



CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

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1. BACKGROUND

Growing Partners of Southwest Colorado (Growing Partners) is a collaborative effort between five service and non-profit organizations. Growing Partners is dedicated to implementing a sustainable local food program that reaches all incomes, ages and cultures and seeks a culturally-rich approach to food security among a tri-ethnic and low-income population in Southwest Colorado. With this joint mission, the organizations came together in 2004, forming a partnership to collaboratively provide community food projects with an emphasis on underserved populations, youth, schools and food producers. The five organizations involved are the Southern Ute Community Action Program, The Garden Project of Southwest Colorado, La Boca Center for Sustainability, Turtle Lake Refuge and Southwest Marketing Network. In 2005 they applied to the USDA Community Food Projects Grant Program (CFPCGP).

Goals of the initial project were:

- Meeting the food needs of low-income families while increasing self-sustainability;
- Creating linkages between existing food networks and social service organizations and schools;
- Promoting health and wellness;
- Providing environmental education that emphasizes the connection between food, land and culture.

In response to the initial grant application, Growing Partners was funded by the USDA CFPCGP to initiate and lead a community-wide food assessment (CFA). The assessment was designed to identify the current needs and resources of the local food system, address the specific needs of underserved populations in accessing healthy food and to encourage community participation in the planning and evaluation phases of the assessment. Since the organizations involved had already centered their programs on underserved populations (including, but not limited to, people with mental and physical limitations, older adults, high-risk and disadvantaged youth and low-income families), it was a natural fit to center the assessment on these populations as well. The CFA also profiled other factors affecting our food system,

Community Food Assessment: “A collaborative process that examines a broad range of food-related issues and resources in order to improve the local food system.”
Community Food Security Coalition

including economic, social, cultural, environmental and agricultural factors. Other populations profiled in the CFA included food producers, distributors, consumers, youth and schools.

Each organization involved in the project brought unique experience and qualifications to the partnership. Combined, the partners have over 60 years experience providing a variety of social services to underserved populations.

The partnership operates under the fiscal management of the Southern Ute Community Action Program (SUCAP). For more than 40 years, SUCAP has implemented and managed a wide range of social service programs and has been recognized by the federal government for their responsible fiscal management.

Located on nearly 200-acres of irrigated farmland, the recently established La Boca Center for Sustainability can provide the land, water, volunteer workforce and technical expertise necessary to implement future community food projects.

The Garden Project of Southwest Colorado provides an educational and therapeutic component to the project and has been providing programs to disadvantaged and low-income youth in the Durango area since the late 1990s. This program expanded in 2004 to assisting older adults and people with disabilities.

Since 1997, Turtle Lake Refuge has been increasing local organic food distribution and experiential nutritional education in the community, and the Southwest Marketing Network addresses policy issues affecting local food systems.

Together these five organizations provided the necessary expertise, resources, networking capabilities and fiscal management to successfully implement the Growing Partners CFA. (Each organization is described in more detail below).

Geographic and Social Populations Served

The community food assessment provided a comprehensive assessment of La Plata County along with a partial assessment of surrounding counties – all within the San Juan Basin of the Four Corners area. The San Juan Basin encompasses a tri-ethnic population of Native American, Anglo and Latino residents. La Plata County has a total population of 43,941.¹ While the assessment focused primarily on the consumers of La Plata County, the food producers profiled were from La Plata and the surrounding counties. In Colorado the counties included were La Plata, Montezuma, Archuleta, San Juan, and Dolores counties. Also included was San Juan County, New Mexico. Primary considerations in designing the CFA included cultural, health, environmental and economic factors of the people served.² Growing Partners centered the assessment on underserved populations including but not limited to people with mental and physical limitations, high-risk and disadvantaged youth, older adults and low-income families. This was accomplished by involving organizations that serve these populations.

¹ Durango's in-town population is 14,802, Ignacio (658), Bayfield (1,565) with the remaining population rural: 27,697 (Census 2000 La Plata County).

² For more information on the population served by the food assessment, the socio-economic, environmental and agricultural demographics of our county see Chapter II.

2. PROJECT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The assessment was designed to identify the current needs and resources of the local food system and address the specific needs of underserved populations in accessing healthy food. It was also designed to encourage community participation in the planning and evaluation phases of the assessment. As stated, Growing Partners has centered its programs, and thus the community food assessment, on underserved populations, by involving organizations that serve these populations. The CFA provided a profile of the factors affecting our current food system including economic, social/cultural, environmental, and agricultural factors. Populations profiled in the CFA consisted of food and agriculture producers, consumers, underserved populations, youth and schools.

Goals of the Community Food Assessment were to:

- Identify resources and needs regarding a) the local food system, b) underserved populations, c) Farm-to-School, and d) key stakeholders;
- Strengthen links between existing food system groups;
- Promote community learning and participation through the community food assessment;
- Use the results of the community food assessment to plan effective Community Food Projects.

3. ORGANIZATIONS AND STAFF

Table 1 lists the organizations responsible for implementing the Growing Partners grant and provides principal contacts for these organizations. All of the organizations collaborating in the implementation of the CFA are established non-profit and/or volunteer organizations that currently work to improve living conditions in disadvantaged communities of La Plata County. Each organization, including its mission, existing programs and operating history is described below.

TABLE 1. RESPONSIBLE ORGANIZATIONS AND CONTACTS

Organization	Responsibility	Contact Information
Southern Ute Community Action Program	Fiscal Agent/ Applicant	970-563-4517
La Boca Center for Sustainability	Delegating organization	970-563-9383
The Garden Project of Southwest Colorado	Delegating organization	970-259-3123
Turtle Lake Refuge	Delegating Organization	970-247-0514
Southwest Marketing Network	Delegating	970-588-2292

SOUTHERN UTE COMMUNITY ACTION PROGRAM (SUCAP)

SUCAP was established in 1966 by the Southern Ute Indian Tribe to serve the entire community. SUCAP employs 140 people in 11 counties, helping thousands of individuals and families each year. Family programs include Southern Ute Head Start, Dare to Be You, Ignacio Senior Center, Peaceful Spirit and Peaceful Spirit Youth Services. Youth programs include Youth Activities Center and Teen Court. Employment Programs include The Training Advantage and Road Runner Transit. SUCAP's mission is to promote the well-being of families and neighbors through social, educational, and economic growth. In addition to SUCAP's role as fiscal manager and their exemplary record, the organization serves as a valuable resource to Growing Partners in recruiting volunteers and identifying low-income families and other underserved groups to participate in garden programs.

THE GARDEN PROJECT OF SOUTHWEST COLORADO (TGP)

The mission of TGP is to build healthier communities through the promotion of sustainable local food systems and the facilitation of year-round educational and therapeutic garden programs. TGP focuses its goals around education, horticultural therapy and community food security issues. TGP combined the efforts of two existing programs, the "Greens and Things" Children's Gardens, and the "Growing Community Food Project." Because of shared missions to provide educational and therapeutic gardening programs, these organizations merged in 2002.

The educational and therapeutic garden programs of TGP reach all age groups and income levels, and are well integrated with existing and developing community social programs such as La Plata Youth Services, Neighborhood Network Center, and Youth Build. Garden sites for 2005 include Durango Housing Corporation (north and south locations), Riverhouse Children's Center, Manna Soup Kitchen, Prugh residential community garden and Sunshine Gardens, an assisted living facility. In 2006, the focus of the Garden Project was geared towards the community food assessment, training participating garden leaders and its residential community garden plot.

LA BOCA CENTER FOR SUSTAINABILITY (LBCS)

The mission of LBCS is to create an atmosphere that nurtures curiosity and inspires creativity and compassion in human beings while integrating respect and responsibility toward the natural world by shaping the balance essential to sustaining healthy ecosystems and human communities. La Boca is on the map as an old southwest Colorado farming and ranching community, and as a former stop on the Durango and Rio Grande Western narrow gauge railroad. It has historically been one of the largest ranching operations in Southwest Colorado. La Boca has begun the process of revitalizing its past by implementing programs that build community, distribute goods and knowledge to local communities, and provide food security through sustainable agriculture.

A Colorado non-profit since 2003, LBCS is a young organization with a strong determination to address food security through networking and building alliances between people dedicated to the same goal. LBCS is designing solutions to issues of food sovereignty and integrating those solutions into other aspects of sustainability. Utilizing examples, education, research and social change, LBCS will serve as a hub for sustainable development.

In the fall of 2004 La Boca began the LBCS Community Supported Agriculture project (CSA) to supply members with organic free-range eggs, goat milk, goat cheese and produce, and CSA intends to serve as a teaching model for replication. The CSA organizes bulk orders to reduce the cost of high quality goods not produced in the area. LBCS began efforts in 2004 towards the creation of the Ignacio Farmers' Market in an effort to link producers and consumers in and around Ignacio, Colorado.

TURTLE LAKE REFUGE (TLR)

TLR's mission is to celebrate the connection between personal health and wild lands. Established in 1997, TLR aims to create a more sustainable community by linking the value of a healthy internal environment (our bodies) with a healthy external environment (the earth). TLR promotes eating locally grown foods, wild harvested foods and living foods, all of which decrease the stress on our bodies and the earth. TLR grows local food in gardens and greenhouses and harvests wild foods. Both are then distributed to the community through educational workshops, "Local Wild Life" Lunches, health food stores and the Durango Farmers' Market. They are educators and stewards of sustainable practices. For example, TLR employs a bicycle-powered blender, bicycle-powered wheat grass juicer, solar dehydrators and delivers by bicycle and a vehicle powered by vegetable oil. TLR strives to live in harmony with the earth and its inhabitants while building a strong and integrated community. TLR received its 501(c) 3 in 2000.

SOUTHWEST MARKETING NETWORK, SW COLORADO PROJECT (SWMN)

The goal of the SWMN is to ensure that new, existing, and prospective Southwest producers, especially small-scale, alternative, and minority producers, have the connections, technical and financial assistance, marketing information, business and marketing skills, and peer examples needed to improve their profitability, viability, and numbers. This is done through SWMN's annual conferences, website (www.swmarketingnetwork.org), quarterly newsletter to over 3000 readers and demonstration projects.

The Southwest Colorado Project is a demonstration project of the SWMN. This project has developed and distributed 1000 copies of the *Mesa Verde Guide to Local Sustainable Food and Fiber*, a directory of local direct marketers. This publication is also available at a local website, www.sustainableswcolorado.org. The SW Colorado Project has also begun a Food and Agriculture Policy Working Group which is identifying policy issues that impact the local food system, alternative and direct marketing and sustainable production in the region. From the policy group, a Farm to School group has formed to tie local agriculture to educational and nutritional needs of schools. The group is working to enhance student awareness and understanding of local agriculture, to improve the overall nutritional quality of food in the local schools and to bring local foods into the schools.

THE STAFF

SHARI FITZGERALD,

Program Director and Founder of TGP and Project Director for Growing Partners

Shari Fitzgerald is the co-founder and program director of The Garden Project of Southwest Colorado. She has served as the Director for the youth garden programs since 1997. Shari's responsibilities have included providing gardening lessons, advocacy, and program development for the youth, school and community garden programs. Previous work

included serving as Executive Director for the Rape Intervention Team, and over 8 years volunteering for rape services and child abuse programs in Colorado and in the Midwest. Shari received a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology from Fort Lewis College in 1998. Shari is the project director for the Growing Partners grant. Her portion of the assessment focuses on youth and schools, health and nutrition and restaurants.

KATY PEPINSKY,

Local Foods System Activist and Agricultural Marketing Consultant

Katy received her BS in Botany from Auburn University in Alabama in 1999 and her MA in Agriculture from Colorado State University in 2005. Since 2003, she has advocated for and partnered with Colorado producers to develop markets and distribution networks for locally grown and processed foods. She has also worked with The Western Sustainable Agriculture, Research, & Education (WSARE) Program and Southwest Marketing Network (SWMN) on agricultural research. Katy joined the Growing Partners of Southwest Colorado in January of 2006. Her primary role with the food assessment has been focused on low-income and Latino residents, and agricultural networking and research.

CHESTER ANDERSON,

Director La Boca Center for Sustainability

Chester Anderson received his B.A. in Ecology and Evolution from the University of California, Santa Barbara and his M.S. in Entomology from Cornell University. He conducted basic research for 15 years in stream ecology and in high elevation lakes at the Rocky Mountain Biological Laboratory and has been involved in numerous stream monitoring and research efforts for a variety of agencies and companies throughout the Southwest. In 1995 he began his own consulting business. Through that experience he has developed water quality monitoring studies that include macroinvertebrates, fish, periphyton and water chemistry parameters. He has designed a number of monitoring studies to identify the degree of impacts and the sources of pollution from point and non-point sources including acid mine drainage, agricultural and urban runoff. In 1997 he began managing a 180-acre farm and ranch in southwestern Colorado and, with his partner, founded the La Boca Center for Sustainability, a non-profit dedicated to sustainable agriculture. The non-profit has overseen a number of projects designed to reduce the impacts of grazing and other agricultural systems on the natural world. Chester has administered an intern program as well as numerous grants, and currently manages a lab that offers a number of water quality and agricultural services. He recently graduated from a soil-food web class with Dr. Elaine Ingham. Through LBCS as a Growing Partner, Chester has helped with administration of the food assessment.

SUE BRUCKNER,

Horticultural Therapy Program Director and Founder of The Garden Project

Sue has completed training at The Horticultural Therapy Institute in Denver, a program supported by Colorado State University. Sue specializes in working with older adult and mentally and/or physically limited citizens. She hopes to present workshops in the future on horticultural therapy and adaptive gardening techniques. She is responsible for the implementation of the horticultural therapy programs at youth and enabling gardens for The Garden Project. Sue's role in the assessment is to survey the needs and resources of seniors and people with mental and physical limitations.

KATRINA BLAIR,
Director and Founder of Turtle Lake Refuge

As the director of Turtle Lake, Katrina is responsible for facilitating and teaching workshops and classes on wild food identification, gathering and preparation, as well as sustainable practice classes. Katrina coordinates volunteers, interns and work-study students. Her other responsibilities include managing “Local Wild Life” lunches, greenhouse and garden planting, administration, advertising and program management. Katrina’s role in the project is focused on the youth population and providing information on wild plants and gleaned food resources in our community.

JIM DYER,
Director Southwest Marketing Network, Project Evaluator

Jim Dyer assists program evaluation through coordinating and facilitating quarterly meetings with the key partners of Growing Partners. Jim also serves as Growing Partners’ Farm-to-School liaison. Jim is a part-time Executive Director of the Colorado Organic Producers Association, the Project Director for the Southwest Marketing Network, and consults on agriculture, water, and environmental issues. He has also taught at the college level both full and part-time over the past 30 years.

EILEEN WASSERBACH,
Executive Director, Southern Ute Community Action Program

Eileen is the Executive Director of Southern Ute Community Action Programs, Inc. SUCAP is a human service-based non-profit providing programs in early childhood development, substance abuse treatment, senior citizens needs, employment training, youth activities and transportation. As the Fiscal Manager for this project, SUCAP applies its 40 years of grant management expertise to assure compliance with federal funding documents and audit requirements. SUCAP’s many programs are also interested in participating with efforts to provide fresher and more nutritious foods, especially to the economically disadvantaged citizens it serves.

CHRIS BARKER,
La Boca Center for Sustainability

Barker served with Growing Partners until March of 2006. His primary role included interviewing farmers and identifying existing county and national research.

GABE EGGERS,
Turtle Lake Refuge

Gabe served with Growing Partners from October through March of 2006. Gabe left his role with the assessment in the spring of 2006 to complete a program at the University of California at Santa Cruz on Agro-Ecology and Sustainable Food Systems. Gabe’s primary role was as volunteer coordinator.

4. ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

Data collected for the community food assessment focused on both qualitative and quantitative data. We approached the project as members of the community, and regarded our community as the experts behind understanding the food system. Only a few of us on the assessment team had a background in interviewing, data collection and analysis. However, we came to the table first as experienced farmers, growers, educators and community members, and second as individuals dedicated to the research component. As interviewers, our responsibility was to present a blank slate to the community, and our only agenda was to allow all participating interviewees and respondents to speak without restraint about our food system.

Before beginning the assessment, we spent several months planning the project, defining our goals, audience, methods, and internal and external evaluation procedures. This process involved researching other community food projects and their methodologies, identifying existing county and national research and identifying a broad spectrum of questions and topics on which to focus. We then sought the support and advice of the community on how to narrow the focus of the assessment and reach those goals. Specifically, we distributed a planning survey to the local Farm-to-School Working Group and other community members to define the parameters for the youth and school portion of the assessment. We made a presentation to the Southern Ute Tribal Council to inform them of our project and identify possible areas of interest for the tribe, and we circulated a flyer and media campaign that sought support and feedback from the community. Lastly, we held a community-wide food forum in Ignacio. The forum, open to all community members, had the goals of educating the community on the CFA and seeking community feedback on the areas of focus for the food assessment.

Data for the food assessment was collected in the following ways:

1. Written interviews and surveys (in-person and by phone)
2. Consumer surveys
3. Community food forums
4. Secondary data resources and other county assessments
5. Coalition meetings

In addition to conducting research, Growing Partners used the data gathered during the assessment to produce educational materials that were then distributed to the community. A harvest calendar, a local foods menu, a Farm-to-School product list, a Farm tours booklet and an informational brochure on Growing Partners and the goals of the community food assessment were all produced, some of which can be accessed at www.sustainableswcolorado.org/cfa.htm, in the full food assessment report.

Written Interviews and Surveys

Interviews and surveys were tailored for specific populations resulting in separate surveys for farmers and ranchers, youth, school administration and staff, non-profit and social service agencies, Latino residents and consumers. Each of the surveys were comprised of some common questions and themes such as: What are our greatest community food needs? What are our greatest community food strengths and resources? What does food security mean to La Plata County residents?

A total of 469 surveys have been collected to date, representing 35 farmers, 36 agencies, 36 restaurants, 13 grocers, 123 consumers, 96 forum participants, 100 youth, 25 schools and 5 medical and nutritional experts. Interviews and surveys ranged from 15-minute consumer surveys to 6-hour in-person interview. In-person and phone interviews provided more in depth data, as well as more opportunities for education and networking among Growing Partners and participating individuals and organizations.

Consumer Surveys

A consumer survey was distributed between April and October of 2006. The survey was designed to reach as many La Plata County residents as possible to connect socio-demographic information with food choices, perceptions, needs and interest in food projects. Surveys were administered in numerous locations and at several events in the county in order to get a wide range of participants. Some of the locations or events included The Taste of Durango, Cinco de Mayo, Farmers' Appreciation Day, The Durango Farmers' Market, Mountain Valley Market, USDA Commodities Food Distribution, and The San Juan Basin Health Clinic.

Community Food Forums

As part of the planning and data collection process, two public forums were held. The first was in the town of Ignacio and the second in Hesperus. Over 60 people attended the Ignacio forum in February 2006. With great community support, a free, locally-grown and prepared dinner was provided. Participants were asked to identify areas for research as well as individuals and organizations to include in the assessment.

The second forum was held in August 2006 in Hesperus. This forum focused on reaching the residents of the Fort Lewis Mesa District, where much of the agricultural land in our community is located. The second forum was designed around food and agricultural needs and resources in the western region of La Plata County, with a focus on agricultural and rural food security.

Secondary Data Resources and Other County Assessments

Growing Partners utilized existing county information from a variety of national and locally published resources. Survey information was collected from other county assessments including the 2006 Grassroots Visioning Projects, 2006 Healthy Lifestyle Coalition health assessment, Operation Healthy Communities Pathways Index (a socio-economic profile), and the Fort Lewis Mesa 2006 Planning survey. The Durango 9R School District and the Nutrition Task Force also provided Growing Partners with the results of a district food services study and 500 parent and student surveys.

Coalition Meetings

Growing Partners attended regular meetings with the local Farm-to-School group, Nutrition Task Force, Sustainability Alliance, Healthy Lifestyle Coalition and the Fort Lewis Mesa Planning Group. Growing Partners staff participated in the meetings to reach its goal of strengthening and expanding food networks as well as gathering data about the food needs and resources of these existing community groups.

5. EVALUATION

Growing Partners used several methods of evaluation including development and the use of a logic model, monthly management team meetings, monthly progress reports and the use of the common output tracking form. The Growing Partners staff used a monthly progress report to categorize the amount of time spent on various project tasks, including research, data collection and analysis, volunteer recruitment and networking, evaluation, administration/staff meetings and contact.

SWMN's Jim Dyer served as the team's evaluator. At an initial meeting of the project team in October 2005, the draft logic model was selected to serve as the basis of quarterly progress assessments. The logic model's goals and corresponding outcomes were listed previously in this report. These quarterly project team assessments were conducted on Jan 18, May 15 and Sept. 25, 2006. At each session, the goals and outcomes were re-examined to assess whether changes were necessary. This review process resulted in no substantive changes. Subsequently, the team assessed progress toward each outcome, noting whether we were on target for achieving the outcome by the end of the project, and making necessary adjustments. This review process resulted in changes to specific priorities, the dropping of some tasks and the substitution of others. The most common adjustments were decisions to bring in additional stakeholders deemed necessary for new insights. In each session, team members were queried as to the effectiveness of internal communications, workload and similar work situations. This resulted in streamlined communications, work shifts among team members and clarified responsibilities.