



CHAPTER VII FOOD SECURITY IN LA PLATA COUNTY

1. WHAT DOES FOOD SECURITY MEAN TO LA PLATA COUNTY?
 - A LOOK AT ISOLATION AND AT THE LACK OF FOOD PRODUCTION

2. FOOD SECURITY ISSUES WITHIN SPECIFIC POPULATIONS: *How Food Insecurity Plays Out in Underserved Populations*
 - LATINO/IMMIGRANT
 - NATIVE AMERICAN
 - OLDER ADULTS & PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES – *A Contribution from Sue Bruckner*
 - LOW-INCOME
 - RURAL RESIDENTS

1. WHAT DOES FOOD SECURITY MEAN TO LA PLATA COUNTY?

Assessment Methodology. Producers and agricultural experts, agencies, and forum participants were asked to define *community food security*. Producers and agricultural experts were asked, “Is La Plata County Food Secure?” Agencies were asked how food security plays out in the populations they serve, and to what degree food issues rank versus other issues¹ within those groups. Forum participants were also asked, “How can we address food insecurity in La Plata County?” All responses were recorded in their various forms, and included in this chapter. These groups, along with the surveys they received, are listed below.

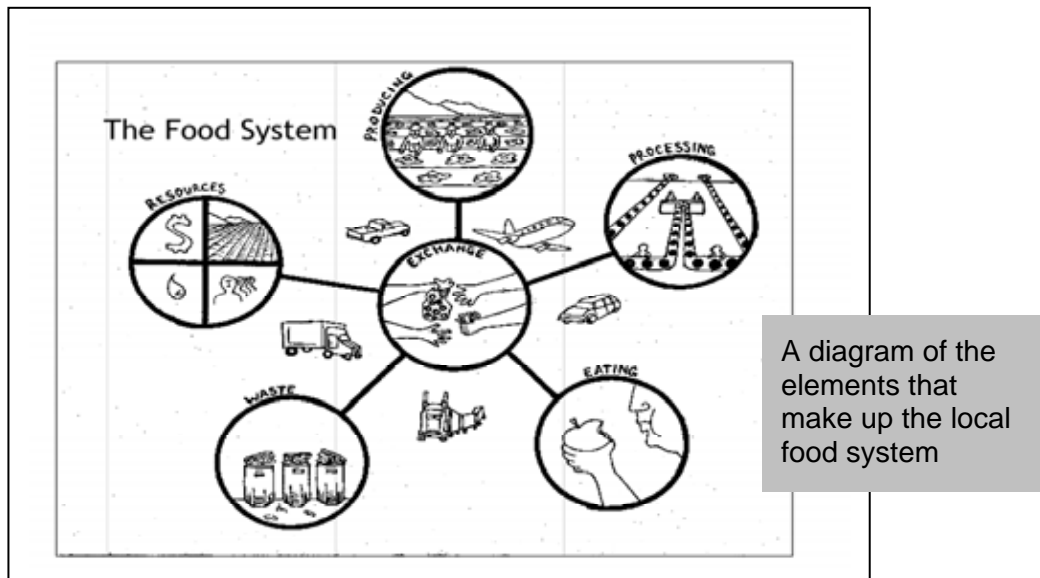
Food System: “A network of human, institutional, and resource connections from food production to consumption.”

Carol Shenan, Director of the Center for Agro Ecology and Sustainable Food Systems

A FOOD SYSTEM PROFILE AND RESPONDENTS FROM EACH SECTOR:

- Producers – *Farm and Ranch Survey, Agricultural Expert Interview*
 - Farmers
 - Ranchers
 - Agricultural Experts
- Distributors, Packers, Processors – *Agricultural Expert Interview*
 - Meat packer
 - Raw Food Bar Manufacturer

¹ Issues like domestic violence, shelter, substance abuse, etc...



- Resources – *Agency Survey, School Survey, Restaurant Survey, Grocery Store Survey, Nutrition Expert Interview, Farmers’ Market Director Survey, Agency Survey for Seniors*
 - Charitable Food Programs
 - Grocery Stores
 - Farmers’ Markets
 - Buying Clubs
 - Restaurants
 - Schools
- Consumers – *Consumer Survey, Youth Survey, Food Forum Information, Latino Survey, Low Income Survey*
 - Seniors
 - Low-income
 - Latinos
 - Youth

INTRODUCTION

While community food security is extremely important to understand and define, it can be a nebulous concept to discuss. For the assessment team, defining the concept proved difficult, but was a critical definition to develop in order to converse with the public about its importance. The overarching goal of the project has been to measure community food security in La Plata County. Food security was addressed directly with many participants, but also indirectly, as people spoke of food security when discussing other food related issues.

It is important to note that many different sectors of the population discussed food security as it relates specifically to them, their work or the populations they serve. Thus a myriad of responses were recorded, providing a detailed picture of the current state of food security in the county and how it plays out in various populations and within various socio-economic groups. For example, when asked about food security in La Plata County, many farmers spoke of a lack of food production and how the community would currently have trouble feeding itself if trucks stopped bringing food to the area. Agencies serving low-income populations talked about their lack of access to fresh foods. What emerged were themes about food security that were population dependent.

Each of these groups plays a somewhat different role in the food system, and has specific relationships to food security and its definition. Ultimately, all of these elements are directly connected to, and affected by, one another.

DEFINING THE CONCEPT AS A COMMUNITY

Defining the concepts of a *food system* and *food security* played an important role in the food assessment. Developing an understanding of the food system as a combination of all the elements that go into getting food from where it's grown to the table was key to talking about community food resources and needs. Also, setting a baseline for what food security means, as defined by the Community Food Security Coalition, created a basis for discussion about food security in La Plata County and how it affects area residents. As participants became more familiar with these concepts, they began to understand and unveil the intricate layers of food security within the local food system and identify key elements of each.

Sustainability

Building off of the Community Food Security Coalition's (CFSC) definition, La Plata County has defined food security as a situation “***in which all people at all times have access to***

SUSTAINABILITY IS...

- Socially responsible,
- Economically viable, &
- Environmentally sound.

enough nutritious, safe, affordable, culturally-appropriate food produced in ways that are

sustainable.” The most notable concern of La Plata County residents to an already well-established and well-defined concept of community food security was in regard to agricultural production. In addition to making healthy, socially just food affordable for consumers, it

was proposed that healthy, socially just food production is needed. As noted by Greg Vlaming, former horticulture agent and organic farmer, “Farmers must be able to afford to produce (our) food.” Peg Redford, Director of the Durango Farmers’ Market, also talked about some of the economic challenges food producers face. “Farmers are able to continue to farm as a primary source of income when they can afford to farm. Some of the *younger farmers* are leasing land – they can’t even afford to buy a farm. Land costs need to be at a price where the land can be farmed. Farmers need a venue to sell more months out of the year to help the young growers pay their mortgages.”

IGNACIO FOOD FORUM, February 28, 2006

The Food Forum in Ignacio, hosted by Growing Partners, provided a venue to ask a well-represented cross section of the population to define food security as it pertains to La Plata County and to food needs and resources.² Since the forum took place during the early phase of the project, it allowed the research team to develop a baseline for the community’s understanding of food security.

Producers, processors and consumers took part in answering questions about the local food system and assisted with the planning phase of the community food assessment. These responses are a good example of the creativity and enthusiasm generated by the community to create grass-roots food system change.

² The Ignacio Food Forum hosted over 60 participants from the surrounding county.

WHAT DOES FOOD SECURITY MEAN TO YOU?

Responses to this question included the following:

- *Safety;*
- *Health;*
- *Access;*
- *Adequate supply;*
- *Fuel-free food;*
- *Conserving soil & land;*
- *Having choices;*
- *Encouraging more people to sell/grow food;*
- *Political support from city and county;*
- *Having the capacity to produce food;*
- *Food security system of survival;*
- *Knowledge of what we are eating;*
- *Organic micro-nutrients/freshness;*
- *That food be available & affordable to all;*
- *If conventional distribution stops, we can supply ourselves;*
- *Kids are safe;*
- *Self-sufficiency;*
- *Land is available;*
- *Safety comes from knowing your grower;*
- *Education through example;*
- *Educating youth via hands-on-education;*
- *Freight; water;*
- *Demonstrated markets;*
- *Dependable;*
- *Community gardens like Shared Harvest;*
- *Knowledge of preservation of food;*
- *Eat seasonally;*
- *Encourage more production & a variety of production;*
- *Local foods to schools;*
- *Lots of land & greenhouses;*
- *Organizations supporting each other;*
- *Start with regional sources; & wild food education.*

HOW COULD LA PLATA COUNTY BECOME MORE FOOD SECURE?

Responses to this question included the following:

- *Implementing CSAs;*
- *Community gardens;*
- *Seed exchanges;*
- *Demonstrational gardens;*
- *Backyard gardens;*

- *Farm-to-School;*
- *Implementing a distribution system;*
- *Working with policy makers;*
- *Educating on the food resources including wild foods, storage, season extension, preservation, how to eat seasonally, and how to grow;*
- *Providing subsidies to small farmers;*
- *Working on land use codes and protecting agricultural land;*
- *Better food access for low income families;*
- *Create a list of places and restaurants to get local food;*
- *Latino and native community open to farmers' markets;*
- *Make it easier to sell excess produce from small gardens;*
- *More markets; food education in schools;*
- *Improving quality of soil;*
- *Have the farmers' market accept WIC and Senior and Food Stamp coupons;*
- *Have education for people who want to farm;*
- *More dairies and mills;*
- *Create models for water security and water preservation and conservation.*

POPULATION SPECIFIC SURVEYS AND INTERVIEWS

The Ignacio Food Forum provided a venue for a non-biased cross section of the community to look at these issues. Surveys and interviews, however, were population specific, and allowed for more concrete definitions of food security as they pertain to each sector of the food system.

A good example of this took place in an interview with Zane Baranowski, a natural food marketer and long-term community member. He approached the question of community food security from two perspectives, as a consumer and as someone involved in the food manufacturing industry. "My first response (to food security) is that (as a consumer) I have the option to get to the store and it has what I want but, as (I look deeper), as a consultant to the (food) industry, food security is a scary thought. If we didn't see any trucks for a week we would be done for."

The following are some of the quotes from interviews and surveys regarding food security in La Plata County. Each comes from a different sector of the population and suggests ways in which various factors, when supported by the community, can contribute to greater community food security.

- **PROMOTE CROP & FOOD SOURCE DIVERSITY.** *"Having enough diversity (in crops) to supply the needs of the community is important. You look at what is grown in this area – you just have some grain, a lot of livestock, and alfalfa. Food security (means you) have a broad diversity of food sources."* Doug Ramsey, San Juan RC&D
- **PROTECT SOIL & WATER RESOURCES.** *"As long as we keep soil and water resources intact, then we can preserve the land and produce what we want through the ages."* Sterling Moss, NRCS

"A key component of a healthy food system is an abundance of locally grown, and produced, organic goods, accessible to **everyone** in the community."
Greg Vlaming

- **PROTECT PRIME AGRICULTURAL LAND.** “*To me it means land; having the land to grow food on. And this is under threat.*” Peg Redford, Director, Durango Farmers’ Market
- **INCREASE FOOD PRODUCTION.** “*The only option is to grow a lot more food.*” Greg Vlaming, former Horticultural Agent in La Plata County & Organic farmer
- **ENSURE FOOD SAFETY.** “*Poisoned food is a threat. Secure food needs to be traceable.*” Paul Evans, Manager, Ute Mountain Ute Farm
- **CREATE GREATER SELF SUFFICIENCY.** “*If the highways are open and the trucks are running we have food security. If there is a truckers strike we will feel it in a day.*” Dave Sanford, Tribal Extension Services
- **INCREASE LOCAL SUPPLY.** “*An area needs to be able to provide for its needs; it makes no sense for us to import things from Vermont that grow right here.*” Trent Taylor, Wheat farmer
- **SUPPORT PROFITABILITY IN AGRICULTURE.** “*Farmers have to be able to afford to produce food.*” Greg Vlaming
- **SUSTAINABLE MUST BE ECONOMICALLY VIABLE.** “*Sustainable has to be profitable!*” Kevin Mallow, Tribal Water Resources, talking about sustainable agriculture
- **KNOW HOW *OUR* FOOD IS RAISED/PRODUCED.** “*Consumers in Durango have had the opportunity to look the farmer in the eye and learn how their food is produced.*” Jerry Zink, owner, SunnySide Meat Processing
- **CREATE DISTRIBUTION & PROCESSING FACILITIES.** “*There is a lack of regional distribution and a lack of regional processing facilities for what is grown.*” Ron Englander, former Grocery Manager, Durango Natural Foods
- **FOSTER SOURCES FOR LOCAL INGREDIENTS.** “*I have not used local providers for material for processing, but it is a goal. I am looking for the possibility of having a local sprouting facility, processor, or other production piece.*” Zane Baranowski, Natural Foods Marketer
“(Currently) local processors cannot depend on local supply of inputs.” Ron Englander, speaking about Waves of Grain, a local granola
- **AFFORDABLE LOCAL FOOD.** “*PRICE is a factor that affects local food choices and purchases.*” Ron Englander
- **CONSISTENCY IN THE LOCAL FOOD SUPPLY.** “*Consistency of a locally produced product.*” Ron Englander
- **AVAILABILITY & CHOICE.** “*As a consumer I have the opportunity to get to the store, and it has what I want.*” Zane Baranowski
- **CHOICE.** “*Here, in La Plata County, if I want to buy lobster for dinner tonight, and I have the money in my pocket, I can.*” Kevin Mallow
- **AVAILABILITY AND PRICE.** “*I feel food secure just by going to the grocery store; when I go there the shelves are always stocked and full. All of the food is relatively inexpensive. What we have to spend on food is a small portion of our income.*” Sterling Moss, NRCS

Constructive criticism

There were also some critical responses to the premise that food security is an issue that needs attention in La Plata County, and although these responses were rare, they are worth mentioning. These responses indicate the perception that global and local food systems are in good condition. Dave Sanford with Tribal Extension Services in Ignacio said, “If we look

at food security as a whole... how many people in this country die of malnutrition? Not many. The USDA is in place so that we have a consistent supply of food and fiber in this country. We've created a 'perfect' food system."

In Ignacio, all members of the Ute Tribe now receive annual dividends from oil and gas earnings, and accordingly there is little concern among Tribal members about having enough money for food. Dave stated: "The Commodities Food Distribution comes to Ignacio. It's almost all non-tribal members that receive it. Tribal members can go to the store. They have money for food." He, along with others in the community, felt food security in La Plata is currently intact due to national, local, and regional support systems in place to ensure its presence. He did mention, however, that if there were an oil crisis, or for some reason trucks stopped coming to the area, we would feel the repercussions on our food system. "If there were a trucking shortage, then we would have problems. We would be okay for about a week with food storage. Then, after a couple of weeks, we would feel it more. If the highways are open and the trucks are running we have food security. If there is a truckers' strike we will feel it in a day. There are some local food options, but not many."

A LOOK AT ISOLATION & THE LACK OF FOOD PRODUCTION

La Plata County is an isolated community. The closest industrial centers, Denver and Albuquerque, are six and four hours away respectively. Trucks bringing food from these and other areas such as Texas, California, and Arizona, are heavily relied upon to supply the region with food. Without them the area would have severe food shortages.

Why doesn't a truckers' strike or inconvenient weather, such the paralyzing snowstorm of 2006, spark concern with everyone? For many, the likelihood of the entire distribution and trucking system in the country collapsing is inconceivable. Dave Sanford, however, explained that it's not an unlikely scenario. "In 1973 there was a truckers' strike and a gas strike. First the government announced, 'if you want gas, or if you want food you had better go get it.' I went to the store to get supplies and they were mostly out of food (at the store). It was all gone the first day... people panicked and they bought it all out." Although this information seems to be common knowledge, it appears overall dependence on trucks to provide the area's food supply is only a concern for some.

People who share this concern are typically those who are concerned about peak oil, or who consider how far food travels when making food purchases. For many in the county, however, just going to a grocery store that has stocked shelves is all the reassurance they need to feel food secure.

Throughout the course of the assessment, when pressed to confront the issues of isolation and lack of food production, many people began to realize the potential significance of these issues. For example, Doug Ramsey, who raises sheep in Montezuma County and is the USDA Resource Conservation and Development Director, began to think about what his food resources would look like if the trucks stopped running. "If, for whatever reason, we went into a world petroleum crisis, we (in the region) would be hard pressed for available food. We wouldn't starve. You can always eat wheat and beef. You would get some food here, but you wouldn't have the variety."

Doug touches on two points that are in fact the most pressing issues affecting food security in the county: isolation and lack of local food production. Sterling Moss, who works with Natural Resource Conservation Service, agrees. “The food we currently have access to is certainly not being grown in this county. It is being brought in from elsewhere. We supply some cattle, some lamb, but that’s about it.”

These factors, along with information throughout the assessment, show La Plata County is particularly vulnerable to food insecurity. However, the information provides the basis for discussion on the benefits of improving the food system in a language most community members can understand and relate to. As more community members become informed and understand the fragility of their local food system, they may feel empowered to change it.

2. FOOD SECURITY ISSUES WITHIN SPECIFIC POPULATIONS: *How Food Insecurity Plays Out in Underserved Populations*

As mentioned in Chapter II, A Profile of La Plata County, the region is culturally and economically diverse. Many populations in the area have been defined as “underserved,” meaning that because of poverty or discrimination, or lack of transportation, these people do not have access to the same services as others in a given community. This section addresses the way food security plays out in a variety of cultural and economic groups.

LATINO/IMMIGRANT

Assessment Methodology: Information regarding the Latino population in La Plata County came from four sources: English as a Second Language classes, Latina women working with the San Juan Basin Health Department, consumer surveys, and Latino program directors. The primary purpose of conducting these surveys and interviews was to better understand the needs and resources of the Latino population regarding food access and security, nutrition and interest in various community food projects.

LATINO SURVEY SOURCES:

1. SAN JUAN BASIN HEALTH DEPARTMENT – PROMOVIENDO LA SALUD
2. PARK ELEMENTARY, ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE CLASS (ESL)
3. CONSUMER SURVEYS
4. INTERVIEWS WITH LATINO PROGRAM COORDINATORS

INTRODUCTION

According to the Durango Herald’s article *Crossing Over – Cruzando Fronteras* in August of 2001³: The Latino population in Durango was the second largest after Anglos. In 2000, the Hispanic and Latino community of 1,436 people was 10.3 percent of Durango’s population.

Ignacio, home of the Southern Ute Indian tribe (SUIT) is also home to many Latino and Anglo families, and the representative culture is tri-cultural, evident in the music, language and food. There are many Latino restaurants in the Ignacio area that serve foods of Mexican origin to SUIT and Anglo residents. Many Latinos in the area, passing on language and traditions to future generations, also speak Spanish in the home.

³ Trujillo, S. *Crossing Over – Cruzando Fronteras: Mexicans take risks to enter U.S.* Durango Herald, August 19, 2001.

With more and more Latinos moving into the area and contributing to the economic vitality and culture of the county, it seemed important to review the food needs and resources of this specific population in order to more systematically address their needs. Regionally, there are agencies that cater to the health, education, economic and food needs of Latinos. It was in having conversations with the people involved in these agencies, and with the people they serve, that some of their distinct cultural food needs and resources were identified.

The overall sample size of the Latino population was small, about 25 participants, some of which were agency directors who represent the larger Latino community. It is the hope, however, that this information can contribute to the community food system profile by including specific Latino input. It is also important to note that the Latino community in Durango is multifaceted, made up of long-term Latino residents who have been in the area for many generations, and those who have recently immigrated from Mexico, Central America, South America and Spain. Each group of residents has its own strong cultural differences.

1. 5/04/2006, SAN JUAN BASIN HEALTH DEPARTMENT – PROMOVRIENDO LA SALUD

The three women who filled out surveys are bi-cultural women working within the Latino community to educate and promote health care to reduce chronic disease within the Latino population. These women are each long-term residents in the county. In addition to their current jobs, they have worked elsewhere in the Latino community in Durango.⁴ All three have been to college, and two have college degrees. In all three cases, they are the primary household food buyer and cook for their families. Two have children in the home. Only one was using Food Stamps and WIC; the other two did not indicate using charitable food programs.

Nutrition: The women were asked several questions relating to nutrition.⁵ These questions, with their responses are listed below:

“The food in the U.S. has many more calories. It’s fast food and is much more expensive.”

What does it mean to you to ‘eat well’?

- Good health.
- Organic – balanced diet.
- Four colors, low salt, etc.

What influences or shapes the way you eat?

- I have learned more about having good/balanced nutrition.
- Education.
- Reading and personal experience.

How is your current diet different from your country of origin?

- It’s more healthy here.
- I have learned more about nutrition since I moved to the US.

⁴ This information is included to illustrate food-related concerns of the Latino community that may indicate and provide us with some of the strict cultural (not just economic) and cost-of-living issues that are impervious to income level, education, and gender.

⁵ Note: Responses to nutritional questions seems to be influenced by the profession of the participants. While not found in other Latino interviews, these women mentioned eating organic, low salt, USDA recommended foods.

Two of the women alluded to being healthier since they moved to the States, however, one talked about a fast food diet being much more prevalent in the US, and how the price of food is much higher here as well.

Food Access:

Participants were asked where they shop for food and why. These three women noted Wal-Mart, City Market, and Albertsons, and said they shop there based on cheaper prices, location, and a good variety of foods available. Food access issues that arose had to do with adequate choices and transportation. All three reported they did not have access to a selection that is representative of their culture's foods. Two women reported not having the choice to purchase healthy foods for their family, and all three reported not being able to purchase organic foods for their family.

Food Security:

When asked, "Did you ever run out of food or worry about running out of food this past year?" only one woman responded *yes*. She said this was triggered by a lack of money and that she used food stamps to offset her food shortages and had asked her friends for a loan.

When asked, "Do you ever feel that food is unaffordable?" all three women said *yes*. One interesting observation is that although all three women are professionals, they still feel that food is unaffordable. And one respondent said she knows of the benefits of organic food, and wants to incorporate more of it into her diet, but feels it is not possible due to cost.

2. 5/17/2006, PARK ELEMENTARY, ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE CLASS (ESL)

Nuvia Chadborn, Olivia Lopez, and Katy Pepinsky compiled the information for these interviews. All three women completed interviews with the participants in Spanish, going over each of the questions and describing them in detail. Therefore, all responses have been translated from Spanish into English for the purpose of the study.

Participants:

There were a total of eleven participants⁶, a diverse sample of both men and women, all with varying levels of education. No one reported an annual household income of over \$30,000 per year. Most participants listed two children in the home. Many of the men interviewed responded that they were the primary food buyers for the household and that they do all or some of the cooking.

Food Assistance:

Only two people reported using food stamps in the past year. Four people responded as using WIC in the past year.

⁶ During casual conversation throughout the interview process, each interviewer learned things about the Latino participants apart from information gathered in the interviews. Participants were:

- Very basic level English speakers, many who had recently immigrated to the United States.
- Most were of Mexican origin.
- Many worked in restaurant kitchens in town, and juggled more than two jobs.
- Many commented that they were sending a great portion of their earnings to their families in Mexico.

Nutrition:

Participants were asked various questions about nutrition. Since most participating in the ESL class are recent immigrants to the United States, they were also asked how and if their current diet differed from what they ate in their country of origin. They were also asked about raising food and whether they maintained a connection to the land in the U.S. Some of these questions with their responses are listed below:

What does it mean to you to eat well?

- To have balanced food.
- To eat what I have access to and what I like.
- Different foods.
- Eat healthy foods.
- Eat on time.
- To have food.
- To eat fruits and vegetables and white meats.

What influences or shapes the way you eat?

- The cheapest prices.
- The most affordable.
- In order to be healthy.
- (For good) health (I avoid) fats, sugar, and everything like this.
- Health reasons.
- Health reasons.

How is your current diet different from that in your country of origin?

- No, because I cook.
- It's basically the same.
- Yes, it's different because there isn't a punctual hour in which everyone eats in the USA.
- Yes, it's different here. I eat a lot of flour, potatoes, and meat.
- Yes, it's different. We eat pizza and hamburgers.
- It's different because it's a different country and because in Mexico the food is not as processed/refrigerated and the fruits are more fresh/natural.
- Some things yes, and others no. In America there is a lot more hamburgers and soda.
- Mostly the flavor.

Did you/do you have experience growing your own food?

- In Mexico I have my garden.
- In my house we grew various fruits.

Food Access:

Seven of the eleven participants indicated they shop at Wal-Mart for food. Most people said they shop there because of cheaper prices. Everyone who indicated they shop there gets to the store in a personal vehicle. Four responded that they shopped at City Market, mostly due to location. It is interesting to note that all responses indicated one or the other of these two stores, despite

"I travel to Farmington, New Mexico to the Carneceria Sonora and to Dona Maria's to make my food purchases."

the fact that Durango has seven grocery stores including two “health” food stores.

Food access issues were identified when participants were asked about specific food access scenarios. Two participants reported having transportation issues to food outlets. Four responded not having access to culturally appropriate foods. In fact, one man’s response was: “I travel to Farmington, New Mexico to the *Carnecería Sonora* and to *Dona Maria’s* to make my food purchases.” After having conversation with several of the people at this table, the research team learned that many of the Mexican families and immigrants travel 45 miles to Farmington once a week to make their cultural food purchases and for cheaper prices despite the high cost of gasoline.

“Yes, I have the choice to buy organic, but it’s very expensive.”

When asked whether they had the choice to purchase healthy foods for their family, all but one participant answered *yes*. However, when asked if they have access to purchase organic foods for themselves or their family, eight responded *yes* they feel as if they have the *choice* to buy organic, but five added the comment that it is “very expensive.”

Table 1. OPERATION HEALTHY COMMUNITY’S LIVABLE WAGE ESTIMATES FOR 2005 IN LA PLATA COUNTY

Durango:

Single Person, renting a one bdrm at \$675/month - \$10.21/hr

Single Parent, one child, renting 2 bdrm at \$900/month - \$18.91/hr

Family of 4, renting 3 bdrm at \$1150/month - \$26.02/hr

While livable wages are a good estimate for what an individual must earn to cover the costs of basic living tools such as shelter, healthcare, childcare and nutrition in the area, most immigrants earn much less. Many businesses pay minimum wage, which in La Plata County is still below \$7 per hour. As indicated by the surveys, many respondents struggle with being able to cover expenses, including food.

Food Security:

Seven of the eleven participants interviewed felt that food in La Plata County was unaffordable, generating some of the most powerful information in this survey. One person responded they felt food was unaffordable *sometimes*. If people responded *yes*, they were asked to explain their response to this question. Most responses noted the high price of food in the county. One person stated, “Sometimes our money doesn’t cover the food expenses,” alluding to the fact that annual household income is not enough to cover the cost of food for her family. Other responses included:

- With what we earn we can only pay for our necessities.
- Certain things like fruit are cheap, but meats are expensive.

It seems most of the participants shared the concern of the high price of food, only two, however, talked about running out of food or worrying about running out of food in the past year. The two who had this concern said that they simply ran out of money, and asked to borrow some to overcome this issue.

“Our biggest worry is about money and whether it will cover our expenses.”

Food-related concerns were heavily tied to money issues. Participants consistently mentioned the need to have more money so that they could buy things. Other food related concerns regarded food being high in fat in addition to being pricey. One person talked about food safety, “Many foods contain preservatives and are refrigerated for long periods of time.” When asked to talk about solutions to these concerns, two people suggested working more to earn more money. Another suggested lowering the cost of food, and at the same time paying people better salaries.⁷

3. CONSUMER SURVEYS⁸

This information comes from a series of consumer surveys from people who identified themselves as Latinos.

These surveys were administered in various settings throughout the county over the course of several months. Most surveys were administered by volunteers from Youth Services of La Plata County. Since all participants indicated being Latino, these surveys were analyzed for various correlations between ethnic background and specific food issues or concerns.

The distribution of income for Latinos surveyed was slightly less than that of the general population surveyed. Other factors such as education, food preferences, shopping locations, reliance on food assistance and affordability did not vary much from the larger survey group. The relationship between food security and ethnicity appears to be less important than the relationship between education/income and food security.

4. INTERVIEWS WITH LATINO PROGRAM COORDINATORS

Two interviews with Latino program directors provided valuable insight into cultural food issues. They also identified potential partnerships for future food related programming. Via the assessment, both Promoviendo la Salud and Los Compañeros are interested in forming stronger connections with Growing Partners to increase the amount of food and nutrition education they currently offer.

Promoviendo la Salud

The San Juan Basin Health Department works in La Plata and Archuleta counties. It is home to the WIC, Promoviendo la Salud, and Prenatal and Family Planning offices, which are all personal health programs with a nutrition component. Karen Forest is the director of Promoviendo la Salud. Her program works directly with the Latino population to reduce health disparities among Latinos in La Plata and Archuleta counties. In an interview, she talked about some of the other departments in the health office, their connection with the Latino and recent immigrant populations, and some of the food issues they have identified. “The Pre-natal Program sees recent immigrants staying in hotels and having real food security issues. They are using the microwave in their hotel rooms to cook food. That is all they have access to.”

Karen feels that many of the Latinos she sees could benefit from education about good nutrition. “A lot of their diets are really poor, especially when it comes to fast food,” she said. In an effort to combat some of the issues surrounding healthy eating, Promoviendo is

⁷ There were only 3 responses to this question.

⁸ For more information about Consumer Survey results, see Appendix 3.

offering a series of cooking classes sponsored by Operation Frontline out of Denver called “Share our Strengths.” According to Karen, “These (classes) are offered in 6-week sessions to teach people to buy and prepare healthy foods on a limited budget. Many of our clients say they don’t buy healthy food because they can’t afford it, but maybe we can show them it just takes a little more effort and planning to be possible.”

Karen listed several agencies she considers to be food resources in the community, but mentioned that for Latinos there is sometimes a language barrier that prevents them from using those services, with the Food Bank singled out as an example. “For people with immediate needs there is no one there who speaks Spanish, and they (referral agencies) have to send someone who does speak the language to go with them,” She said. Also, she mentioned the Manna Soup Kitchen as a food resource, but doesn’t feel Latinos really use it.

“The premise for these classes is to create a social venue where people can gather together (create community) and share information for improving their health and hopefully overall quality of life.”
Kay Vigil

For someone who is not Latino, or who has not spent much time working with that sector of the population, it may be necessary to build a level of trust before developing projects. “This just takes time,” Karen mentioned. “And it takes showing your face at Latino gathering places so people get to know you.”

Los Companeros

Building trust seems to be a good way to initiate food system change; not only within organizations, but also with the populations they serve. Eddie Soto, who directs Los Companeros⁹, agrees. He would like to see Latinos have increased access to fresh, locally grown foods by getting more involved in farmers’ markets and receiving horticulture and garden training in Spanish. He is interested in partnering with the Growing Partners to provide training sessions on community gardens in Spanish and in encouraging better-established transportation routes between the Latino neighborhoods and the area farmers’ markets. He also feels there needs to be more advertising in Spanish targeting the Latino population so it will make people more comfortable attending new events.

CONCLUSIONS

The information gleaned from the Latino population in the county draws interesting parallels, proving specific cultural food issues exist apart from the issues affected by income level, education and gender. According to surveys and interviews, Latinos in La Plata County are concerned about a lack of access to culturally appropriate foods. As mentioned in the Grocery Store Survey¹⁰ there are plans to open a Mexican foods grocery store in Durango which may begin to address some of these issues.

In addition, there is information about cultural differences in diet – some Latinos feel that foods are more processed in the U.S. compared to foods they had access to in their countries’ of origin – and there is little access to healthy, fresh foods compared to countries where open-air farmers’ markets are commonplace. As Eddie mentioned, creating greater

⁹ Los Companeros, an arm of the San Juan Citizens’ Alliance, works to improve the living conditions of immigrants in the San Juan Basin, and to work with other organizations to eliminate the causes of their displacement from Mexico or Central America. They also have concerns for labor and civil rights of Latino immigrants.

¹⁰ See Chapter 4, Food Resources: Grocery Store Survey, for a complete section on culturally appropriate food choices in La Plata County.

access for Latinos to already existing farmers' markets could help to address this issue.

Food related concerns among the Latino population surveyed were heavily tied to their income. As most survey participants reported having income levels below \$30,000, they shared the feeling that typical household earnings are not enough to cover family necessities like food. Some suggestions to overcome this issue were offering higher wages, creating more job opportunities, and reducing the overall cost of food.

NATIVE AMERICAN

Assessment Methodology. In February 2006 the assessment team gave a presentation to the Southern Ute Tribal Council to inform them of the project and identify possible areas of interest for the Tribe. The information on the Native American population comes from Program Surveys with agencies serving the Southern Ute (Indian) Tribe (SUIT) including SUIT Tribal Health Services, Southern Ute Community Action Program (SUCAP), the Sun Ute Recreation Center, the Ute Mountain Ute Farm and the SUIT Custom Farm. Other information was gleaned from the Ignacio School District.

INTRODUCTION

Ignacio is located on Tribal land inhabited by the SUIT. Tribal government, traditions and language continue to be widely recognized and celebrated in the area. The following is information about the food resources currently available to the SUIT and Ute Mountain Ute Tribes, along with a list of suggested food projects to address some basic Tribal food needs.

SUIT DEMOGRAPHICS¹¹

According to Dave Sanford, the SUIT is a small tribe. In 2006 there were around 1,400 members. Only 25 percent are under eighteen. Fifty percent of the tribe is less than 25 years of age, and only about 150 people are over fifty-five. Although it is a young tribe, it is not growing. As tribal members marry outside of the tribe, tribal blood continues to become diluted. A tribal member over 55 years old is considered an Elder and may be appointed to be on the Elders' Committee, which serves as an advisory board to the Tribal Council.

For the purposes of this section, the tribal food needs and resources are the focus. Through interviews, food projects were identified that could begin to address the needs of the SUIT.

The Utes no longer fulfill their dietary needs by living off the land. They used to have to live off the land because they had to, but now they have a choice about where they get their food.”

Steve Whiteman, Tribal Division of Wildlife

FOOD NEEDS

Two concerns of the Tribal Elders were in regard to a specific agricultural extension agent designated to the Tribe, and a cucumber farm. Both of these previously valued resources were enjoyed by the Tribe, but are now things of the past. Both of these concerns, expressed by the Elders to the assessment team, required both research and discovery.

According to Dave Sanford, Director of the Custom Farm and Tribal Extension in Ignacio, years ago there was a Colorado State University (CSU) Extension Agent assigned to the Tribe, Dr. Haney. The Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Southern Ute Tribe, and CSU funded

¹¹ Information on SUIT Tribal Demographics came from an interview with Dave Sanford, Director of Tribal Custom Farm, and Tribal Extension Services.

the position on a federal program contract. However, the position was cut due to a lack of funding.

The Tribe has employed a number of extension agents over the years. Dave remembers that before Dr. Haney, in the 1950s, there was an extension agent in Ignacio who tried to get people to grow things. This agent initiated the cucumber farm mentioned by the Elders. The cucumber farm was located south of Ignacio. At this time there was also a dairy farm on the reservation.

During the 1930s to the 1950s, because of U.S. Government pressure to turn the Southern Utes into farmers, the area was home to more subsistence agriculture than it has ever known. Currently, however, Dave Sanford could only think of two full-time farmer/ranchers on the reservation, and they are both Anglos. The rest are a few people with gardens and minimal livestock. Dave feels these families continue to ranch out of habit and tradition, but don't have to out of necessity for food, as they did in the past.

In an interview with Elise Redd, Director of SUIT Health Services, access to affordable fruits and vegetables, and healthy affordable food, was noted as some Tribal members' most pressing food needs. "If you are going to cook healthy many of those foods are more expensive. I think (for this reason) a lot of people will not purchase fresh, perishable foods; they will purchase cans." Kip Koso, Director of the Sun Ute Recreation Center agrees. When asked about Tribal members' most pressing food needs, he too stated access to quality foods as a serious issue.

FOOD RESOURCES

A FOOD BUYING PROGRAM

During the early 1900's the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) established a Food Buying Program for the Tribe. Due to the Tribe's isolation and reliance on subsistence living and agriculture, the BIA provided food staples, such as corn, grains and beans, as the U.S. government tried to encourage members of the SUIT to become farmers. Today, mostly due to tradition and habit, not necessity, the Elders still purchase beans and potatoes in bulk, which are available at a discount to all Tribal members.

It's very important to the tribe to hunt and to fish. They want to maintain populations of these animals on the reservation for future generations."

Steve Whiteman, Head of the Tribal Division of Wildlife

HUNTING AND FISHING AS A FOOD RESOURCE

According to Steve Whiteman, head of the Tribal Division of Wildlife, wild game is an important source of meat for tribal members. Not only is it a tradition to hunt for meat, but Whiteman adds that there are also management issues that can be addressed by people hunting certain animals. "Traditionally, the Utes were hunters and gatherers and roamed all over the state.

Mule deer were the primary food source in this area. It wasn't until they had access to horses that they could access the Eastern Plains for bison."

Two hundred to 250 Tribal members receive elk and deer hunting permits. Steve feels there is more meat available to the Tribe than they could possibly consume in a given year. "It is a tremendous amount of meat."

Fishing is another resource the SUT Division of Wildlife (DOW) manages. Every year the division stocks rivers on tribal land with various trout species raised in their hatchery. Compared to hunting permits, the number of fishing permits issued to Tribal members is small, approximately 125. Steve mentioned that Tribal members tend to keep and eat the fish they catch. SUT Tribal DOW issues 1,000 non-Tribal fishing permits per year, mostly for catch-and-release fishing.

THE BISON PROGRAM

The Southern Ute Division of Wildlife, Bison Program Overview¹²

“As with many other Native American tribes, bison represent an extremely important symbol of spiritual strength and endurance to the Utes. Historically, bison were also important for the day-to-day survival of the people, providing essential food and hides for clothing and shelter. The Utes first started pursuing bison when the Spanish brought horses to the West in the early 1800s. Horses allowed the Utes to leave their homes in the Rocky Mountains and venture into the eastern plains to successfully harvest bison. Today, the bison remains an important spiritual symbol to the Utes, and it plays a significant role in the annual Ute Sun Dance and other religious ceremonies.

Since the early 1980s, the Southern Ute Tribe has managed a small herd of bison, primarily for cultural preservation and educational purposes. The Division of Wildlife Resource Management maintains the herd at approximately 15 head within a 350-acre fenced pasture near Ignacio. A small number of bison are culled from the herd every year in order to provide meat for the Ute Bear Dance and other tribal functions. Also, the non-edible portions of the culled bison, such as hides and skulls, are utilized and distributed by the Sun Dance Chief in accordance with Ute traditional values and beliefs. In addition to herd management, the Division works closely with the Southern Ute Academy and other local schools in the Ignacio area to provide educational presentations on the importance of bison to Ute culture. School groups are often given tours of the tribal bison herd, providing a valuable opportunity to observe and learn about bison behavior.

On an annual basis, bison calf production and herd management objectives require that some animals be removed from the herd. These bison are made available through auction to enrolled Southern Ute Tribal members and to the general public. Announcements of the auction, including bid procedure, are provided in the Southern Ute tribal newspaper, The Drum.”

THE CUSTOM FARM

The Custom Farm in Ignacio provides access to farm equipment and services for tribal members. Many tribal members used to have their own equipment, but once this service was established, they could borrow equipment that was maintained by the tribe without having to pay for their own. Tribal Extension Services are currently run out of this facility. The Extension office is home to a consumer science agent and a 4-H agent.

WATER

“There is very consistent irrigation delivery on this side of the county.”
Kevin Mallow, Tribal Water Resources Specialist

TRIBAL FOOD PROJECTS OF INTEREST

1. TRANSPORTATION
2. GREATER LOCAL FOOD ACCESS-*Farm stands or A farmers' market*
3. COMMUNITY GARDENS
4. A YOUTH COMMUNITY GARDEN
5. COOKING CLASSES

¹² <http://www.southern-ute.nsn.us/WRMWeb/bison.html>

POTENTIAL AND KNOWLEDGE TO GROW TRADITIONAL CROPS

“*Things such as forages, dry beans, and potatoes were once readily grown in the area. The Animas Valley used to grow a lot of potatoes; in the 1940’s there were 40-acre potato farms in the Valley and in La Plata Canyon.*” Kevin Mallow, Tribal Water Resources Specialist

BACKYARD GARDENS

“*Most everyone has a backyard garden. There is a fair in August where people bring a lot of the food that they have grown.*” Dave Sanford

THE SUIT TRIBAL HEALTH DIABETES PROGRAM

The SUIT Diabetes program, funded by the Center for Disease Control, focuses on prevention of the disease by promoting healthy levels of exercise and encouraging a healthy diet. According to Elise Redd, Director of Tribal Health Services, this program has been very successful in getting people to exercise at home. The program recently purchased exercise equipment people can take home to work on their personal fitness instead of having to do so in public. “There is a recreational center here, but a lot of people won’t use it. Using the *Polar Age Body System* at home, people can later transition to the recreational center once they are more comfortable.”

In addition to the Diabetes Program, they offer a *Healthy Weight for Women* cooking class and a traditional foods cooking class. Because buffalo meat is a low fat, lean meat, and is available locally, they promote its use in the traditional foods class.

SUN UTE KITCHEN SPACE: *A Teaching Environment*

According to Kip Koso, Director of the Sun Ute Recreation Center in Ignacio, the kitchen in the recreational center is available to teach cooking classes.

THE ACADEMY: *Nutritional Counseling*

The school nurse at the (Southern Ute) Academy in Ignacio, a school open only to tribal members, hosts monthly meetings with families where she meets with interested parents to address nutrition and weight loss.

THE TRIBAL COMMODITIES PROGRAM

This charitable food program is available to people who live on the reservation. They also offer cooking classes.

THE NUTRITION FAIR

This event allows community members to promote healthy eating. It is held at Rolling Thunder in the Casino in Ignacio

THE WOMEN, INFANT, CHILDREN PROGRAM (WIC)

WIC goes to the Head Start school building to meet with mothers of students to enroll them in the program.

THE UTE MOUNTAIN UTE TRIBE: *The Farm*

In the late 1800s, because many of the land and cattle operations used the Ute Reservation for grazing, conflicts arose between the Utes and local cowboys. Violence ultimately forced some of the Utes farther southwest to the town now known as Towaoc, the current home of

the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe. Towaoc is located in Montezuma County, near the town of Cortez.

For fourteen years, Paul Evans has been running the Ute Mountain Ute Farm and Ranch Enterprise, a 7,700-acre commercial farm just west of Towaoc. In addition to Paul, the farm employs 22 people, 70 percent of whom are Ute Tribal members. The farm provides training for its employees in tractor operation, agronomy and livestock. Currently, the Tribe is sending one of the farm's tribal employees to college to study agronomy.

For the purposes of the food assessment, contact with the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe was made only with Paul Evans, Manager of the Ute Mountain Ute Farm. Although he is an Anglo, he was hired by the tribe to manage their corporate farm's operations and could provide information regarding farm operations. Because the Utes are traditionally hunter-gatherers and have little experience farming on a large scale, Paul mentioned his job is to train the Utes to be farmers. Eventually he would like to pass on the job of farm manager to a Ute Tribal member.

The farm raises alfalfa hay, sweet corn, wheat, triticale, feed corn, dry beans (garbanzos) and natural beef for wholesale markets. Paul mentioned that the Ute Farm is Whole Foods Grocery Store's exclusive regional source for conventional sweet corn, which they take to their warehouses in Denver and in Austin, Texas. The sweet corn is also available to Tribal members in Towaoc and in Ignacio.

The farm already hosts farm tours for students from Cortez, and they have hosted experts from Colorado State University, the Cooperative Extension and the agricultural industry to teach technical workshops. They would, however, be interested in hosting more area specific workshops for Tribal members.

OLDER ADULTS AND PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES – *A Contribution from Sue Bruckner*

Assessment Methodology: The information gathered by Growing Partners regarding the older adult and physically and/or mentally limited populations in La Plata County and extending into Montezuma County came from agency surveys and interviews with key informants. Key informants were individuals in the community who worked or volunteered directly with these populations. The primary purpose of conducting the surveys and interviews was to better understand the needs and resources of the older adult and physically and/or mentally limited populations regarding food access and security, nutrition, and interest in various community food projects.

A packet of information was sent out to 23 agencies including 14 nursing homes, assisted living facilities, and retirement centers, three hospice organizations, one home health agency, one senior center; two senior services agencies, one Area Agency on Aging and one agency for developmentally disabled individuals. Each packet included an agency survey, a magazine article from *OT* (an occupational therapy magazine) discussing the therapeutic value of gardening programs for older adults¹³, an information sheet outlining examples of community food projects geared towards senior and/or physically and/or mentally limited

¹³ Panganiban, S. (1995). How Does Your Garden Grow: an interdisciplinary team approach at Park Tustin Rehabilitation and Healthcare Center increases the therapeutic value of gardening programs for residents. *OT Week*, 22 – 23

populations and a write-up describing horticultural therapy and the positive impacts it can have on older adults.

The majority of the agencies received phone calls alerting staff to the arrival of the survey. Of the agencies contacted, a total of four completed surveys (it was hard to get responses from most agencies). Surveys from Hospice of Montezuma, SUCAP Senior Center, Madison House Assisted Living Facility, Community Connections, Inc. and one letter (Sunshine Gardens Assisted Living Facility) were returned. Four agencies were interviewed in person (Montezuma County Senior Services, La Plata County Senior Services, The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), and Hospice of Mercy). A representative of AARP was also interviewed.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

As of the 2000 Census, the senior population totaled 15 percent of the population in Southwest Colorado. Between the years of 2000 and 2012, this percentage is expected to grow by over 60 percent.¹⁴ It is not surprising that this segment of the population is gaining much-needed attention. Prior to Growing Partner's Community Food Assessment, research had been conducted to identify the needs of older adults (also referred to in this report as "seniors" and identified as 60 years of age or older) living in La Plata County. Researchers reached out to 8,903 older adults through phone contact, completing 161 phone interviews. Findings specific to nutrition and food security are included in this report as they supplement the information gained through research completed by Growing Partners.

In September of 2004, the Colorado Department of Human Services released the Strengths and Needs Assessment of Older Adults in the State of Colorado. An executive summary of the survey results specifically for La Plata County was also published at this time. The research is stated to be a "high-quality, rigorous, statistically valid survey of seniors in the state."¹⁵ Results were weighted to appropriately reflect the demographic characteristics of this county. Pertinent results are listed below:

- 16% of respondents reported not eating at least two complete meals a day
- 10% of the county's older adults have a level of difficulty getting enough food to eat
- 18% of the county's older adults need some level of help getting enough and/or the right kinds of food to eat
- Food affordability concerns are depicted by the following statistics:
 - 15% of respondents stated they were not always able to afford to eat *healthier meals*
 - 14% were not always able to afford the *kinds of food* they wanted to eat
 - 3% were *frequently* not able to afford *enough* food to eat
- 14% of respondents had a level of difficulty arranging transportation to go shopping

¹⁴ <http://www.operationhealthycommunities.org/path.html>

¹⁵ Colorado Department of Human Services Division of Aging and Adult Services (2004). Strengths and Needs Assessment of Older adults in the State of Colorado: La Plata County, Executive Summary of Survey Results.

- 71% of respondents reported participating in a hobby such as gardening one or more hours per week; 85% engage in moderate activity such as gardening for at least 30 minutes a day 1 to 7 days per week. (Note: this is included because it may be indicative of the numbers of older adults who are, or may be interested in gardening activities.)

Recognizing that the senior population is growing and that “this growth is expected to dramatically affect the population and demographic trends in La Plata County,”¹⁶ the Senior Program Advisory Committee (SPAC) of Operation Healthy Communities furthered the research conducted through the Strength and Needs Assessment. Findings were reported to the La Plata County commissioners in September, 2005. SPAC contributed the following observations, which are pertinent to Growing Partner’s community food assessment:

- Seniors do not know how to access services, rather than those services not being available
- Seniors expressed concern about the lack and availability of public transportation in rural areas
- 7% of seniors who responded to the local questionnaire could not afford food (as compared to the 3% reported in the Strengths and Needs Assessment);
- 19% of seniors currently have food delivered to them;
- A full 20% of seniors were unable to afford their basic needs; when basic needs were not affordable, allocations for food were among those cut.

Upon completion of their research, SPAC recommended that the county continue to provide and increase funding for home health and meal services in order to meet the increasing demand from seniors. Additionally, SPAC cautioned that the growth of the senior population in La Plata County will drastically affect this region’s ability to provide services. Given this information, there will be an increased need in appropriate community food projects (such as education on accessing available services, basic nutrition needs of older adults, meal planning and shopping on a budget). There is also a need for improved transportation services, especially in rural areas, senior community gardens, farmers’ market outreach programs and horticultural therapy activities.

What is Horticultural Therapy?

According to the American Horticultural Therapy Association (AHTA), horticultural therapy creates “barrier-free, therapeutic gardens that enable everyone to work, learn, and relax in the garden.”¹⁷ Gardens are designed to accommodate a wide range of needs, interests and abilities and are especially beneficial for people with physical or mental limitations. New skills, adaptations and gardening methods are offered through horticultural therapy, allowing for individuals to actively participate in home, community and/or institutional (ex. assisted living facilities, nursing homes, and hospitals) gardens. Enabling gardens characterized by raised beds, wide rows, table gardens, container gardens, and pulley systems, as well as specially adapted tools, enable the physically and/or mentally limited gardener. With the

¹⁶ Operation Healthy Communities (2005). Senior Program Advisory Committee Report to La Plata County Commissioners.

¹⁷ www.ahta.org

assistance of a more able gardener, or a Horticultural Therapist, even the most physically and/or mentally limited individuals can participate in growing a garden.

What does horticultural therapy have to do with community food security?

There is a great, yet often missed, connection between horticultural therapy and community food security. As mentioned, horticultural therapy enables individuals with physical and/or mental limitations to actively participate in gardening and/or small-scale farming. In other words, it gives these populations the ability to grow, and have access to fresh, nutritious and culturally appropriate foods. Thus horticultural therapy can, and does, strengthen food security.

What does horticultural therapy have to do with older adult and physically and/or mentally limited populations?

The older adult population represents the fastest growing segment of the U.S. population and for hundreds of thousands of older adults, horticulture has been, and remains, a preferred leisure pursuit.¹⁸ However, limitations in physical mobility often render it difficult for this population to participate in these activities. Many agencies serving older adults and physically and/or mentally limited individuals are simply unaware that these limitations, to a certain extent, can be surpassed. For many, this equates to a loss of the numerous benefits offered through horticultural activities. Fortunately, horticultural therapy addresses this problem and enables individuals to take an active role in the production of fruits, herbs, and vegetables.

FINDINGS

As there were a limited number of surveys returned, all agency responses are listed below. Again, responses were obtained through phone conversations, in person interviews, and the returned agency surveys. When it seemed to clarify understanding, the type of agency making a particular statement is listed in parentheses.

Four agencies serve food at their sites. Where is this food obtained?

- 4 from distributors (4 of what? Meals? Agencies? Unclear...)
- 1 from food bank
- 3 from grocery stores

Do residents/participants have any choice in what they are served?

- “*Menus are set for the month with one entrée daily. Input from seniors is always welcome.*” Senior Center
- “*We have a monthly food committee meeting made up of residents. They certainly let us know of their likes/dislikes!*” Assisted Living Facility
- “*Yes. Clients play a large role in the choice of meals, depending on dietary needs.*” Agency for individuals with developmental disabilities
- *Balanced menus are made on a state level.* Senior Center

Locations other than the agency where meals are eaten?

- Homes, restaurants

¹⁸ Hass, K, Simpson, S.P. & Stevenson, N.C. (1998). Older persons and horticultural therapy practice. In S.P. Simson & M.C. Straus (Eds.), *Horticulture as therapy: Principles and practice* (pp. 231 - 255). Binghamton, NY: The Food Products Press.

- Families' homes, restaurants, senior center
- Soup kitchen, senior center, day program sites, homes and restaurants
- "Generally have meals in their own homes." Hospice
- Other senior centers

What programs does your agency offer relating to food, nutrition, farming, gardening and/or cooking?

- "Deliver USDA commodities to homebound seniors 4 times a year."
- "Residents occasionally help with preparation such as shucking corn, snapping beans, etc."
- Grocery services - lists compiled by support staff; nutrition classes; cooking classes
- Grocery services - lists compiled by "the client with the assistance of family or our caregiver."
- Classes on eating healthy, field trip to store to educate on reading labels, cooking classes
- A hydroponic system in our greenhouse, raised gardens. Assisted Living
- Raised gardens and gardening activities. Assisted Living

Primary barriers the agency faces in trying to offer food related programs:

- "Money to provide services is always in short supply."
- "We probably wouldn't do much more than we do as our residents have difficulty doing more." Assisted Living
- "Food cost for healthy foods; clients not understanding the need for healthy foods; staff not wanting to cook." Agency for individuals with developmental disabilities
- "It is not a primary part of our mission." Hospice
- "No barriers aside from lack of money."
- "We are however limited because of costs as far as what distance we can go in providing unlimited resources."

Considering the population served, of what importance is food access and food security?

- Important, but ranks behind more pressing issues (Agency for individuals with developmental disabilities)
- Not really an issue that needs much consideration or action (Assisted Living)
- Important, but ranks behind more pressing issues (Senior Center)
- Moderately important that should be addressed soon (Hospice)
- Not really an issue that needs much consideration or action (Senior Services)
- Important, but ranks behind more pressing issues (Hospice)
- An extremely important issue that deserves to be addressed immediately (Food Bank)

Considering the population/s served, what are their food resources?

- Grocery stores, gardens, and restaurants
- "Us! Part of service is providing all meals and snacks."
- Medicaid and food stamps; "Their allotment is often insufficient." Hospice
- Senior centers, commodity programs, free lunches at churches
- "Money from social security which is often not enough to make ends meet" Durango Food Bank

Considering the population/s served, what are their food needs?

- Balanced meals
- Balanced, appropriate diets
- *“Some require specific diets, with diabetic diets being the most common.”*
- Healthy wholesome foods that will enhance rehabilitation process

How can we better outreach the population your agency serves (preferred communication style, advertising, ideal locations for outreach, etc.)?

- *“We have a monthly newsletter.”*
- *“Flyers at low income housing and on grocery store bulleting boards would be very helpful.”*
- Flyers at stores, senior centers, churches and doctors’ offices; PSAs on radio and in newspapers

What community food projects would best aid the community you serve?

- Farmers Market, Food Bank, Nutrition Education
- *“Help getting our greenhouse and gardens going,”* farm tours, cooking classes
- Food banks, horticultural therapy programs, *“farmers market “field trips” with transportation and help selecting produce until they feel comfortable in that setting.”*
- Senior community garden; farmers market programs for seniors (activities at market), transportation to doctors (to monitor health and nutrition concerns)
- Raised gardens, greenhouse on site, donated/discounted food from local farmers market
- There is a need for healthier tastier foods at nursing homes
- Farmers market outreach programs for seniors
- A program providing publicity and outreach to seniors about their possible eligibility for commodity deliveries
- Emergency food kits for isolated, homebound, and low-income seniors
- Garden programs for our seniors
- An indoor gardening program at our facility
- Horticultural therapy programs at our client’s homes for both the client and the caregivers – gardens providing nutritious fruits and vegetables as well as psychosocial and other physical benefits
- Transportation – particularly for seniors living in rural areas – to grocery stores, farmers markets and other food resources

What space or resources do you have to offer these community food projects?

- Community dining room
- Space for a grow cart
- Meeting rooms, kitchen space, potential garden space, space for container gardens, courtyard
- *“We have meeting space and a small plot, but our location is not convenient – but we’re willing!”*
- Space is limited; would share resources when possible
- *“If we had some raised gardens that volunteers or others could implement and install at our facility we could provide the irrigation system for such... We would also include and invite some of the 55 plus communities in our area to be involved in this endeavor.”*

- Space for raised garden beds

Would anyone from your staff be interested in receiving training or educational materials on food, nutrition, gardening, cooking, and/or horticultural therapy?

- *“Maybe our kitchen staff”*
- *“This is a possibility”*

How could Growing Partners assist and collaborate with your organization to better serve the food needs of the people your agency serves?

- Collaborate on grants to provide services
- *“Help getting our greenhouse and gardens going,”* offer farm tours and cooking classes
- *“We need resources for when their food stamps run out. Pamphlets to distribute to clients, whose illness may be adversely affecting appetite and sense of taste.”*

CONCLUSIONS

The data collected through the Strengths and Needs Assessment (2004) and the SPAC report (2005) demonstrates that food security concerns are a reality for a significant portion of La Plata County’s older adult population. Pressing issues were affordability, access to desired foods, transportation difficulties and lack of knowledge of available services. Additionally, the research shows that a high percentage of older adults remains physically active and participates in hobbies. This is pointed out because it may be indicative of their future interest in community food projects, which would incorporate both hobby gardening and physical activity. While this research did not specifically target populations with physical and/or mental limitations, their nutrition and food security issues may be similar to those of the older adult population. Therefore, the research findings are extrapolated in this report to include all the mentioned populations.

The majority of the food served comes from distributors or grocery stores. None of the specific grocery stores were natural food stores. In the case of senior centers, the menus are dictated at a state level. As listed under the section “Findings,” some programs are offered by the agencies surveyed that relate to food, nutrition, and farming, gardening and/or cooking. These could, however, be enhanced with further education for staff on the importance of nutrition and the role of local, fresh fruits, herbs and vegetables, senior nutrition programs, the numerous possibilities offered through horticultural therapy, and the variety of other community food projects that can be geared towards the older adult and physically and/or mentally limited populations. There is also a need for more education and publicity on the food related services that are currently available, specifically emergency food assistance programs.

Fortunately, agencies are beginning to realize that community food projects would allow them to better serve their intended populations in regards to issues of health and nutrition. Interest and enthusiasm was expressed from a number of the surveyed agencies for the development of local community food projects such as senior community gardens, farmers’ market outreach programs, improved and new transportation services and horticultural therapy activities. These projects could easily be geared towards the older adult and physically and/or mentally limited populations, thus enabling local agencies to not only offer better service but also contribute to efforts to strengthen local food security.

In conclusion, prior research and the research completed through Growing Partner's Community Food Assessment has painted an optimistic picture for a future of community food projects for older adults in La Plata County.

LOW-INCOME

Assessment Methodology. This information comes from responses to a series of Consumer Surveys from those families/individuals with an annual household income of \$30,000 or less per year¹⁹. It also comes from a series of interviews with program directors from charitable food programs such as the Food Bank, Manna Soup Kitchen, SHARE, and from other agencies offering food programming to low-income recipients.

Consumer Surveys: These surveys were administered in various settings throughout the county over the course of several months. Most, however, were collected at a Commodities Food Distribution site and through La Plata Youth Services' volunteers. All participants indicated making less than \$30,000 per year, and thus these surveys were analyzed for various correlations between income and food issues or concerns.

Agency Interviews: Charitable food program directors as well as other agencies interested in food projects or those already offering food related programming were interviewed between January and September 2006. Many of the program directors were interviewed in-person and on-site.

INTRODUCTION

This section compiles information from the Consumer Surveys and agency interviews to paint a picture of La Plata County low-income residents' food needs and resources. The first section discusses food access for low-income residents, focusing on abundance versus quality and nutritional values of food. The second part of this section looks at the issue of food security within the working poor. As was brought up in agency interviews, there may be greater food access issues for those people who make just enough money so as not to qualify for certain charitable food programs. Food needs and resources are then listed as well as interest in various food projects that could begin to address some of the most pressing food needs of the low-income population.

FOOD ACCESS: *Abundance versus Quality and Nutritive Value*

In La Plata County there are many programs in place to ensure people do not go hungry. What seems to ring true with many agencies in La Plata County is that there is abundant regional access to food from a variety of sources. As Dave Sanford pointed out in his interview, even restaurant and retail dumpsters increase our community's access to food. "Wal-Mart

Working with the Durango Farmers' Market (DFM) to receive donations... When asked if they thought of partnering with the DFM to receive donations, Renea Young, Director of the Durango Food Bank, talked about some of the challenges in doing so. Renea used to work with DFM to get donations, but she felt they were very sporadic and not worth the time and energy it took to ask volunteers to come in and help out on a Saturday, a day when the Food Bank is typically closed.

¹⁹ The Operation Healthy Community's Livable Wage Estimates for 2005 and the national poverty level determined annual household income relating to a 'low-income' estimate in La Plata County.

throws away a lot of food. Just go look at their dumpsters. There are also many people who dumpster dive in the county. There is more food than we can eat as a community available.”

As noted in *Chapter 4, Food Resources and Food Projects: Charitable Food Programs*, La Plata County is blessed with a myriad of agencies that have been vital to the health of the community and have done a great job addressing hunger in the region. One example of this is the local soup kitchen, Manna, which is known to attract people from as far away as New Mexico, who travel north to Durango solely for a safe, free hot meal.

Many of these agencies rely directly on community support, thus it is critical the community continues to value their importance. Food comes to them as donations, which is both a blessing and a curse for some program directors. Renea Young, Director of the Food Bank, sometimes worries about having enough food for her clients. She has to keep her shelves stocked so that she will have enough food to meet regional demand. “If we could have a more consistent source of food donations, it would be helpful,” she said. “Sometimes my shelves are stocked, other times I really worry about running out of food.” The Food Bank and Manna Soup Kitchen both receive donations from area grocery stores, via food drives and from local food distributors.

The Manna Soup Kitchen also functions on community food donations. City Market, Albertsons, Mercy Medical Center, Nature’s Oasis, and at times the farmers’ market and local restaurants donate food to be served at the soup kitchen. Most of the food is already prepped and comes to them as “leftovers.” Kim Workman, former Director of Manna, commented that having a staff that knows what to do with a lot of leftovers is helpful. “It’s not gourmet food we are trying to make here. It’s practical, down home cooking, made from a lot of leftovers.”

It does not go unnoticed that these programs, donors and recipients have created a system that feeds a lot of people. However, it is also important to address whether or not the charitable food served is high quality, fresh and nutritious. And this is where there seems to be room for improvement.

This is not to say that agency directors aren’t trying to remedy the situation. There are, in fact, examples of various programs that have established gardens for low-income program recipients. There is also agency and participant interest in increasing access to fresh, local, healthy foods for the low-income population.

In order to begin to address the importance of fresh, nutritional foods, however, it is important to document this perspective. By interviewing health practitioners, agency directors, and nutritional experts, a pattern emerged suggesting a need to improve charitable food offerings to include certain foods. According to Zane Baranowski, a certified nutritionist:

(The knowledge the) general public has been given by governmental agencies about what food is, is inadequate. They have allowed (products such as) white breads, cereals, sugar and corn syrup to count as food. They allow nutritionally compromised, over-processed foods to be part of their recommended daily food choices. (There is a lack of) true understanding about the overall nutritional profile of *real food*.

Several other nutritionists and health practitioners also brought up concerns about a diet laden with sugar, corn syrup, hydrogenated oils and processed foods. It was also noted that fast, convenience foods tend to contain these ingredients – they are used as product stabilizers and flavor enhancers – and, due to their easy-to-prepare and non-perishable nature, these products have greater appeal for the low-income population. According to Amita Nathwani, founder and president of Four Corners Holistic Health Association, “When I walked into a local grocery store what I found was that there were hardly any foods without hydrogenated oils and corn syrup, everything seemed to be processed.”

For some, eating processed foods may feel more like a necessity than a choice. As pointed out by Karen Forest, who works with the Latino population at The San Juan Basin Health Department, “Recent immigrants (are) staying in hotel rooms and have real food security issues. They are using the microwave in their hotel rooms to cook food – that is all they have access to.” What is true, however, is that over consumption of these foods can contribute to a higher risk for obesity and diabetes, two health concerns many of the agencies serving to the low-income population also have to address. According to Whitney Vaughn, advocate at the Family Center of Durango, “Most folks ordering from the food bank want quick foods that are easy to prepare or require no cooking. Very few cooking items ever make the list. If so, the Latino population is most often the ones ordering cooking or baking items.”

The following material is a description of some of the foods offered by two charitable food programs.²⁰ This information is offered to display a typical charitable food menu, reflective of both participant demand and the nutritional components of the federal food system²¹. It also demonstrates the strong presence of foods high in sugar and that are non-perishable (known to contain food preservatives and stabilizers like hydrogenated oils).

A CLOSER LOOK AT TWO CHARITABLE FOOD PROGRAMS AND WHAT THEY OFFER

1) USDA COMMODITIES, THE EMERGENCY FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (TEFAP)

The mission of the USDA TEFAP Program, as listed in the Charitable Food Programs Section of this report, is to supplement the diets of low-income needy persons, including elderly people, by providing emergency food and nutrition assistance.

The following is a menu from the TEFTAP distribution on June 22 at the La Plata County Fair Grounds. (* Denotes the presence of added sugar, & **, the presence of hydrogenated oils.)

Menu²²

- 3 – 8oz Jars of Peanut Butter *, **
- 1 – 15 oz Can of Peaches, * (sugar & corn syrup)
- 3 – 10.75 oz Cans of Vegetarian Soup, *, **
- 1 – 15 oz Can of Cut Sweet Potatoes, * (sugar & corn syrup)

²⁰ This is an example of foods offered by both the USDA TEFTAP Program and WIC in La Plata County. This is by no means a complete list of all foods offered.

²¹ This is inclusive of the FDA Food Pyramid and USDA Dietary Guidelines. It should not be interpreted as a reflection of the particular local food programs' choices.

²² The USDA provides a webpage with links to commodity fact sheets and recipes currently available to persons eligible to participate in TEFAP. Each fact sheet includes a description of the USDA product, packaging and storage information, nutrition facts such as serving size, fat and sodium (salt) levels, etc., and suggested recipes. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/facts/hhpfacts/hp-tefap.htm>.

2 – 1 lb Enriched Macaroni Packages (enriched with ferrous sulfate, niacin, thiamin, mononitrate riboflavin, & folic acid)
2 – 14.5 oz Cans of Carrots (salt added)
1 – 2 lb Package of White Beans (no additives)
2 – 24 oz Cans of Beef Stew
2 – 11.5 oz Cans of Cranberry Juice Concentrate, * (fructose & corn syrup)
2 – 15 oz Boxes of Cereal, Corn Flakes & Tasteeos, * (sugar listed as the second ingredient)

The TEFTAP Program occasionally provides frozen meats and cheese as sources of protein to participants.

2) WOMEN, INFANT, CHILDREN (WIC) PROGRAM

The WIC Program provides supplemental foods, health care referrals and nutrition education at no cost to low-income pregnant, breastfeeding and non-breastfeeding post-partum women, and to infants and children up to 5 years of age, who are found to be at nutritional risk.²³ Unlike food stamps, WIC offers very specific food coupons that go so far as to specify certain brands and items of food. Based on a client's needs, "checks" are printed with specific items that are then taken by the client to the grocery store to access those foods.

According to program director Betzi Murphy, WIC offers thirty choices of fortified cereals²⁴; frozen or big cans of juice – fortified with vitamin C; milk and cheese products which contain calcium; and eggs, peanut butter, or beans as a protein source. Women who are breastfeeding, which is encouraged, have access to carrots and tuna. Infant formula is also supplied.

As participants and the program director are well aware, WIC coupons do not provide for fresh fruits or vegetables as part of its current program. This is something Betzi would like to see change over time, because of the importance of fresh sources of vitamins and minerals that could benefit the participants in her program.

What a WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program could do

The WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) is associated with the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for WIC. Congress established the FMNP in 1992 to provide fresh, unprepared, locally grown fruits and vegetables to WIC participants, and to expand the awareness, use of, and sales at farmers' markets.²⁵

Currently, the state of Colorado does not participate in the WIC FMNP; however, there are counties in the state that fund their own programs. The Boulder Farmers' Market and The Alamosa Farmers' Market provide funds to their county's WIC office for vouchers that can be redeemed at these markets.

The USDA, realizing the demand for fresh foods as part of the larger WIC Program, has proposed an amendment to the existing rules to add fruits, vegetables and whole grains to the current products available. If passed, the average WIC family would have about \$45

²³ <http://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/FMNP/FMNPfaqs.htm>

²⁴ Including such vitamins and minerals as Iron and Folic Acid.

²⁵ <http://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/FMNP/FMNPfaqs.htm>

monthly to purchase fruits and vegetables at supermarkets and farmer's markets starting in 2007.

La Plata County currently does not offer a WIC FMNP, but Betzi is very interested in following through with agencies such as The Growing Partners, The Durango Farmers' Market, and Fort Lewis College to get it started. Whether through federal support or via local efforts that would submit grant proposals for funding, it is clear having a WIC FMNP is be a regional priority.²⁶

FOOD SECURITY WITHIN THE WORKING POOR

In completing interviews with agencies serving the low-income population, the issue of food security within the working poor arose. The working poor are considered a subset of the population who is employed full time, but earns an annual household income below the average livable wage. This subset may not qualify for charitable food programs such as Food Stamps, Commodities, and The Food Bank. This population, the "working poor," may feel the strongest repercussion of food insecurity in that they struggle to afford the cost of food for their families, yet do not qualify for charitable food programs. Whitney Vaughn of the Family Center of Durango expressed the local dynamic that contributes to certain populations being able to access certain food programs. "Food is very accessible here (in Durango) because of the food bank and other resources. Most of our referrals are to the food bank. Families tend to come here for assistance. Single and homeless individuals seem to seek support from the soup kitchen. It is a different population. Their food access is often better than the working poor."

FOOD NEEDS of the LOW-INCOME POPULATION

Throughout the course of interviews, agency directors were asked to list the most pressing food needs of the low-income populations they serve. The following is a list of some of those needs.

Durango Food Bank:

- **Education in food preparation:** *"It would be good to make people more self-reliant and able to take care of themselves by preparing their own food."* Renea Young, Director
- **Having charitable food programs cover peoples' food needs:** *"People come to me because they sometimes just need a week's worth of food before they get hooked up with Food Stamps, but many times the stamps don't cover all of their food needs."* Renea Young

Family Center of Durango:

- **Individual Cooking classes:** *"Cooking programs are great, but few low-income families are comfortable in large groups; they would do much better ideally to have one on one service. If I could have my wish, we would have someone able to go to their homes and work with them individually on their food needs, cooking shopping, etc. Obviously this would take a lot staff time."* Whitney Vaughn
- **Transportation** for the food bank: *"They may not seek this service if they can not find transportation."* Whitney Vaughn
- **Food Quality over Food Access:** *"We are very interested in local food and nutritional food. There is a lot of missing education on nutrition and on (how to shop for) bulk foods. There is a*

²⁶ To further encourage mothers to breastfeed, Betzi mentioned initiating the program by offering it to WIC recipients who are breastfeeding moms.

culture of food in low-income families, a junk food circuit. They have lost the taste for healthy food. The cooked foods they buy are microwaveable, pastas, hot pockets. They cook based on convenience not nutrition. Their greatest food need is in the health and quality of the food they eat.” Whitney Vaughn

The Family Center of Red Mesa:

- **Transportation:** “Seniors could be driven to grocery stores to do their shopping.”

Manna Soup Kitchen:

- **Cooking and nutritional education.** “Organizing a class that will teach people how to cook simple, nutritious meals; including the basics in meal planning, preparing food, and nutritional values.” Kim Workman, former Director
- **Access to foods high in protein and calcium.** “We get a lot of donations, but where food falls short is in the protein (meat) and dairy (eggs, yogurt, tuna) areas.” Perla Gething, Manna Kitchen Manager
- **Access to affordable local products.** “I want to source local products for the Soup Kitchen, but I cannot afford it. If someone wanted to donate the produce, I could write the donor a receipt for tax deduction purposes²⁷.” Kim Workman

Promoviendo la Salud, an arm of San Juan Basin Health Department:

- **Nutritional education:** “A lot of their diets are really poor, especially when it comes to fast food. I hope that a cooking class can help teach people to go to the store and purchase affordable healthy foods that they can prepare throughout the week. Many people say they don’t buy healthy food because they can’t afford it, but possibly it takes a little more effort and planning to be possible.” Karen Forest, Program Director

SHARE, Catholic Charities:

- **Greater availability of foods low in sugar, carbohydrates, etc:** “Someone recently requested we carry a food package for diabetics – one that would be low in sugar, carbohydrates, etc.” Lon Irwin, SHARE Coordinator

Volunteers of America Safehouse:

- **Transportation:** “For people leaving the program to live on their own, transportation to food sources remains a significant obstacle.” Lynn Asano
- **Access to baby food:** “For some young mothers, baby food is sometimes a problem to access.” Lynn Asano
- **Having a well-balanced diet:** “Many of our clients do not eat well-balanced meals with vegetables and fruits.” Lynn Asano

WIC:

- **Transportation, lack of money, &/or time to get to workshops:** all listed as challenges offering food-related programming to low-income recipients. Betzi Murphy, Director

²⁷ Manna is a 501(c) 3.

FOOD RESOURCES of the LOW-INCOME POPULATION

Program directors were also asked to name some of the food resources currently available to the low-income participants their agencies serve. The following is a list of those resources.

Family Center of Durango:

- **The Durango Food Bank**
- **The Food SHARE Program**

Manna Soup Kitchen:

- **An on-site vegetable garden:** Manna maintains an on-site vegetable garden, which appears to be a good idea in principle, but has mostly created a lot of work for staff. This is evident in the interview with Kim Workman, former Director of Manna. For the past two years Manna has used their garden space to grow ingredients for pickles, which are sold to raise money for the program. When asked whether they were interested in growing food to be used in soup kitchen meals, Kim replied: *“The garden is very labor intensive. Our priority is to feed people, not grow food, so the garden becomes a second priority.”*

Kim also mentioned that the garden has created a lot of work for her and her staff. *“I spend a lot of time doing garden maintenance and harvesting. My kitchen staff is not prepared to work with the dirty (freshly harvested) food that needs to be washed and prepped. All of this adds three steps to my staff’s cooking process, which they are not accustomed to.”*

Promoviendo la Salud, an arm of San Juan Basin Health Department:

- **Cooking classes:** *Share our Strengths*, a Denver company, is a 6-week program that teaches people to buy and prepare healthy foods on a limited budget.
- **WIC:** for pregnant women and kids
- **The Food Bank**
- **Manna Soup Kitchen**
- **Wal-Mart**

Volunteers of America Safehouse:

- **Manna Soup Kitchen**
- **The Food Bank**
- **Local churches** that make referrals to the soup kitchen and food bank.

AGENCY INTEREST IN FOOD PROJECTS

The following is a list of projects named by food agency directors that could benefit the people they serve. It is meant to link the needs and resources of the low-income population with creative solutions.

Family Center of Durango:

- **Community Gardens**
- **Schools garden because this hits everyone**
- **Cooking classes** with nutritional education incorporated
- **Individualized cooking and shopping classes**
- **Transportation services**

La Plata Youth Services:

- **Cooking classes** for youth.
- **More farmers' markets** downtown, more than once per week.
- **Community gardens** to lower the cost of organic/fresh vegetables and make them more accessible to people with low-incomes.

Manna Soup Kitchen:

- **A greenhouse** for the garden area to allow for extended production of crops.
- **A compost pile** to utilize food waste.
- **A memorial fruit tree garden** in remembrance of deceased friends and patrons.

Promoviendo la Salud, an arm of San Juan Basin Health Department:

- **Cooking classes**
- **Grocery store tours** teaching people how to read labels and identify healthy, affordable foods.

Volunteers of America Safehouse:

- **Transportation services**
- **Community gardens**
- **Cooking and nutritional workshops**

San Juan Basin Health Department:

- **Food Banks with healthier choices**
- **Enabling gardens**
- **Cooking classes**

CONCLUSIONS

Information from agencies offering food related programming and services illustrates there are many food resources already available to the low-income sector of La Plata County. What it also shows is there are opportunities to improve charitable food offerings by including certain foods; increasing the amount of nutritional information and education provided; offering transportation services to improve food access; improving access to growing spaces; and offering cooking classes focused on healthy and affordable food purchasing.

RURAL RESIDENTS

Assessment Methodology. This information comes from several interviews with rural residents regarding rural food security.

INTRODUCTION

La Plata County is home to many rural communities. Most employment opportunities and services, however, exist in the urban areas. This is also where charitable food programs are housed. According to Beth LaShell, an agricultural educator at Fort Lewis College, food security in the county is very regionalized. "In Durango proper, yes, we are food secure, but in the entire county, no, we are not."

Proximity to services affects whether or not people will utilize them, especially if public transportation to those services is not available. Road Runner Transit recently expanded its transportation routes to include a new service connecting Bayfield proper to Durango and maintains a connection between Ignacio and Durango. Current prices are \$0.50 - \$2 depending on the distance traveled. The busses, however, do not get to the most rural areas in the county; they basically hit the city centers and major buildings. For the elderly, physically impaired, or youth, getting to these bus stops without a personal vehicle is still an issue.

Currently there are no charitable food services, other than school lunch, that people in rural areas can access.

According to one resident from the Breen/Marvel area in the western part of the county, “Folks in Breen don’t go to the Soup Kitchen for lunch.” It’s just too far. And people in the Red Mesa District don’t feel there is a lot of food stamp use either.

Currently there are no charitable food services, other than school lunch, that people in rural areas can access. There are however many home gardens in rural areas. And, according to participants at the Food Forum in Hesperus, a lot of people in that area of the county preserve food when it’s producing in abundance.

Rural areas, such as Red Mesa, are known to be tight knit communities that take care of their own people. According to Beth Lashell, “there is a lot of kindness from neighbors.” Kevin Mallow, who grew up in the same part of the county believes there is very little hunger in the area.

CONCLUSIONS

Although it’s felt that rural communities look for internal solutions to handle food insecurity, Growing Partners sees rural food security as an issue that warrants widespread community attention. Lack of access, due to transportation constraints or distance to agencies and services, are needs the county must address to increase food security in rural areas. Whether services come to them, or access is better facilitated with transportation services, it is clear that rural residents do not have the same access to food programs and services, as do those in urban areas.