups could get introduced, discuss possibilities and find ways to collaborate (and meet in the middle). As interest builds from producers and buyers (retail, restaurants or institutions) these are places where networking and middle-man support will be helpful. An assessment of what role the food bank, or potentially a coalition, can play in the continual creation of direct relationships between producers and buyers will be helpful as more desire to create these relationships.

Another important aspect of SEORFB’s role this year was connecting to the statewide network of people working on local foods efforts, building relationships with community decision makers and entities, and advocating for rules and regulations that promote and support local foods. Through the greater Oregon Food Bank network, listservs and the RARE (Resource Assistance for Rural Environments AmeriCorps program) network the food bank was able to connect to others doing this work throughout the state for advice, ideas, training and workshops and bring this information back to the Southeast Oregon community. Through these networks: a WIC Veggie Voucher producer training happened in Ontario for local producers to be able to participate in this new Oregon state program and community food projects, such as the community garden and farmers’ markets, connected to grants and statewide networks for publicity. Continuing this connection to a
larger network will be important for getting resources to the community, especially producers, and those involved with community food projects that are not as connected to the greater statewide work. Some of the work this year has been about getting local leadership involved in the food systems discussion including state representatives, city leadership (especially in Nyssa), the area’s schools and school districts, Malheur County government organizations, including the Commission on Children and Families and the Health Department, and the area’s economic development leadership. Many of these relationships have already existed in different capacities but have evolved to incorporate local food through connections over community food projects, economic development opportunities and/or educational opportunities.

One specific example from this year of engaging leadership to turn them into local food and farm advocates was through a report and presentation by Ken Meter, President of Crossroads Resource Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Meter conducted a study entitled “Local Foods as Economic Recovery” of the Greater Treasure Valley (Ada (ID), Canyon (ID), Elmore (ID), Gem (ID), Owyhee (ID), Payette (ID), Washington (ID), Malheur (OR) and Harney (OR) counties). He came to the region to present his findings and was able to do a presentation for local leadership in Southeast Oregon. It has been hard to engage some of the economic development leaders in the local foods conversation, but Meter was able to show them the potential that exists in the area. The examples he presented demonstrate what can happen when economic development leaders see the value of local foods work and decide to partner or collaborate for projects. Having their leadership, advocacy and initiative can help in the development of community kitchens, small food business incubators or new food enterprises making it easier and more possible for these projects to happen.

**Recommendation 4: Increase and maintain access to a stable food supply in underserved areas, particularly in Harney County.**

1. Identify potential food pantry hosts and establish food pantries in communities not currently served.
2. Develop and distribute outreach materials to food insecure populations about food assistance programs.


Parts one and two of this recommendation are both done by the regular work of the Southeast Oregon Regional Food Bank. One pantry site at the Blessed Sacrament Catholic Church in Ontario became part of the food bank’s network this year and now receives food on a regular basis from the warehouse. Another site that has been identified as a potential pantry host, during this year, is in the small rural area of Drewsey in Harney County. Southeast Oregon Regional Food Bank’s Outreach Coordinator has kept a regular presence at area pantries speaking to clients about food assistance programs, distributing outreach materials and promoting healthy recipes incorporating staples from food boxes. She has also developed other avenues to discuss food assistance programs especially to untraditional audiences, such as school aged children and teenagers, through community events and educational workshops and programs.

This year had a particular focus on increasing stable food access in Jordan Valley that goes beyond emergency food. A strong relationship has been formed with the Jordan Valley School District and Superintendent who advocates for increased food security in her community. Partners came together to support and highlight the school lunch program through the Ranchers Feeding Kids Program, mentioned above, which provides at least one hot meal to the community’s children and teenagers throughout the whole school year. After the Community FEAST workshop in May, interested was expressed by a farmer in the Nampa area that wants to bring a mobile farmstand to Jordan Valley – he was connected with the Jordan Valley School’s Superintendent as a community contact to help make this opportunity possible. And finally more information was gathered about the area’s small grocery stores that provided insight into better ways to support them and their ability to provide food security to the region. Below is the information gathered by the rural grocery store surveys conducted in Jordan Valley:
An important piece to implementing recommendation four, to increase and maintain access to a stable food supply in underserved areas, is to understand how food is accessed in these underserved and rural areas. One method toward understanding food access and supply is conducting a rural grocery store survey. This involves identifying the stores in rural areas that sell food and that community members use as a food source on a regular basis.

Jordan Valley, Oregon is a small, isolated community in Malheur County of around 200 people, two hours south from the more populated areas of Ontario, Oregon and Southwest Idaho (Nampa, Caldwell and Boise) that feature more options for purchasing food. It is also an area where it is difficult to grow food because of the elevation makes a frost possible anytime during the year. The isolation, difficult growing climate and lack of a large grocery store make food insecurity a reality for many in Jordan Valley.

Both “groceries” are small stores, Mrs. Z’s is more of a quick shop/convenience store, while the Ranch Hand a small corner/everything store with food as a primary feature. For the survey we spoke with Leeann Conrow, the store manager for Mrs. Z’s, and Jane Collins, the co-owner of the Ranch Hand. These stores do not provide full grocery options such as a large variety of produce, many selections of whole foods, or meat, but they do go beyond what you would think of in a traditional small convenience store (soda and snacks). Each understand their role as providing food for a community that has limited options and, in that regard, each go out of their way to try and offer diversity. For example, Mrs. Z’s is presently considering offering hot lunch options. The Ranch Hand when first purchased by the present owners, four years ago, was not a grocery, but the owners saw the need for more grocery options in Jordan Valley especially for the older women in the community that do not the ability to drive two hours for food. Both stores indicated that availability and quality of food are important things to offer in their grocery stores because of their central role in supporting hunger alleviation in their community.

Available Food:
The majority of the products both stores offer are non-perishable goods since those keep for longer and are easier to keep in stock, but both stores also have a selection of perishable goods. The majority of the food in Mrs. Z’s is pre-packaged snacks and pre-packaged meals such as chips, candy, instant mash potatoes, canned soups and chili, Ramen Noodles and Hamburger Helper. The perishable goods Mrs. Z’s features are meat products, mostly hotdogs and sandwich meats (though Conrow said they have sold local hamburger before just not on a regular basis), milk and dairy products and a small selection of fresh produce (for example: potatoes, onions, bananas, and a few tomatoes). Mrs. Z’s also has a delicatessen that makes to-order sandwiches and self-serve snacks. The Ranch Hand has mostly non-perishable goods but more whole products than snacks and pre-packaged meals such as bags of rice, beans, spaghetti, tomato sauce, canned soup, and canned chili. The Ranch Hand also has perishable goods such as milk and dairy products and variety of produce especially fruit (there was no fruit in the store on a Friday – Collins said the fruit goes fast after she stocks the store on Mondays). The Ranch Hand also sells seeds, potting soil and a small amount of other garden products in the springtime.

**Suppliers, Delivery and Buying Requirements:**
One of the major barriers for the Jordan Valley stores and their ability to provide a variety of quality food available regularly is their isolation and distance. There are a limited number of people who will deliver to Jordan Valley and if they do deliver buying minimums are difficult for these small stores to meet. They don’t have the volume or turnover to place large orders. Mrs. Z’s primary grocery supplier is Arrowrock Supply out of Boise, ID. The secondary suppliers to Mrs. Z’s are Tri-City Meats out of Meridian, ID for hotdogs, Clover Wholesale out of Marsing, ID for dairy products and eggs and Conrow drives up to Costco in Caldwell, ID once a week for produce and perishable goods (primarily lettuce, tomatoes and meats). Conrow views distance as the major challenge for her store because it affects what she has available from her suppliers. Buying requirements are a problem for her – Arrowrock requires $300 order a week to deliver to her store, Tri-City Meats stopped delivery to Jordan Valley recently and now their products come with Arrowrock for a small fee, however Clover Wholesale does not
have a minimum buying requirement for delivery to the area. Conrow says she hasn’t necessarily had a problem in the past with minimum buying requirements until Tri-City Meats stopped delivering which was hard. She says she doesn’t feel, as an independent grocer, that she is getting fair pricing from her supplies (compared to chain stores). She says “My suppliers don’t care if I’m a customer, especially Tri-City Meats.” Conrow also has problems getting all of the products she wants delivered to the store. “Zeros come up when we place an order with suppliers…and we usually get three quarters of an order when it is placed.” Mrs. Z’s low purchase volume and location have placed the store without much sway and at the mercy of its suppliers, which leaves the store’s ability to provide to the community compromised.

The Ranch Hand’s primary grocery suppliers are WinCo Foods and Costco in Nampa, ID. Collins drives up to Nampa once a week, on Mondays, to purchase products for her store from these chain groceries. The only secondary supplier the Ranch Hand uses is Clover Wholesale that delivers milk and dairy products to Jordan Valley (the Ranch Hand’s products are dropped off at Mrs. Z’s). During the summer, Collins also purchases fresh produce from farmstands in the Nampa area for the store. They have looked into purchasing from grocery store suppliers but couldn’t meet the minimum buying requirements (specifically they looked at American Fine Food which had a $5,500 minimum buying requirement). Since then they have not looked into delivery.

Another telling point to mention for both stores is that they use big chain stores in Idaho for some, if not most, of their grocery supply. Both owners mentioned community members, that have the means, travel to the greater Boise area to purchase groceries at the chains that can offer more variety and cheaper prices. Though Collins also said many people in the community depend on her traveling to buy products from these stores instead of going themselves.

The Economy’s Affect on Business:
One of the other major difficulties for both stores is operating in an area with a struggling economy. Both store owners mentioned their pricing – they both try to offer fair pricing
because they view their stores as a community service and don’t want to overcharge their neighbors. Conrow says offering a fair price is important for her business. According to Conrow, Mrs. Z’s charges higher prices than the Ranch Hand, but her prices are lower than those at most convenience stores. Mrs. Z’s also accepts SNAP but does not accept WIC vouchers. Collins says throughout the Ranch Hand’s history they’ve mark their products up by 30%. She tries to offer fair prices because she knows the store is providing an important service to the community, especially those who cannot leave town to purchase groceries, and her personal relationships are more important than making a larger profit.

These grocery store surveys were conducted at the end of March 2010 and at that moment both stores were going through a tough time. Mrs. Z’s owner, Conrow, commented that there are hard economic times right now and business has been weak overall. However, in the last few weeks, business at Mrs. Z’s, has been picking up because of spring break. For her, tourists bring a lot to the store, especially during spring break time with more people traveling through Jordan Valley. During these hard times, buses have been Mrs. Z’s primary source of business and Conrow did mention that buses and tourists were down this spring break compared to others. When Conrow was discussing her other customer base, the Jordan Valley community, she said she has noticed that unemployment benefits in the community are running out and people are trading in cans for money and using pennies to purchase food. Mrs. Z’s accepts SNAP but Conrow said people aren’t using this very much.

The Ranch Hand has also been going through an equally tough time. Collins said “For four years business was steady but the last three months have been the worst three months we have ever had.” Collins contributes this change to the economy. She noted that sometimes difficult times for the community have worked to their advantage; when gas prices were extremely high they did well because people would buy it from their store instead of making the trip to Nampa. When discussing major challenges for her store, Collins said unpaid accounts are her biggest problem right now. The Ranch Hand is the only store, according to her, that extends credit in town and during the present climate
it has been difficult to get people to pay their accounts. Collins said the last two months have been the hardest for the store in its four year history. They have had to take money out from annuity to get by and keep the store stocked for the last two months.

**Store Closing Trends:**
Collins also talked about the history of grocery stores in the area. She said Jordan Valley once had two grocery stores, in 1968, which have since closed. She believes they closed because they overextended credit. For her, the problem of extending credit is a worry but the difficulties that come with running a grocery store in an extremely rural area are a necessary part of the job when providing this important service to her community.

To Collins the loss of grocery stores in Jordan Valley and other small towns nearby seems like a trend. Winnemucca, a town in Nevada three hours south on Hwy 95, used to have multiple stores but is now down to one. Collin has heard the store in Winnemucca has things delivered because of its isolation and distance from other places. Collins also mentioned that some stores do better because of their isolation or unique location. There is a small store in McDermitt, an unincorporated community on the border between Oregon and Nevada (the store is on the Nevada side) that has more business and gets things delivered because of their location on the Fort McDermitt Indian Reservation.

**Collaboration and Grocery Alliances:**
In the survey there are leading questions featuring some ideas for solutions or ways to help support small, independently-owned grocery stores. Both Jordan Valley stores mostly operate in isolation and do not work together or with other stores or entities outside of the area. Conrow does not, by choice, collaborate with other small independently owned stores though Clover Wholesale’s dairy deliveries for the Ranch Hand are dropped off at Mrs. Z’s. When first asked the question if she would be interested in collaborating with other stores, Conrow responded that she would not be interested. However she did mention that she would like to buy local beef again (because when she had local hamburger in the past it went fast) and if there was a group of stores or people that could purchase together (making it easier to purchase local beef) than she
would see the benefit of working together. Conrow was also asked if a statewide alliance of small, independently-owned grocery store owners would have value? Conrow says she knows of a local convenience store alliance that exists in Oregon but that an alliance of grocery store owners or stores in the eastern part of the state could be helpful. For her, there are disconnects between the policies that happen in Salem and their impact on eastern, rural areas. “What they do in Salem is hard over here and they don’t necessarily think of the outcomes for this area.”

Collins presently does not collaborate with other small independently owned stores, but would have an interest in doing so. She sees the possibilities collaboration might bring in regards to purchasing orders or buying. A unit of stores together could have the ability to buy volume as a group that would benefit all. To be able to buy things as a group would allow her to better stock her store with variety regularly - specifically fresh produce is difficult to have on a regular basis. When she buys fruit, once a week, it goes quickly before she is able to go back up for her weekly stocking trip to the Nampa area. Delivery of fresh produce and perishable items that are hard for stores in Jordan Valley to keep on a consistent basis would expand their ability to serve their community, lessen food insecurity in the area and increase access.

**Recommendations:**
To better support the Jordan Valley stores more information is needed about other small, isolated stores in Nevada on Hwy 95 and other stores in Southern Idaho. Information about who delivers to the stores in McDermitt, NV and Winnemucca, NV, their buying requirements, and their challenges would help to discover the possibilities for collaboration and establishing a network of rural stores in the area.

A short term, more immediate, goal to help both Jordan Valley stores have more business and increase food access in the community is to increase the use of SNAP benefits in Jordan Valley. Having a conversation with the Ranch Hand about the possibility of accepting SNAP would be a good place to start. The Ranch Hand does not have a card machine to process debit or credit so there might be some cost to getting an EBT
machine. However EBT machines that hook up to phone lines are a possibility and there are grants to get these machines for cheap or for free. Helping the Ranch Hand explore these possibilities would increase the likelihood the owners would view SNAP usage as a viable option for their store. The Ranch Hand’s present problem with unpaid accounts might lessen if a majority of their customer base is using SNAP and the Ranch Hand was able to accept SNAP dollars.

Along these lines, a SNAP community outreach push is also needed in Jordan Valley. Presently there is a DHS pilot program that uses laptops for people to remotely sign up for SNAP benefits without needing to be in their office. This would be a great option for Jordan Valley, given the two hour drive to reach Ontario where the closest DHS office is located. By eliminating a need for a trip, this could help many that don’t have the means to travel up to Ontario still be able to benefit from SNAP. Outreach addressing the stigma of SNAP would also help support these stores and increase the likelihood community members would sign up and use SNAP benefits. If SNAP is accepted at each store in town and community members view its usage as a real option for food security, and not something to be ashamed of, both stores would likely see an increase in business.

**Recommendation 5: Increase access to healthy, fresh, locally-grown food throughout the region, particularly in rural communities and food insecure populations.**

1. Establish WIC voucher, senior voucher and SNAP access at all area farmers’ markets and farm stands.
2. Increase the amount of fresh food in emergency food programs.
3. Promote participation in programs that address nutrition and self-reliance.

Jordan Valley again offers a good example of the efforts done this year to increase access to healthier, fresher food to populations that are traditionally underserved. Along with what has already been mentioned, there has been special attention in Jordan Valley given to foods that provide more nutritional value over the easier to ship/deliver non-perishable items. Ranchers Feeding Kids supports the effort to bring healthy, well-balanced hot
meals to students everyday that also regularly features local beef. Promoting gardening as a form of food security in Jordan Valley began with a suggestion by the school Superintendent and grew to be included in the Ranchers Feeding Kids event as a station about container gardening and how to grow tomatoes (a very popular food in the community) in high altitudes. The overwhelming response to the gardening session at the event (the evaluation forms listed it as one of the top topics people were excited to learn about during the day) led to an OSU Extension agent traveling to Jordan Valley and conducting a gardening class with a special emphasis on their unique climate. Finally their isolated location and desire for more food options piqued the interest of a Nampa, ID farmer interested in bringing a mobile farmstand to the area making fresh produce more readily available during the summer months. All of these programs work together to create a well-rounded approach for increasing access to healthy foods.

WIC Vouchers and Senior Vouchers are now accepted at the two well-established farmers’ markets in the area and through an increased number of farmstand vendors in Oregon. In April 2010, Ontario was a stop on a statewide tour to train direct-sale farmers to accept new WIC (Women, Infant and Children) Fruit and Veggie Vouchers (a program that began this year). The training reached six producers, including four who had never participated in the longstanding Farm Direct Nutrition Program (a WIC and senior voucher program that gives checks to these populations to support local farmers during the summer months). This training prepared three vendors at the Nyssa Farmers’ Market to accept FDNP checks and WIC vouchers, the market manager at the Vale Farmers’ Market to accept FDNP and WIC and two area farmstands that already accepted FDNP to accept the new WIC vouchers too. One farmstand in Ontario became equipped this year to accept SNAP and they are the only farmstand/direct-sale farmers in the area that accept SNAP benefits. For the area’s farmers’ markets the cost of operating the EBT machine necessary for accepting SNAP benefits is prohibiting them from being able to pursue that option. However all of the markets are open to the possibility, especially Nyssa. The possibility of a Farmers Market Promotion Program Grant from the USDA for eastern Oregon markets could make this process easier for the Nyssa and Vale farmers’ markets. Staying connected to other eastern markets and the statewide farmers market network
(Oregon Farmers Market Association) will be important as they continue to pursue this possibility.

Beyond donations from local growers and gardeners that get dropped off at the food bank’s warehouse and distributed through their network of pantries and programs, the only direct program that supplies fresh produce to the emergency food system is the Four Rivers Community Garden (FRCG) in Ontario. One of the community garden’s main purposes is to grow produce for the Next Chapter Food Pantry that is located next door. The FRCG, in 2009 its first year of production, raised 300 pounds of produce for the pantry. For 2010, the garden has a total of 18 beds, 11 beds more than in 2009, to grow produce and has a goal of doubling production and the amount they donate to the pantry.

As mentioned above with Jordan Valley, one of the goals this year has been to promote not just increased access to fresh foods but participation in programs that address nutrition and self-reliance and provide educational opportunities addressing these issues. Ranchers Feeding Kids is the largest example of a one-time introduction to the issues of nutrition and self-reliance because it featured information about nutrition and budgeting
and gardening on a budget to a very broad audience. The other programs introduced this year, for the most part, have introduced continual instruction or have plans to be implemented on a continual basis in the future. Two programs from Oregon Food Bank that addressed self-reliance were implemented in the Southeast Oregon community. One is the Seed to Supper program, which is a gardening instruction class for low-income adults (both a six week class and a one time basic gardening class). The Seed to Supper one-time basic gardening class was taught by a Master Gardener volunteer in April to the Oregon Childhood Development Coalition (OCDC) Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Program’s parents. The class was part of OCDC’s instructional series to their parents and included materials to start their own home garden and information about the community garden in the area. The other very successful class from Oregon Food Bank was conducted by the Outreach Coordinator for SORFB. Many in the community have expressed a desire for a cooking class targeted at low-income adults. The Operation Frontline Program’s cooking class began in June 2010 and was a six week class addressing nutrition, basic cooking skills and healthy meal preparation. The class was a big success with all spots being filled and the full class graduating after six weeks. There was such a desire for this class that many have already signed up for the next opportunity and there will be an AmeriCorps member hired to teach these classes this coming year. Its popularity indicates the true desire in this community for information and direction when it comes to healthy eating.
The final program that was introduced this year was a collaboration between the FRCG, OSU Extension Office, SEORFB and the Boys and Girls Club of the Western Treasure Valley. This program began in June 2010 and ran through mid-August (the length of the Boys and Girls Club summer program) and it addressed nutrition, healthy eating and gardening in both a classroom setting and outdoors. Each week the Boys and Girls Club members would have a session on Wednesdays and Fridays. On Wednesdays a regular group of club members went the community garden to plant their own plots and learn more about where their food comes from and how it grows. On Fridays, at the club, all members participated in an afternoon session focused on trying different healthy snacks and doing fun activities that introduced topics related to healthy eating, nutrition, or plants. The program ended with a small harvest meal where the kids picked produce from the garden and incorporated it into a healthy meal. The goal of this program was to provide the club members with fun, educational activities throughout the summer that got them excited and engaged with these important topics. All involved thought of the program as a success because of its ability to engage the club members and there are plans to continue it next summer. The other long-term goal is to be able to adapt this concept to have gardening and nutrition programs for other youth groups or schools in the area.
There other nutrition and self-reliance opportunities that are available in the community. OSU Extension Office, like with the Boys and Girls Club program, teaches nutrition education, as part of their SNAP Nutrition Education Program, in schools throughout the year. The Malheur County OSU Extension office does not have a master gardeners program – though there is one offered in neighboring Payette, ID through their extension office. The Extension service also does not offer preservation and canning classes though other entities in the community have filled the void. Susan Barton in Nyssa (with the Nyssa Chamber of Commerce and the Nyssa Farmers’ Market) has offered canning classes in the past and continues to offer them based on community sentiment. Kinney Bros & Keele True Value Hardware in Ontario offers a canning workshop each summer that is always well attended.

**Recommendation 6: Support existing community-based food projects and encourage the development of new projects.**

1. Promote the creation of farmers’ market and farm direct sales.
2. Promote the creation of community kitchens processing, meals and events.
3. Provide support for producers and entrepreneurs in value-added ventures.
4. Promote the creation of community gardens.

An important part of this year was the continued support and facilitation of community food projects. Many of these food projects began in 2008 or 2009 but with continued support this past year these projects were able to get on better footing for the future.

There are three farmers’ markets in the area – Nyssa, Ontario and Vale. The Nyssa Farmers’ Market is in its second year. During its first year, the market occurred the third Friday of the month in the evenings during the months of August, September and October. This year the Nyssa market began in June and takes place every Saturday morning (June through the end of September) and it also happens on the third Friday of the month in the evenings – keeping with tradition from last year. The market has a strong planning team that meets once a month to provide leadership, direction and decision making for the market – this team is made up of market vendors, interested
community members and city government. The market has had strong support from the City of Nyssa, the Nyssa Library and Nyssa Community Food Pantry. During its first year, the market was located on an abandoned lot on Main Street that is owned by the city. This year the market was moved to Thunderegg Park on Main Street (west of the US Bank). The market struggled this spring with insurance issues (the year before it was under the policy of the Nyssa Pantry but this arrangement could not continue with the new regularity of the market). The market is now covered under the City of Nyssa’s insurance policy. The market is still small but has increased interested vendors during its new season with its weekly instead of monthly market. The market still struggles with community support and turnout with low numbers of people attending and making purchases which has discouraged some of the vendors. Others understand the market needs time to grow and the community members need time to see it as a viable source for food. Another important aspect to consider for the Nyssa market is the population the market is trying to reach. Nyssa has both a high Latino population, and presently there are only a few irregular vendors that feature some traditional foods such as tortillas, peppers and chiles, empanadas or salsa, and a high poverty rate with much of its population receiving SNAP benefits. If the Nyssa market was able to sustainably accept SNAP with an EBT machine (and advertised this new feature extensively) I believe they would see an increase in their customer base. A survey of the community and their perception of the market would provide some insight about the direction the market should take in the coming years.
The Vale farmers’ market, Hot Springs Trading Post, is also in its second year of operation. The Hot Springs Trading Post is part of the Vale Farmers & Crafters Organization, a non-profit in the area. The market manager, Kate Humphrey, runs the market and makes the majority of the decisions. The Hot Springs Trading Post is open every Saturday morning and early afternoon June through September. The market operates much like a farmstand with the market manager staffing it instead of growers being the vendors. Growers come before the market begins to drop off and weigh in their produce and are able to leave. To keep the system fair, the market manager sets the price for all produce. Growers come back at the end of the market to weigh out their produce and collect the money they have made throughout the day. The market manager takes a percentage of each grower’s sales that goes back into market upkeep. The Vale farmers’ market, like the Nyssa Market, is also small with a small number of growers contributing to the market especially at the beginning of the season. Vale also struggles with a lack of community support and turnout.

The Ontario farmers’ market is called the Saturday Market and this year it began at the end of June and has plans to continue through September. The Saturday Market has
primarily been a craft market in the past because of its loose association with the House that Art Built, an arts and crafts co-op in Ontario. For years past there was an irregular, small market outside the House that Art Built on Saturdays during the summer that featured mostly crafts, jewelry and sometimes produce vendors. This year the market appointed a market manager, Terri Anne Finnerty (the only regular produce vendor at the market), who has done regular advertising, connected with other markets in the area (through the Community FEAST) and moved the market’s location. The Ontario Saturday Market is now downtown on Oregon Street (the downtown’s main street) at the park across from Radio Shack. The market is still small with mostly craft and jewelry vendors but it has potential to grow and there seems to be more interested produce vendors for next year. There is room for improvement because they do not presently have planning or vendor meetings and are playing a high deposit ($250) to the City of Ontario for use of the park. However they seem to have overcome the major problem Ontario has had in the past when trying to put together a market – finding volunteers and leadership to plan and implement it.

There was also a collective meeting in February between the Nyssa Farmers’ Market, Vale Farmers’ Market and those interested in having one in Ontario (this was before it was known that the Saturday Market was happening again and there was a market manager). Before this meeting some on the areas’ market planning teams felt that the markets were in competition with each other, but the meeting dissipated the majority of that feeling. The meeting was also an important information sharing opportunity to improve the markets, increase vendors and bring in different customers. It fostered new ideas such as collective marketing, by making a brochure and posters featuring all of the markets to increase advertising possibilities. This idea did not get implemented this year but is a great way to support and connect the markets in the future. Making the collective market meeting an annual winter event (to prepare for the upcoming market season) will be helpful as the markets continue to evolve in the future.

There is a community meal site in Ontario that operated the majority of the 2009-2010 year. This meal operates three times a week (Monday, Wednesday and Friday evenings)
and is a popular and dependable place for a hot meal for many in the community. There were two small “meals” that were a part of two self-sufficiency programs – the Operation Frontline Cooking Class and the Garden and Nutrition Program for the Boys and Girls Club. Each of these meals represented an accumulation of knowledge from these classes and were demonstrations of the nutrition, healthy eating and gardening experiences the students learned. Finally there was a desire expressed during the Community FEAST for a Harvest Festival that would highlight food grown in the area and the producers that grow it by bringing together all community members to partake and learn more about the bounty in the region.

The one category where there was little headway this year was with the creation of a community kitchen and support for producers’ added value ventures. Through the Local Food Guide inventory and discussions with many producers in the area, a community kitchen or processing facility was mentioned by many as a much desired addition to the area. This venture needs an assessment about possible directions to go and whether using an already existing church kitchen, revamping an existing structure or building a whole new place is best. It also needs partners, especially ones that see the economic value of supporting small food businesses. There are some in the area that have been creating added-value products. There is a teriyaki sauce maker who uses the Caldwell Commercial Kitchen run by the University of Idaho Extension Service. And this year Ashby Family Farms had their home kitchen certified as a domestic kitchen to process their lettuce into a bagged mixes and make baked goods such as muffins and cookies. These are examples of value-added ventures in the area but they can be expensive or inconvenient and finding out a way to support up and comers will be an important step in establishing a community kitchen.

The Four Rivers Community Garden is in its second year of production. During its first year the garden installed 10 raised beds, had volunteers contribute 500 hours and donated 300 pounds of produce to the Next Chapter Food Pantry. This year the garden worked hard on establishing leadership, becoming more organized, increasing its presence in the community and fulfilling their mission to provide educational opportunities to the greater
community about gardening. Highlights from this year include: re-engaging with the
Saint Matthew’s Episcopal Church community (they gave their land for the garden to
use), continuing to connect to emergency food programs, making various community
presentations, an event for the first anniversary of the garden on Earth Day, participating
in Serve Day (a faith-based nationwide volunteer service day), applying for multiple
grants, connecting with many in the community to receive donations and support for
transplants, seeds and starts for the year (especially from Ontario and Jordan Valley FFA
programs and local nurseries), receiving a donation of two maple trees to provide shade
for both garden volunteers and pantry patrons, becoming part of the Malheur Mentoring
and Enrichment Coalition, and collaborating with Malheur OSU Extension Office, The
Boys and Girls Club and the SEORFB to create a gardening and nutrition education
program for youth. The physical garden, this summer, increased the number of raised
beds to 18 and installed soaker hoses in all beds and connected them to a timed irrigation
system. This year the food bank has played a close supporting role for the garden
providing staff time to support the garden’s organizing, outreach, and programming
efforts. Though the garden is still struggling to maintain regular volunteers and
sometimes has difficulties with leadership and organization, they are better prepared to
run their operation with less direct support from SEORFB. However the food bank
should keep a strong relationship with the garden especially around their education
programming. Continuing to connect with the garden through client outreach and through
the garden and nutrition education program for the Boys and Girls Club (and hopefully
other youth organizations in the future) fits with both SEORFB and FRCG’s goals.
There is strong interest in establishing other community gardens in the area. There are two nearby community gardens in Idaho: one in Fruitland through Love, Inc. which is in its second year and another through WICAP in Payette that began its first year of production this summer (both are run through the staff of these organizations). Organizations and people that have expressed interest in having a community garden are OCDC, The Boys and Girls Club and the Nyssa community (many want to establish one for the Nyssa schools). Though there is interest expressed by all of these groups they have not gone beyond this step because of a lack of identified leadership to guide and implement these projects.

Interest has also been building for a new community project – Farm to School. There has been interest, especially in the Ontario area, in the past for getting a greenhouse or houses at the Ontario elementary schools to increase the student access and consumption of fruits and vegetables. This interest has been renewed this year and became evident as a project many would like to support at the Community FEAST workshop. During one of the FEAST breakout sessions: producers, Ontario’s school food director, and a representative
from the County Health Department came together to discuss the possibilities of a farm to school program. From this meeting the Ontario School District food director contacted the other school food directors in the area to invite them to a meeting to discuss their interest in buying more of their food locally. This meeting was a great success – having Nyssa, Vale, Ontario and Fruitland (ID) school food directors attend; all were interested and want to pursue further possibilities. The next step is to have a networking meeting between area producers that have the interest and capacity to sell to schools and the food directors to figure out ways to collaborate and work together to get high quality food in the schools. These food directors are also very interested in having the Ranchers Feeding Kids Program in their schools. Farm to School has so much potential to go in many different directions with more education, programming and student participation. The one constant that was expressed by all was the desire to have more local, fresh food in the schools.