

# CENTERING SMALL SCALE AGRICULTURE IN UNDER-RESOURCED COMMUNITIES

MOVING BEYOND FARM-TO-PANTRY

# INTRO: NEW CITY NEIGHBORS

A non-profit organization in Grand Rapids Michigan.

Our mission is to Empower Youth to Reach their Full Potential.

Our strategy is Good Food.

**New City Cafe:** A weekly pop-up restaurant serving wood fired pizzas, soups and baked goods to teach farm-to-table

Neighborhood engagement events around racism and sexism in the food system, cooking, gardening, etc.



# NEW CITY FARM

- 3 acre, 3 site urban and rural farm social enterprise
- Services 250 CSA Customers
- \$140,000 annual sales
- 25% of produce grown going to low income customers through EBT, Fresh Markets and Food Pantries.
- Employs 20 youth annually



# ACCESS OF WEST MICHIGAN

- Access' vision is to cultivate communities rooted in equitable systems.
- Good Food Programs
- Congregation Connections (housing assistance)
- Poverty Education Workshops
- Through partner collaboration, working towards holistic solutions to poverty by cultivating equitable systems through education and collaboration.



I GOT 99 PROBLEMS...

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Low income consumers lack access to fresh produce

Fresh produce is often the leftovers of a system designed for wealthier consumers

Food pantries lack infrastructure for keeping fresh produce fresh

Food access movements are often White led

Farmers are overwhelming White

Small Scale Farmers often struggle to be sustainable and are asked to do too much

Price point required by small scale producers is outside the range of low income consumers

Direct-to-consumer farms already spend a substantial amount of time distributing the food they produce via CSAs, farmers markets or high end wholesale accounts

“EVEN AS A FARMER, I HAVE TO DEAL WITH THE FACT THAT WHEN I COME DOWN TO THE FARMERS’ MARKET AND SELL MY PRODUCE I HAVE TO EDUCATE PEOPLE ABOUT THE VALUE AND COST OF FOOD, BECAUSE I AM SURROUNDED BY A FOOD SYSTEM—A SUBSIDIZED FOOD SYSTEM—THAT SKEWS THE COST AND VALUE OF FOOD. MY CARROTS ARE TWO DOLLARS. THEY ARE TWO DOLLARS BECAUSE I AM A FOR-PROFIT FARMER, AND UNLIKE THE CARROT FOR 99 CENTS THAT’S SOLD IN CELLOPHANE AT THE SUPERMARKET DOWN THE STREET OR THE BUNCH OF CARROTS THAT YOU GOT FOR FREE FROM THE FOOD PANTRY, THIS TWO-DOLLAR CARROT IS FEEDING ME, MY FAMILY, AND IT MEANS SOMETHING.

“IT IS A BAND-AID. I RECENTLY ASKED [THE STUDENTS IN MY GARDENING] CLASSES, “WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF FOOD PANTRIES AND FOOD KITCHENS?” AND OF COURSE THEY SAY, “TO FEED THE POOR,” AND “TO HAVE ACCESS TO FOOD,” AND SO ON. BUT THE MAIN FUNCTION OF THESE TWO APPROACHES IS [SUPPOSED TO BE] THAT THEY’RE RESERVED FOR EMERGENCIES ONLY. INSTEAD, THEY’VE BECOME A WAY OF LIFE.”

– Karen Washington, *Its not a Food Desert, It’s Food Apartheid*

# CHARITABLE FOOD SYSTEMS



- TRANSACTIONAL
- REACTIONARY
- RELIEF-ORIENTED
- PATERNALISTIC
- NEED-BASED



VALUES OF GOOD  
FOOD SYSTEM WORK

# GOOD FOOD SYSTEM VALUES



**Grow → Invest → Engage → Collaborate →  
Change**

# HOW DO WE CREATE A MORE EQUITABLE FOOD SYSTEM?



Root causes

Invest in local

Sustainability and  
Transformation

PREVIOUS STRATEGIES

# HEALTHY CORNER STORE

**Strengths:** Meets consumer where they are at with minimal infrastructure improvements needed.

Drives additional customer traffic for the store.

**Weaknesses:** Volume of produce sales is too low to move highly perishable items.

Produce needs to accompany other essential cooking ingredients.

Owners of store need to focus on profitability first and aren't primarily invested in the interests of the community or the low income customer.



# NEIGHBORHOOD FARMSTAND

**Strengths:** Alternative direct market for an urban farm

Super fresh produce for the customer

Unique ethnic foods can be included

Direct farm to customer connection

**Weaknesses:** Volume of produce sales is too low to move highly perishable items, resulting in a direct lost for farmers

Produce needs to accompany other essential cooking ingredients

Farm stands had limited hours

Another task on a long list of tasks



# CSA SHARES WITH EBT AND DOUBLE UP FOOD BUCKS

**Strengths:** Works within an existing farm's distribution system

Super fresh produce for the customer

Very affordable for the customer: \$14 per week on a Bridge Card

Guaranteed purchase for the farmer

**Weaknesses:** Choice is limited resulting in waste

Produce needs to accompany other essential cooking ingredients

CSA pick up has limited hours

Customer commitment is weaker

EBT equipment and reporting



# EMPOWERING HOME GARDENING

## Strengths:

- Highly empowering
- Food sovereignty

## Weaknesses:

- Finding stable and safe space to grow in can be a challenge
- Limited to seasonality
- Requires knowledge
- Not necessarily more affordable
- Some level of physical mobility is required





# CSA TO PANTRY

## Strengths:

- Low cost way to connect small scale produce to low income customers
- Works within an existing farm system
- Guaranteed purchase for farmer

## Weaknesses:

- CSAs are often designed for a middle to upper income family unit not bulk distribution
- Crop plans are driven by middle and upper income customers
- Unable to adapt to unique needs of the local communities surrounding the pantry
- Pantries are often viewed as being paternalistic
- Low customer choice and confusing
- Produce given away for free so not in built sustainability



FARM TO FRESH  
MARKET



- Healthy food retail social enterprises
  - Housed in non-profit entities who typically have a food pantry and other social services
- Produce sold at 50% of the retail value (other products not necessarily)
  - Sourcing Michigan-grown produce

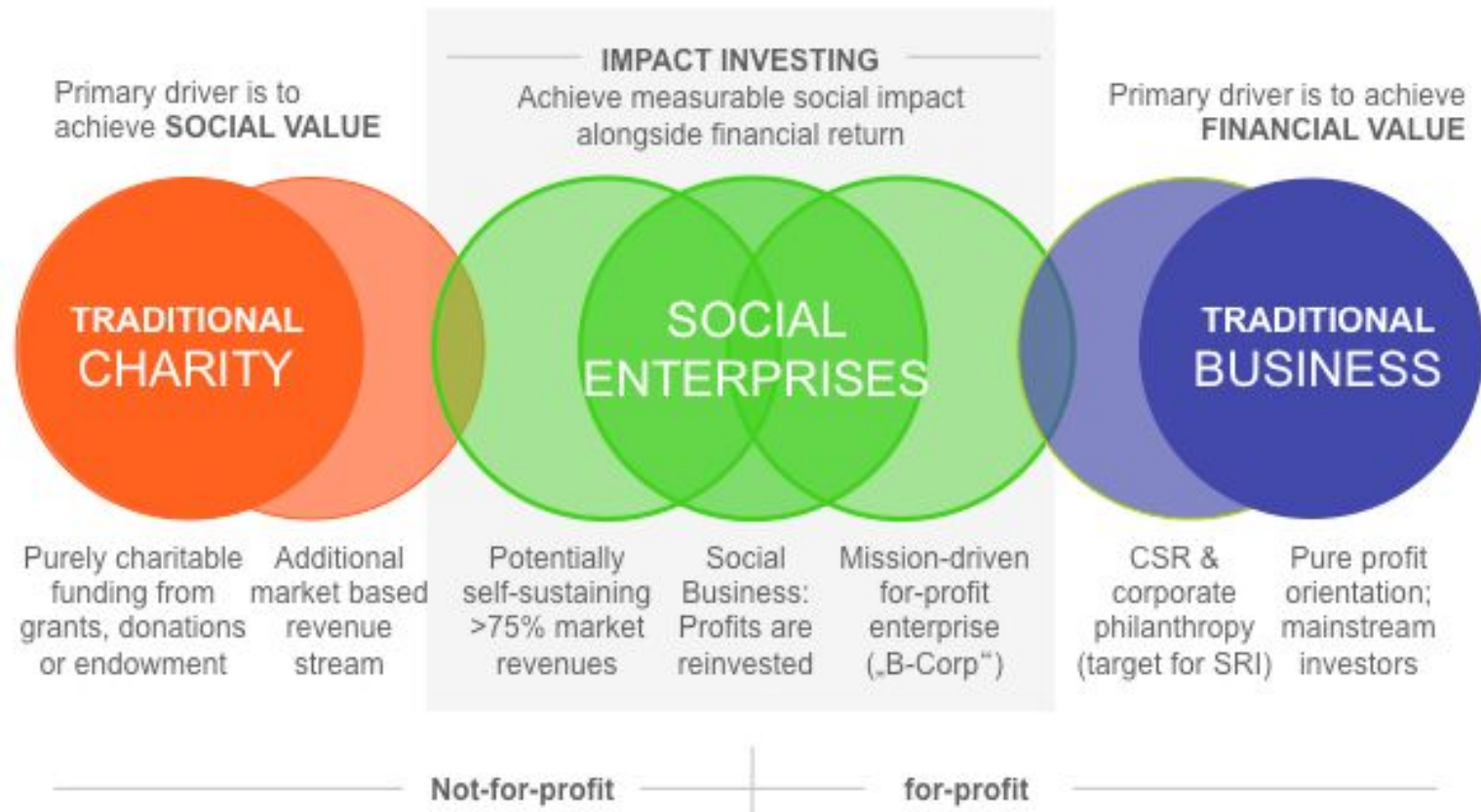
# HOW DOES IT WORK?



- Strategically partner with community resource centers in low food access areas
- Open to everyone, no income minimum or maximum
- Source food from local farmers (often much pricier) and places like Cherry Capital and Farm Link, also grocery stores
- Goal is to reduce barriers between small local farmers and their immediate neighbors
- Most markets accept many forms of government food assistance (SNAP/EBT)



# The business model spectrum revisited



Source: Adapted from J. Kingston Venturesome, CAF Venturesome, and EVPA.

# WHY FRESH MARKETS?

- Moving away from toxic charity model
- offers an affordable, dignified experience
- customer choice



- Adaptable: each market is unique to its neighbors/demographics
- Hyper-local
- Pricing varies at each location-many with a sliding scale

# MODEL 1: UCOM

- Smallest site
- Connecting to low income consumers
- Lots of buy-in from shoppers
- A good starting point
- Total Farm Direct Sales \$23,875
- Strengths:
- Personal connection between market coordinator and shoppers
- Mobile Market option with pre-orders to over 50 apartment complexes
- Weaknesses-housed in same building as food pantry-feels less like a shopping experience
- Limited cooler space
- Confusion on part of pantry-goers as to what is pantry, what is market



Hours: M-W 9:30-4:30, Thurs: 10-6



# MODEL 2: THE OTHER WAY

## Unique Features:

- Houses a Co-op, a pantry and a Fresh Market. Co-op membership is \$10 per month and members must be 200% of federal poverty line
- Total Farm Direct Sales \$6,640

## Strengths:

- Separate building-feels like a storefront
- Also sells other essentials
- Pay as you can sliding scale

## Weaknesses:

- Separate building-not integrating relationships b/w pantry members
- Very crowded inside store



Hours: Tues-Fri 9-4pm

# MODEL 3: UMCH

## Unique Features:

- Junk food sold here to draw customers in
- Never started from a pantry model
- An intergenerational learning center so they are able to buy unsold produce for use in preschool and elderly programs
- Brick and mortar store separate from other outreach programs—good and bad
- Staff comes with more of a business background
- Outside storefront has a warehouse feel, as a new food store, it has been challenging draw in customers



Hours: T,W 11-5, Th:11-7, F: 9-5

# MODEL 4: COMMUNITY FOOD CLUB

## Unique Features:

- Open to any Kent County household at or below 200% federal poverty
- Uses a Sam's Club model with membership
- Produce is cheapest, processed food is more expensive

## Strengths:

- 56% of what is sold is fresh produce
- Moves over 2000# of produce weekly

## Weaknesses:

- Less local food due to amount moved daily
- Only 5 paid staff, and lots of volunteers help to run it



Hours: M-F 10-5, Sat: 10-2

# MODEL 5: FLAT RIVER OUTREACH MINISTRIES

## Unique Features:

- Not a funded partner
- Sits inside a thrift store

## Strengths:

- Buy-in from site
- One stop shopping with thrift store connection
- Previous social enterprise experience

## Weaknesses:

- Not enough community members know it is there



Hours: M-F 10-6, Sat 10-2

THE FARMING SIDE:  
THE FOCUS SHARE

# DISTRIBUTION WITHIN AN EXISTING SYSTEM

## **Low Income Site Needs**

- Meet the consumer where they are at
- Utilize existing non-profit infrastructure
- Provide desired produce only
- Provide choice
- Low cost produce
- Sustainability

## **Farmer Needs**

- Guaranteed purchase for the farmer
- Efficient one day distribution with sales totalling a minimum of \$500 weekly
- Financial Support to develop new distribution system
- Sustainability

# COMMUNITY INFORMED CROP PLAN: FOOD SITES WERE SURVEYED WITH THE END GOAL OF DETERMINING 5 SEASONAL CROPS THAT WOULD BE DELIVERED WEEKLY IN BULK.

May - June 15

Season	Item	Quantity	Cost
<b>Spring Share</b>	Cilantro	1 bundle	\$1.50
	Collards	1 bundle	\$2.00
	Green Onions	1 bundle	\$1.50
	Lettuce	2 heads	\$4.00
	Spinach	1/2 # bag	\$4.00
		<b>Total</b>	<b>\$13.00</b>
<b>Spring Sub Items</b>	Kale	2 bundle	\$4.00
	Radishes	2 bundle	\$3.00

June 15 - July 15

Season	Item	Quantity	Cost
	Broccoli	1	\$2.50
	Cabbage	1	\$2.00
	Carrots	2#	\$4.00
	Lettuce	1 head	\$2.00
	Peas	1 pt.	\$3.00
		<b>Total</b>	<b>\$13.50</b>
	Cilantro	2 bundle	\$3.00
	Collards	2 bundle	\$4.00
	Kale	2 bundle	\$4.00
	Radishes	2 bundle	\$3.00

## July 15 - August

Season	Item	Unit	Cost
Summer Share	Beans	1#	\$4.00
	Carrots	1#	\$2.00
	Cucumbers	2	\$3.00
	Green Peppers	2	\$2.00
	Onions	1#	\$2.00
		<b>Total</b>	<b>\$13.00</b>
Summer Sub Items	Celery	Head	\$2.00
	Collards	bundle	\$2.00
	Green Tomato	1#	\$2.00
	Jalapeno	6	\$2.00
	Kale	bundle	\$2.00
	Poblano	3	\$2.00
	Summer Squash	3	\$2.00

## August - October

Season	Item	Unit	Cost
	Carrots	1#	\$2.00
	Onions	1#	\$2.00
	Peppers (Red, Yellow)	3	\$3.00
	Tomatoes	2#	\$4.00
	Tomatoes (Roma and Cherry)	1 pint	\$3.00
		<b>Total</b>	<b>\$14.00</b>
Sub Items	Cabbage	Head	\$2.00
	Celery	Head	\$2.00
	Eggplant	2	\$3.00
	Garlic	2	\$3.00
	Green Tomato	1#	\$2.00
	Jalapeno	6	\$2.00
	Poblano	3	\$2.00
	Sweet Potatoes	1#	\$2.50



## November - December

Season	Item	Unit	Cost
Fall Share	Broccoli	1	2.5
Nov-Dec	Carrots	2#	4
	Garlic	1 head	1.5
	Onions	1#	2
	Potatoes	2#	4
		<b>Total</b>	<b>14</b>
Fall Sub Item	Butternut Squash	1	\$2.50
	Cabbage	1	\$2.00

## August - October

Season	Item	Unit	Cost
Winter Share	Carrots	1	\$2.00
Feb-15-April	Garlic	1	\$1.50
	Onions	1	\$2.00
	Potatoes	2	\$4.00
	Spinach	0.5	\$4.00
		<b>Total</b>	<b>\$13.50</b>

CHOICE COMBINED WITH  
STABLE VOLUME: THE  
WEEKLY GOOGLE FORM



“BUYING LOCAL PRODUCE AT THE MARKET IMPACTS EVERYONE- THE LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM IS STRENGTHENED, FARMERS CAN SELL MORE BECAUSE CONSUMERS ARE BUYING MORE, AND THERE IS BETTER HEALTH FOR SHOPPERS!”

- Fresh Market Customer



# COMMUNITY FEEDBACK:

- ▶ 98% OF SHOPPERS REPORTED THAT DUE TO THE MARKET, THEY CAN COOK HEALTHIER FOOD FOR THEIR HOUSEHOLD
- ▶ 100% OF SHOPPERS REPORTED THE MARKET MAKING IT EASIER TO ACCESS FRESH FRUITS AND VEGETABLES IN THEIR NEIGHBORHOOD
- ▶ 90% OF SHOPPERS REPORTED THEY FEEL THEIR OVERALL HEALTH HAS IMPROVED DUE TO SHOPPING AT THE MARKETS
- ▶ 97.5% OF SHOPPERS REPORT FEELING MORE FOOD SECURE BECAUSE OF SHOPPING AT THE MARKET



# STRENGTHS:

- LOW INCOME CUSTOMERS HAVE AGENCY
- LOW INCOME CUSTOMERS ARE A PART OF A COMMUNITY BASED SOLUTION
- ACCESS TO HEALTHY LOCAL PRODUCE IS IMPROVED
- MORE DIGNIFIED THAN A PANTRY EXPERIENCE
- REVENUE ALLOWS FOR INCREASED SUSTAINABILITY
- CONNECTED TO LOCAL FARMERS
- LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM IS STRENGTHENED OVERALL
- STRONGER COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

# WEAKNESSES:

- SEASONAL AVAILABILITY STILL RESULTS IN LIMITED CHOICE
- SINGLE FARM STREAM CAN RESULT IN INCONSISTENT SUPPLY OF CROPS
- FINDING THE RIGHT VOLUME POINT FOR EACH SITE CAN BE CHALLENGING
- LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY IS QUESTIONABLE
- MARKETING AT SITES SHOULD BE IMPROVED TO HIGHLIGHT FARMERS MORE

# THANKS!

## Contact us:

Lance Kraai, New City Neighbors,  
Operations Director

[lancek@newcityneighbors.org](mailto:lancek@newcityneighbors.org)

[www.newcityneighbors.org](http://www.newcityneighbors.org)

Gratia Lee, Access of West Michigan,  
Good Food Systems Director

[gratia@accessofwestmichigan.org](mailto:gratia@accessofwestmichigan.org)

[www.accessofwestmichigan.org](http://www.accessofwestmichigan.org)

## Other Resources:

Mother Hubbard's Cupboard-Bloomington, IN  
<https://www.mhcfoodpantry.org/>

Local Matters, Columbus, OH  
<https://www.local-matters.org/>

## Books:

*Big Hunger* by Andy Fisher

*The Stop* by Nick Saul and Andrea Curtis

*Sweet Charity* by Janet Poppendieck