



# Food Access in West Tallahatchie

a community  
partnership working to  
improve food futures

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*Specifically in the towns of Glendora, Sumner, Tutwiler, Webb, and Rome.*

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# Executive Summary

## Purpose

In fulfillment of the Dow Sustainability Fellows Masters and Professional Fellowship Program, five fellowship recipients utilized a community-based participatory research approach to address the systemic challenges to food insecurity in West Tallahatchie, Mississippi. Located in one of the least food-secure states in America, the west side of Tallahatchie County (referred to as West Tallahatchie) is a rural county located in the fertile Delta region and is a roughly 30-45 minute drive away from the closest full-service grocery store. The student team partnered with the Emmett Till Interpretive Center (ETIC) in Sumner, Mississippi to engage residents of West Tallahatchie and regional nonprofits in the research process. Building on the stories and insights shared by community members during interviews and workshops, the project team designed a region-specific scenario-based plan that provides potential strategies for more food-secure futures. The following report summarizes these scenarios along with relevant research and resources believed to be most useful to West Tallahatchie in improving access to fresh fruits and vegetables within the community.

## Background

Many Mississippians are currently food-insecure or at risk of facing food insecurity, particularly women and children. The causes of food insecurity are linked to racial, economic, social, and political factors and will require creative problem solving at the community, state, and national level. We believe that investment in sustainable food systems is one action that may increase food security, while also improving public health outcomes and building a healthier economy.

## Methodology and the Problem

Our project sought to provide West Tallahatchie with actionable tools that could serve as a roadmap for next steps toward improving community access to healthy food, namely fresh fruits and vegetables. We used scenario planning to provide narratives for future outcomes that allow the community to better imagine how decisions made today could influence the future of food access in their community. After conducting a series of interviews and engaging in workshops with community members, we summarized these findings and used them to choose drivers that would provide a theme across our scenarios. We chose as drivers the degree of both community empowerment (cohesive vs. fragmented) and local food production (plentiful local options vs. no local options). Using these drivers, we defined four possible food futures: *Business as Usual*, *One Stop Shop*, *Growing Tallahatchie*, and *Missed Opportunities*.

*The Business as Usual* scenario is a continuation of current conditions in West Tallahatchie where there is little community organization, a lack of political support, limited collaboration with nonprofit and community organizations, and low interest in growing, using or cooking with fresh produce. *One Stop Shop* presents a future where fresh produce that is sourced primarily from outside

of West Tallahatchie is sold at a small to mid-sized, year-round supermarket in the county. The *Growing Tallahatchie* scenario explores a future where community members purchase fresh produce grown within the county through four strategies—farmers markets, mobile markets, healthy corner stores, and farming programs—that support the local economy. Finally, *Missed Opportunities* is a food future where fresh produce is grown and available within West Tallahatchie, but community members are unable to come together to make improved food access a reality.

With these four futures defined, the project team used our research on current dynamics in West Tallahatchie to analyze each scenario's potential effect on food security-related outcomes in West Tallahatchie according to its organizational structure and leadership, accessibility, economic development, public health and nutrition, and education.

## Recommendations

Our report includes scenario-specific recommendations that apply to particular outcomes described within each of the four scenarios. However, for West Tallahatchie to begin the work necessary to achieve the most desirable of the described scenario outcomes, community cohesion and commitment will be required. We recommend that West Tallahatchie lay the groundwork for strengthening community capacity and drive this change through the following steps:

- Convene community meetings across Glendora, Rome, Sumner, Tutwiler, and Webb to provide an opportunity for members of the community to learn more about potential food-security outcomes for West Tallahatchie, and importantly, to provide the means of becoming involved and effecting change.
- Develop a coalition of leaders that will be able to support, manage, and lead the endeavor of improving food security within West Tallahatchie. We recommend that the coalition be comprised of between eight and twelve people who represent the diversity of identities and preferences across West Tallahatchie, as well as non-profit organizations that work in the region. This representative body will help ensure that decision-making reflects the priorities of the West Tallahatchie community being served. Working in tandem with the local community to increase community involvement and empowerment, this group will take steps toward realizing a food-secure future that serves the needs of all West Tallahatchie residents.



**Figure 1: Summary of Scenarios**



People's priorities and attitudes remain unchanged leading to a continuation of normal circumstances. Specifically, there is:

- › Low interest in growing, using, or cooking with fresh produce;
- › Little community organization;
- › Lack of political support; and
- › Limited collaboration with nonprofit or community organization partners.



Community members and businesses purchase locally sourced produce at a variety of alternative food environments that grow and support the local economy. Four strategies help the community move toward this future:

- › Improving existing farmers markets;
- › Establishing mobile markets;
- › Transitioning to healthy corner stores; and
- › Encouraging farming programs.



Community members are able to purchase fresh produce, sourced from outside of the county at a year-round at a small- to mid-sized supermarket located within West Tallahatchie. The success and viability of the market depends on:

- › Motivated and committed community leadership;
- › Experienced ownership;
- › Having residents dedicated to regularly shopping at the supermarket;
- › Clear political backing; and
- › Significant financial support.



A future where food security is possible, but unrealized due to a number of possible factors:

- › Lack of political support;
- › Lack of community building and agreement; and
- › Lack of leadership to secure funding and additional resources.

**Figure 2: Overview of Scenario Recommendations****ONE STOP SHOP****Strategy: Small- to Mid-Sized Supermarket**

1. Pursue a public-private partnership;
2. Form a diverse Board of Directors with a designated coordinator;
3. Identify and recruit an experienced grocer;
4. Establish a regularly scheduled bus or shuttle service;
5. Offer space at the market for community gathering, events, and educational activities; and
6. Create an in-store marketing and labeling systems that inform shoppers about healthy eating choices.

**Strategy: Farmers Markets**

1. Create a diverse farmers market advisory board;
2. Develop a handbook of market rules and policies;
3. Petition to become a certified farmers market;
4. Create a marketing publicity plan;
5. Apply for authorization to accept food assistance benefits and obtain free equipment from the Farmers Market Coalition; and
6. Connect with organizers from other regional markets to recruit new vendors.

**Strategy: Mobile Markets**

1. Purchase produce directly from farmers;
2. Develop a pre-order program for customers;
3. Offer food preparation education programs;
4. Offer a variety of grocery items;
5. Have special promotions at the end of the month;
6. Establish consistent stops with convenient locations; and
7. Create a diverse mobile market advisory board.

**GROWING TALLAHATCHIE****Strategy: Healthy Corner Stores**

1. Identify receptive retailers;
2. Provide financial and technical assistance to small businesses;
3. Make small, gradual changes to help the store adjust to the demands of selling perishable inventory;
4. Assist stores with certification for SNAP, WIC, and other public food assistance benefits; and
5. Promote healthy corner stores and healthy eating.

**Strategy: Farming Programs**

1. Host workshops for local farmers focused on production methods and business skills;
2. Connect beginner farmers across the Delta and throughout the Southeast;
3. Join a regional farming network; and
4. Develop an incubator-farming program .

# Introduction

## 1.1 Project Scope and Goals

With one of the highest unemployment rates in the country, Mississippi is the nation's least food secure state with 22% of households lacking reliable access to healthy food in 2014.<sup>1</sup> In rural regions with less densely populated communities, finding ways to ensure access to fresh food—especially fruits and vegetables—can be challenging. This project is a direct response to the limited availability of fresh produce in West Tallahatchie and seeks to promote community-driven work toward: expanding access to fresh fruits and vegetables, contributing to local economic growth, and improving the health of community members and their families. While efforts have been made to address food insecurity in this region, these efforts have thus far been unsuccessful in bringing real and lasting change to the community. This project represents a partnership between five Dow Fellows at the University of Michigan and The Emmett Till Interpretive Center (ETIC), a nonprofit organization based in the Mississippi Delta dedicated to community-based racial reconciliation efforts. Together, and in collaboration with the greater community, we have worked to explore strategies for increasing access to fresh fruits and vegetables in West Tallahatchie. This report presents our findings in the form of four potential future scenarios for sustainable food systems in West Tallahatchie, Mississippi.

*Food security is the ability of all people to have access at all times to enough safe and nutritious food so that they can lead healthy and active lives.*



Figure 3: Emmett Till Interpretive Center in Summer, Mississippi

## 1.2 The Dow Fellows Team

Our Dow Fellows team consists of five masters and professional students representing the University of Michigan School of Public Health, the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy, the School of Natural Resources and Environment, the Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning, the Ross School of Business, and the Law School. We have capitalized on the foundational knowledge of our respective disciplines to incorporate multiple perspectives into this work.



*Dow Fellows during the May 2016 trip to Mississippi*

<sup>1</sup> "Food Insecurity in Mississippi." Feeding America. <http://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2014/overall/Mississippi>

As such, our individual interests, skill sets, and experiences have allowed our team to consider the issue of food security in West Tallahatchie through an interdisciplinary lens. Our integrated approach has challenged us to develop these food system scenarios with respect to the impact on community stakeholders, government relations, local economies, public health, community development, and the natural environment.

### 1.3 Approach and Methodology

Achieving food security is a community effort. It depends on our ability to establish successful and sustainable food systems, which require designing and implementing solutions that best respond to local needs and wishes. As a team of students from outside of West Tallahatchie we recognize that we do not have all of the necessary knowledge or expertise to address this challenge. Because of this limitation, our project has been guided by a community-based participatory approach, where we have made every effort to partner with community organizations, leaders, and members in all aspects and steps of the process.

The Dow Team conducted its research throughout the 2016 calendar year. We focused on identifying community resources, needs, and opportunities for increasing access to fresh produce in West Tallahatchie by collecting data through:

- **Key informant interviews** with representatives from a diverse mix of perspectives, including local mayors, business owners, and farmers as well as representatives of faith-based organizations and local nonprofits to learn about perceptions of healthy eating and barriers to becoming a more food secure community;
- **Informational contact interviews** with representatives of organizations actively working in the Delta region and across Mississippi on food access and community development initiatives to learn about food security success stories and best practices;
- **Community workshops** with residents of West Tallahatchie, stakeholders, and representatives of nonprofit organizations to build on findings from our interviews and define scenarios;
- **Food audits** of six stores in West Tallahatchie to assess what fresh fruits and vegetables are currently available to residents within the county;
- **Community consumer surveys** distributed to West Tallahatchie residents to collect consumer information on shopping and healthy eating habits from a larger sample of community members; and



Figure 4: Three of five Dow Fellows after December 2016 community workshop

*A sustainable food system is a collaborative network that integrates several components in order to enhance a community's environmental, economic, and social well-being.*



- **Final community meeting and presentation** with residents, stakeholders, and community leaders to share the project report, discuss findings, and incorporate community feedback into the final report.

This research was supplemented with consultation and advice from the ETIC, academic scholars and practitioners in the food and public health professions, nonprofit websites, reports, news and academic literature, and brainstorming sessions among project team members. Please see Appendices A-F for specific key informant interview, food audit survey, community consumer survey, and community workshop protocols.

The first step in this process was to listen. The interviews and associated research focused on several topic areas for effective food systems as defined by interviews with community members and a review of food system academic literature, including: community resources that could serve as a basis for intervention, community cohesion, organizational structure and leadership, accessibility, economic development, food purchasing preferences, healthy eating behaviors, long-term and short-term funding sources, education, and interesting or innovative alternative food system practices. Afterwards we reviewed and summarized the self-identified needs and ideas of West Tallahatchie residents. Upon gathering information from community and expert consultations, our team outlined several potential strategies for addressing the core issues related to food security in West Tallahatchie. Informed by the above research, we synthesized these strategies into four food system scenarios, discussing how these possible futures may impact access to healthy foods, potential barriers to success, and strategic recommendations for implementation.



Figure 5: Community Workshop at Emmett Till Interpretive Center



Figure 6: Community Workshop at Tutwiler Community Education Center

## 2. Food Security Needs in West Tallahatchie

### 2.1 Background

For the purpose of our work, we have often used the phrase ‘food access’ to discuss food insecurity. Food insecurity, defined as limited access or ability to acquire enough nutritionally adequate and safe food,<sup>2</sup> is a serious public health problem.<sup>3</sup> More than 22% of Mississippi households and one in four Tallahatchie residents are food-insecure.<sup>4</sup> Mississippians most at risk of facing food insecurity are women and children—particularly minorities, those living below the poverty line, single parent households, and/or households in which no members have completed high school.<sup>5</sup> In the Delta region, where Tallahatchie County is located, most low-income residents have to travel over 30 miles to access more affordable food available at larger grocery stores and supermarkets.<sup>6</sup>



*One important measure of food access is the distance to the nearest supermarket, defined as 10 miles or less for rural areas.*

Especially in a challenging economic environment, people living with food insecurity might not have the ability to purchase enough food or to purchase sometimes more expensive healthy foods. Facing these odds, adults and children who experience food insecurity are at risk of developing health issues, such as diabetes and

cardiovascular disease.<sup>7</sup> Food insecurity has also been associated with depression and anxiety among teens and adults. In young children, periods of food insecurity may cause developmental delays, including lower IQ scores and increased behavioral problems.<sup>8</sup> Annually, “food insecurity costs the US about \$90 billion in medical care costs, lost educational attainment and worker productivity, and investment burden into the emergency food system.”<sup>9</sup>

With the largest percentage of residents with earned incomes below the federal poverty level,<sup>10</sup> the state of Mississippi faces widespread food insecurity and there is increasing concern over the significant number of residents currently experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, food insecurity.

2 Anderson, S. A. (1990). Core indicators of nutritional status for difficult-to-sample populations. *The Journal of Nutrition*, 120(Suppl. 11), 1559–1600.

3 Chilton, M. & Rose, D. (2009). A Rights-Based Approach to Food Insecurity in the United States. *American Journal Of Public Health*, 99(7), 1203-1211. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2105/ajph.2007.130229>

4 “Food Insecurity in Tallahatchie County.” Feeding America. <http://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2014/overall/mississippi/county/tallahatchie>

5 Chilton, A Rights-Based Approach to Food Insecurity in the United States.; “Issue Brief: Food Security in Mississippi.” September 2009. Virginia Commonwealth University Center on Human Needs. [http://societyhealth.vcu.edu/media/society-health/pdf/POSD\\_FoodSec\\_MS\\_2009.pdf](http://societyhealth.vcu.edu/media/society-health/pdf/POSD_FoodSec_MS_2009.pdf)

6 “Stimulating Grocery Retail Development in Mississippi.” The Food Trust. [http://policylinkcontent.s3.amazonaws.com/MS\\_recommFINAL\\_web\\_0.pdf](http://policylinkcontent.s3.amazonaws.com/MS_recommFINAL_web_0.pdf)

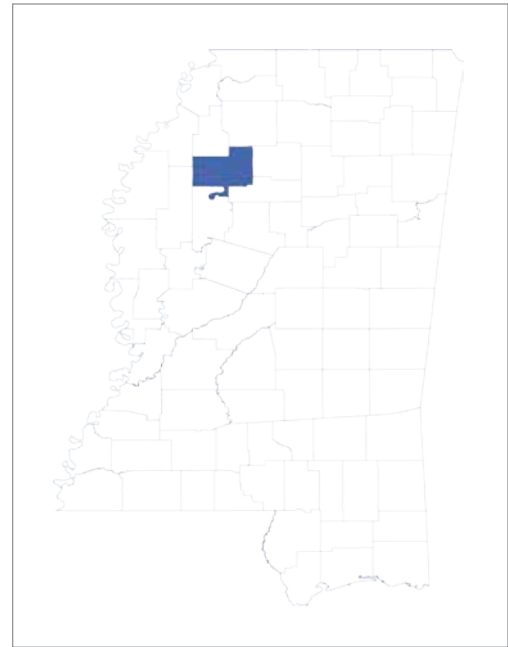
7 Leung, C. W., Epel, E. S., Ritchie, L. D., Crawford, P. B., & Laraia, B. A. (2014). Food insecurity is inversely associated with diet quality of lower-income adults. *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*, 114(12), 1943-1953.e2. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jand.2014.06.353>; Chilton, A Rights-Based Approach to Food Insecurity in the United States.

8 Pelletier, D. L., Olson, C. M., & Frongillo, E. A. (2012). Food insecurity, hunger, and undernutrition. In Erdman, J. W. Jr., MacDonald, I. A., & Zeisel, S. H. (Eds.), *Present Knowledge in nutrition* (10th ed., pp. 1165-1181). Ames, Iowa: John Wiley & Sons.

9 Chilton, A Rights-Based Approach to Food Insecurity in the United States.

10 “Mississippi state budget and finances.” Ballotpedia. [https://ballotpedia.org/Mississippi\\_state\\_budget\\_and\\_finances](https://ballotpedia.org/Mississippi_state_budget_and_finances)

The problem of food insecurity is linked with racial, economic, social, and political factors that cannot be easily solved overnight and require equitable, inclusive, and unified action at the community to national levels. While the solution to food insecurity must include the elimination of poverty, *investment in sustainable food systems* is one approach towards reaching the goal of improved food access.<sup>11</sup> Policy changes that promote sustainable food systems also typically promote sustainable and local food production, promote access to local foods, and increase investment in alternative food retail markets.<sup>12</sup> We believe that the State of Mississippi and community leadership in West Tallahatchie may improve public health outcomes and build a healthier economy through investing in sustainable food systems.



*Figure 7: Map of Tallahatchie County located in the rural Delta Region of Mississippi*

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<sup>11</sup> "Food Security & Food Access" Grace Communications Foundation. <http://www.sustainabletable.org/280/food-security-food-access>

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

## 3. Scenario Planning: Improved Food Futures in West Tallahatchie

### 3.1 Introduction

Scenario planning allows communities to envision possible futures, the steps that are necessary to realize these outcomes, and the challenges that may occur along the way.<sup>13</sup> The scenario creation requires an open dialogue between planner and stakeholder. Planners must first listen to communities so they can understand what is needed and glean insights while communities openly share what they hope for in their future. Most importantly, scenario planning is not about designing a single “best” future that only gives the community one option. Instead, this approach aims to provide several future outcomes, both those that may succeed in implementing a desired change and those which are less desirable, but may illustrate the consequences of “business-as-usual” trends.

We have chosen scenario planning to explore four different food system scenarios for West Tallahatchie. These scenarios were defined according to what food systems might look like in the future under different conditions of food production and community empowerment—two important drivers of food access in the county identified by our community partners. Each scenario was used to identify feasible and sustainable ways to increase access to fresh produce within the county. They can be used as an educational tool to inspire action, and they allow consideration of different options when there may be disagreement about which potential solutions may be best.

### 3.2 Scenario Planning Methodology

Scenario planning is a strategic planning method that communities can use to imagine, illustrate, and assess possible futures. It is a method that uses plausible stories to demonstrate how potential changes within a community might unfold. It is a way to critically think about the future, but also to proactively develop strategies that will shape a community’s future. Scenario planning can be thought of “as a way of thinking about the future without trying to predict it.”<sup>14</sup>

There are a number of familiar planning methods that can be used to help lead futures towards desirable outcomes. However, these tools, such as forecasting, are often incomplete and focus on past trends rather than envisioning what might lie ahead. These forecasts are not able to account for important unpredictable factors that influence

*Food production means that in an ideal West Tallahatchie, every resident has access to good quality and affordable produce within the community rather than outside of the county. Food can be locally sourced from farms, community gardens, markets, and ‘home-grown’ places, but it can also be outsourced, brought in from growers and places outside of the county.*

<sup>13</sup> Hopkins, L.D. & Zapata, M.A. (2007). *Engaging the Future: Forecasts, Scenarios, Plans, and Projects* (1st ed.). Cambridge, MA: Lincoln Institute of Land Policy.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.



the future.<sup>15</sup> Visioning is another common way for communities to imagine what they may become. This process helps identify common community goals, but highlights only one future and often fails to identify actionable next steps that can help realize a desired outcome.

Scenario planning looks at a more diverse, rich, and actionable range of possibilities. Scenarios are based on the history of the community, and the drivers, or most important factors, and uncertainties that are shared during conversations with community leaders and residents. Instead of planning for a “best” future, scenarios represent *possible* futures that give a wide range of outcomes, not all of which may be desirable.<sup>16</sup> This strategy helps communities be prepared for possible surprises or setbacks, and in doing so improves the ability of communities to respond to these events. Finally, scenario planning relies on storytelling, which helps to build a shared perspective and narrative to inspire community-wide action.

Drivers are the key sources of uncertainty used to define the scenarios and are therefore carefully chosen. According to interview and workshop participants, thinking about possible food futures in West Tallahatchie is very tied to food production and community empowerment, thus these two drivers were selected. These drivers were defined on a scale of ‘outsourced’ to ‘local’ food production and on a scale of ‘less cohesive’ to ‘more cohesive’ community empowerment, as described in Figure 1.

As shown in Figure 8, we consider four possible food futures defined by the combinations of these drivers —*Business as Usual*, *One Stop Shop*, *Growing Tallahatchie*, and *Missed Opportunities*. It is important to consider each of these four futures in order to make decisions and follow recommendations

*Community empowerment is more than building a space where community members are welcome and encouraged to share their beliefs and needs, it means that the community of West Tallahatchie is strongly united on which food future is best for all of its members as a whole, regardless of race, age, or income.*

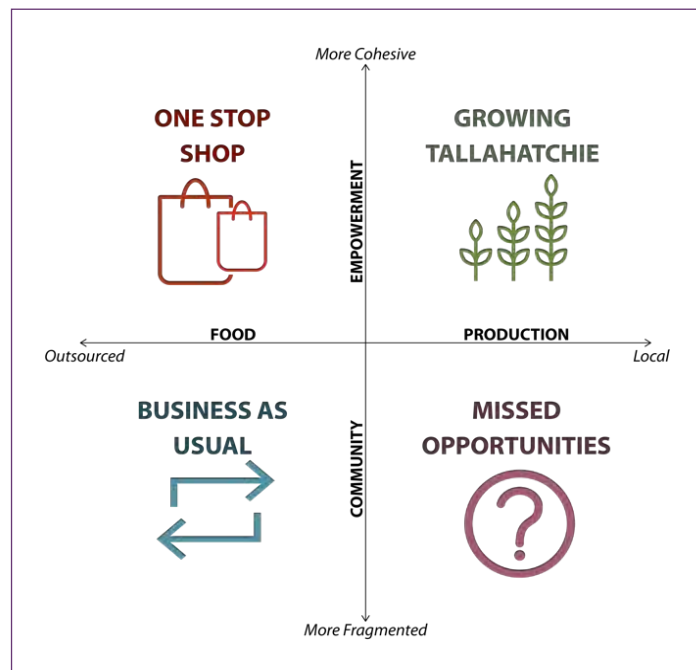


Figure 8: Four future food system scenarios developed for West Tallahatchie, Mississippi

<sup>15</sup> Huss, W.R. (1988). “A Move Toward Scenario Analysis.” *International Journal of Forecasting*, 4(3): 377-388

<sup>16</sup> Hopkins and Zapata, *Engaging the Future*.

that move the community toward a desirable future. The analyses of the four potential food futures were completed through discussions of five key dimensions, or factors that impact or are impacted by food security, including: organizational structure and leadership, accessibility, economic development, public health and nutrition, and education. These dimension analyses, as well as their potential challenges and our recommendations, are included later in the report discussion.

*One Stop Shop* and *Growing Tallahatchie* both describe scenarios where food access is improved, but through very different strategies. *One Stop Shop* describes addressing the problem by creating a new, community-owned grocery store, and *Growing Tallahatchie* addresses the problem through four possible solutions: farmers markets, mobile markets, healthy corner stores, and farming programs. As both require considerable community initiative, we also describe a scenario where local food production increases without community leadership (*Missed Opportunities*) and where the trends continue unchanged (*Business as Usual*).

### 3.3 Potential Futures in West Tallahatchie

Below we present the four scenarios narratives for West Tallahatchie. They encompass a range of possible futures, as illustrated in Figure 1. The scenarios range from one where no major changes take place in the community and access to food remains limited for many people, to one where there are many ways for community members to access fresh produce and the community flourishes. As you read each scenario, please keep in mind that scenarios are not designed to create perfect futures. We seek to take into account the realities of a place and space, the desires of the people living there, the resources that are available, and how all of those variables may evolve in the future. Sometimes a scenario describes a future that we do not prefer. While this may not seem helpful at first, the purpose of these scenarios is to help community members consider more fully the decisions they face today. While we recommend *Growing Tallahatchie* as the most promising scenario, we encourage you to consider all four scenarios so that you can best decide which possible future meets the needs of your community, your family, and your own goals for the future.

## I: Business as Usual

The *Business as Usual* scenario explores West Tallahatchie in ten years, where community empowerment and local food sources remain unchanged from the present. *Business as Usual* represents a future where no action has been taken by community members to organize toward improving food access and subsequent health outcomes.

*Business as Usual* scenario drivers include:

- *Less cohesive community empowerment* to improve fresh produce in the form of low interest in growing, using or cooking with fresh produce, lack of community organization, and weak leadership from community leaders and limited collaboration with partners like nonprofits and community organizations.

- *Outsourced food production* continues, meaning that in order for community members to access reliable and diverse fresh produce, they must travel up to 45 minutes by car outside of the community to supermarkets or large grocery chains.

## Ten Years from Now

The year is 2027. Without shifts in community engagement in terms of the issue of local food security, and without a concerted initiative to source local food from the Mississippi Delta, residents of West Tallahatchie continue to rely on grocery purchases from the Dollar General, corner stores, and gas stations, such as Double DY Express in Tutwiler and The Filling Station in Sumner. When possible, residents continue to drive a personal vehicle or borrow a car to reach grocery stores outside of the county, which have a larger and more reliable selection of fresh food available for purchase. Local initiatives to provide food from personal farms cultivated by families or community plots, such as

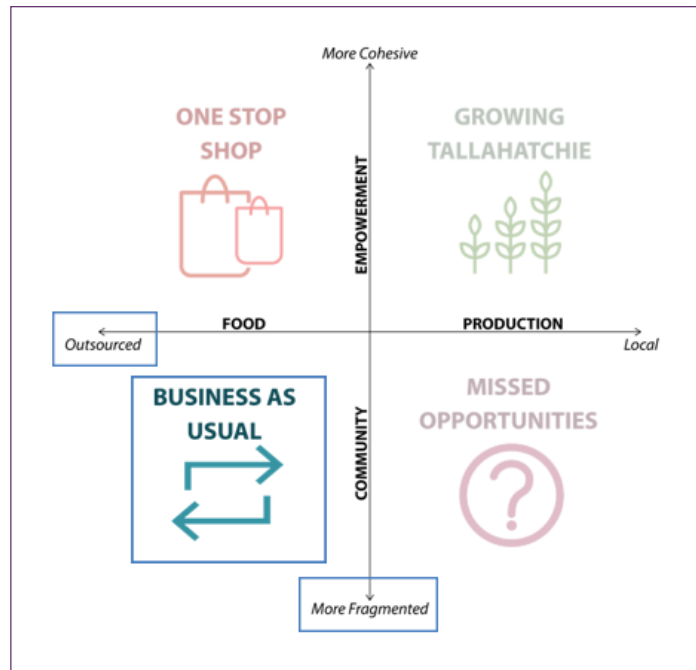


Figure 9: The West Tallahatchie Potential Food Future of *Business As Usual*



Figure 10: The Dollar General located in Webb, Mississippi along US49E where West Tallahatchie residents continue to purchase a majority of foods

that of Mayor Johnny B. Thomas's in Glendora, have been successful when actively tended but do not provide a long-term, reliable source of produce for sale and distribution. As a result, residents make do without fresh fruits and vegetables on most days, eating processed food and packaged snacks for most meals. In this scenario, obesity and diet-related conditions and illnesses, such as heart disease, diabetes, and high blood pressure, remain prevalent across the West Tallahatchie community.



*Figure 11: Shelves and refrigerators at a West Tallahatchie store lie empty or are stocked with packaged and processed foods*

## II: One Stop Shop

While there are many types of self-contained grocery stores, the *One Stop Shop* scenario considers the effect of the community opening a small to mid-sized supermarket. This one stop shop is housed in a single building, operating year round, and sourcing the majority of its fresh produce from outside of West Tallahatchie as agriculture in the county continues to produce large commodity crops such as soy, corn, and cotton. It would require motivated community leadership, experienced ownership, clear political backing, financial support, and committed residents to regularly shop at the supermarket. *One Stop Shop* demonstrates an opportunity to sell fresh and affordable produce to all members of the community in a location that maximizes access by all who want to shop there. The One Stop Shop also has the potential to provide additional employment to local residents, to improve health outcomes, and to partner with community organizations to be the focal point for community-building activities, such as food-related and health-related workshops and cooking classes. However, in addition to the challenges implementing this scenario, it may lack other benefits



that come with local food production, such as the creation of a more diverse local economy where many may participate and the social network that may be built from diverse local food programs.

The *One Stop Shop* scenario explores a future where community members are able to purchase fresh produce that has been sourced from outside of the county, at a single supermarket location within West Tallahatchie. The scenario drivers for *One Stop Shop* are the following:

- *More cohesive community empowerment* in the form of high interest in purchasing and eating fresh produce, community organization, and strong leadership.
- *Outsourced food production* in order to supply community members with reliable, diverse, and accessible fresh produce.

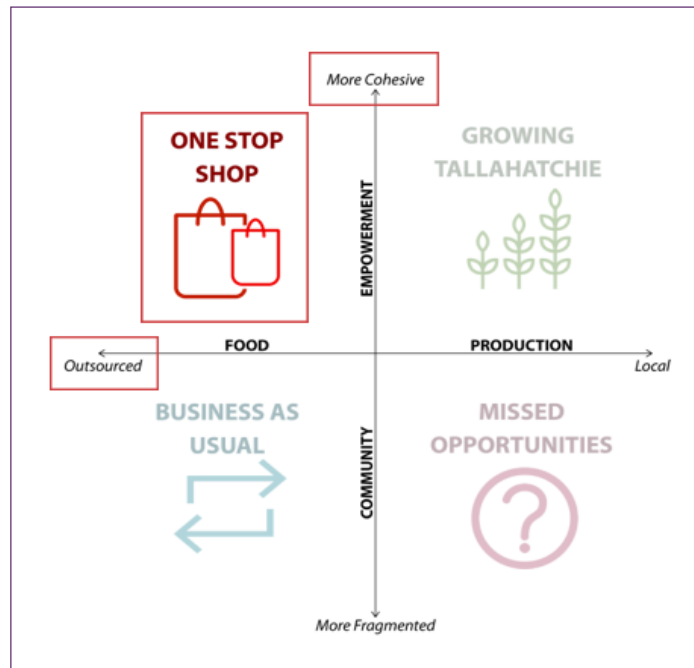


Figure 12: The West Tallahatchie Potential Food Future of *One Stop Shop*

## Ten Years from Now

The year is 2027 and access to food—fresh fruits and vegetables in particular—has improved in West Tallahatchie. Rather than driving to one of the large supermarkets in Clarksdale, Batesville, Cleveland, Greenwood, or Grenada, West Tallahatchie residents are able to shop nearby at the Emmett Till Public Market located in the old Emmett Till Recreational Complex on US-49 East. The Emmett Till Public Market is a mid-sized supermarket, stocking groceries and household items for the West Tallahatchie community. Due to the building's large size, the inside feels spacious but at times empty. Inside, there are several private rooms reserved for community events and workshops; the exterior is painted with a large mural of West Tallahatchie history and has a small green space with outdoor seating available to customers. Due to limited quantity and diversity of local food production, most of the varieties of fresh produce supplied at the Emmett Till Public Market are sourced from growers and businesses outside of Tallahatchie County. While this does not support a diverse local food economy or local growers, the Emmett Till Public Market is able to meet the basic needs of the community by offering affordable, accessible, and consistently available fresh produce.

A number of decisions and initiatives have brought West Tallahatchie to this point. Ten years ago, West Tallahatchie was considered by the US Department of Agriculture to be a “low-access community.” In other words, it was an area in which more than one-third of residents lived over 10

miles away from a grocery store.<sup>17</sup> While, there had been efforts in the past to create community gardens, expand the Sumner farmers market, and sell apples, oranges, and bananas at local gas stations, none of these were showing promise as a long-term solution. To address this growing issue, a number of community residents and leaders along with local nonprofits came together in 2017 to find a way to increase the availability of healthy, high-quality, and affordable foods within the area. At a series of meetings and workshops there were many ideas put forth, but the most popular idea was to establish a grocery store within West Tallahatchie.

The group of community residents, leaders, and nonprofits explored a number of different food market formats. Many were interested in trying to attract a new big-box store development to West Tallahatchie, given that these stores offer a large variety of food products and other goods at affordable prices. However, after doing a market feasibility study to understand the economic, operational, legal, and other needs of a project that size, the group determined that a big-box store would not be a viable solution. The feasibility study showed that typical big-box stores, which are usually national market chains like Walmart, depend upon consumer spending and disposable income to be financially secure.<sup>18</sup> However, a Population Projections Summary completed in 2016 by the University of Mississippi estimated that the population of Tallahatchie County would continue to decrease and by 2025 would likely only be 11,000-12,500 people.<sup>19</sup> At this size, the population would not be large enough to support a big-box store. Further, though many believed that a big-box store would generate needed employment opportunities, the feasibility study indicated that large chain department stores do not create significantly contribute to job growth<sup>20</sup> and can have a negative impact on local economies in comparison to community-owned small businesses.<sup>21</sup>



Figure 13: The original Emmett Till Multi-Purpose Complex on US-49 East

After deciding not to pursue the big-box grocery store concept, the group looked into other supermarket options. Another idea of interest was a community-owned model grocery store. The group looked at success stories, coming across several in rural areas that had used private investment to open local grocery stores in publicly owned buildings. Under this model, community members paid back the private investor over time by purchasing ownership shares and paying annual membership fees until the grocery stores were completely community owned. Following this model, the group began looking for available buildings where the store could be located. It was

17 “USDA Defines Food Deserts.” American Nutrition Association. <http://americannutritionassociation.org/newsletter/usda-defines-food-deserts>

18 “2015 Retail Industry Report.” Mazzone & Associates, Inc. <http://www.globalmna.com/assets/2015retailindustryreport.pdf>.

19 Green, J. 2016. County Cohort Component Model: Population Projection Summary. University of Mississippi.

20 Neumark, D. 2008. “The effects of Wal-Mart on local labor markets.” *Journal of Urban Economics*, 63: 405-430.

21 Michigan State University. 2010. “Why Buy Local? An Assessment of the Economic Advantages of Shopping at Locally Owned Businesses.” Retrieved from: <http://www.ced.msu.edu/upload/reports/why%20buy%20local.pdf>.

acknowledged that the store location should be as accessible as possible to all residents of West Tallahatchie. Though not publicly owned, the Emmett Till Recreational Complex (ETRC) building was in an ideal spot on US-49 East.

In order to proceed with the community-owned grocery store idea, it was agreed that the ETRC needed to be purchased by a public entity in West Tallahatchie. In an act of good faith and reconciliation on behalf of all residents in West Tallahatchie, the City of Sumner agreed to bid on the property. The group investigated property value in the area, finding that average property value in that year (2017) was \$72,000 in Tallahatchie County.<sup>22</sup> Accounting for the large size of the building as well as its prime location, the group estimated a bid of \$150,000 to purchase the ETRC. To be able to finance this purchase, the group recommended that the City of Sumner should apply to the Regions Bank branch for a private loan on behalf of the community. It was the group's hope that the Regions Bank would be interested in a private loan given their requirement by federal law—through the Community Reinvestment Act—to invest in the communities in which they are located, including communities that are low-income.<sup>23</sup>

The group continued scoping estimated costs for a community-owned grocery store model. After reviewing budgets for similarly sized grocery stores in rural locations, it was found that a minimum budget of roughly \$2 million would be necessary to cover start-up and first year expenses, including: property purchase, inventory (fresh produce, other food items, and household goods), equipment, fixtures, security, mortgage and property tax, licenses and permits, advertising, utilities, accounting and legal, owner salary, employee payroll, supplies, and insurance.<sup>24</sup> Projecting these costs out over ten years, the group was able to calculate the amount of annual revenue required to keep the store running and pay off the initial loan to eventually transfer ownership over to the community. According to these estimates, the group determined that ownership shares in the store would likely be close to \$1,000 and community members would be able to purchase annual memberships for \$100. To share the high costs, the Mayors of Tutwiler, Glendora, Sumner, Webb, and Rome along with the County Board of Supervisors agreed to cover the remainder of the loan if community members made these payments for the first five years of operation.

Upon reviewing these projections, the Regions Bank decided the projected revenue would not be enough to ensure repayment of the loan within ten years and declined to fund the project. The group sought out wealthy benefactors to fund the project start-up. However, they were unable to persuade investors that a local, community-owned grocery store would be a wise use of money when a grocery shuttle service business that shuttled residents to stores outside the county would be much cheaper and far less complicated. At the time, it was also noted there were not enough food producers in the area to even support this format given its reliance on locally-sourced fruits and vegetables. With this, the group agreed to also dismiss the community-owned grocery store model.

22 "National Home Prices Heat Map." Trulia. [https://www.trulia.com/home\\_prices/Mississippi/Tallahatchie\\_County-heat\\_map/](https://www.trulia.com/home_prices/Mississippi/Tallahatchie_County-heat_map/)

23 "Grocery Store Attractions Strategies: A Resource Guide for Community Activists and Local Governments." PolicyLink. [http://www.policylink.org/sites/default/files/groceryattraction\\_final.pdf](http://www.policylink.org/sites/default/files/groceryattraction_final.pdf)

24 "Rural Grocery Store and Start Up Operations Guide." Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs. <http://www.iira.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Grocery-Store-Start-up-and-Operations-Guide.pdf>

While this conversation was going on in West Tallahatchie, political leaders at the state level revived a popular bipartisan bill from 2013. Recognizing that Mississippi was continuing to have too few grocery stores in many of its communities, the state House of Representatives reintroduced Mississippi House Bill 798 or the *Healthy Food Retail Act*.<sup>25</sup> The act passed both the House and Senate by a wide margin to become state law during the 2020/2021 legislative sessions. The bill established and designated funding for a grant and loan program to increase access to fresh and healthy food in underserved communities known as the Mississippi Healthy Food Retail Financing Initiative.

With this policy in place, the group in West Tallahatchie saw an opportunity to build a new independently owned grocery store sized to suit the needs of the West Tallahatchie population. While there were several vacant properties available for development, members of the group decided to approach ETIC about renovating and using the Emmett Till Recreational Complex building as it had been previously identified for its prime location and accessibility. The building had been vacant for many years and ETIC had been trying to find a way to use the building for the benefit of local residents. The ETIC Board of Directors agreed to allow the group to pursue starting a grocery store in the building as long as ETIC was involved in decision-making and space was reserved for community activities and events.

Once the group settled on this format and location, they applied for financial support through a number of healthy food and rural development programs to support the project. A combination of grants and loans totaling to \$3 million were received in 2022 from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development Guaranteed Business Loan Program,<sup>26</sup> the Mid South Healthy Food Initiative, the Kellogg Foundation, and the new Mississippi Healthy Food Retail Financing Initiative. This financial incentive helped attract an experienced grocer to West Tallahatchie who would manage the operations of the new market. To ensure the community's best interest in the store's continuing management, a public-private partnership was established between the grocer and a Board of Directors representing West Tallahatchie that would be involved in decision-making. The full service grocery store, named the Emmett Till Public Market, opened in late 2023 and became accessible to residents of Webb, Tutwiler, Sumner, and Glendora as well as many outlying communities. In addition, the Emmett Till Public Market has created and retained roughly twenty jobs countywide.

### III: Growing Tallahatchie

*Growing Tallahatchie* explores a future where community members are able to purchase locally grown fresh fruits and vegetables directly from other community members or nearby farmers. We explore several strategies that could help move toward such a future, including establishing or improving stationary farmers markets and mobile markets, transforming locally owned corners stores into healthy corner stores, and implementing various farming programs to increase local agriculture output and availability.

25 "Policy Efforts and Impacts: Mississippi." Healthy Food Access Portal. Retrieved from: <http://www.healthyfoodaccess.org/policy-efforts-and-impacts/state-and-local/mississippi>.

26 "Business & Industry Loan Guarantees." USDA. <https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/business-industry-loan-guarantees>.



The *Growing Tallahatchie* scenario demonstrates a future where community members are able to purchase locally sourced fresh produce at a variety of alternative food retail environments within West Tallahatchie. *Growing Tallahatchie* scenario drivers are:

- *More cohesive community empowerment* in the form of high interest in fresh produce, community organization, and strong leadership.
- *Locally sourced food production* in order to supply community members with reliable, diverse, and accessible fresh produce.



Figure 14: The West Tallahatchie Potential Food Future of *Growing Tallahatchie*

## Ten Years from Now

In 2027, residents are able to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables, and other grocery essentials, at a number of convenient locations across the community. The West Tallahatchie Farmers Market operates once a week on the Sumner square and a mobile market operates Monday through Saturday with stops in both West Tallahatchie and North Sunflower County. Healthy corner stores located in each of the four major communities—Glendora, Sumner, Tutwiler, and Webb—offer residents fresh food options every day. About three dozen families receive a weekly box of produce through the community-supported agriculture subscription service offered through the farming incubator program.

A number of decisions and initiatives over the last ten years have paved the way for these outcomes. In 2017, community residents, government leaders, and nonprofit representatives held a series of workshops to explore modes of increasing the availability of healthy, high-quality, and affordable foods in West Tallahatchie. Based on the results of the workshops, the group decided to pursue the development of a sustainable and resilient local food system. In order to move forward community priorities, residents, policymakers, and nonprofits came together to form the Growing Tallahatchie Coalition (Coalition). The aims of the Coalition were to engage in community organizing and policy advocacy, develop a nutrition education program for youth and adults, and expand alternative food retail systems.

From the start, a top priority of the Coalition was to cultivate an environment that actively supports local food systems. Coalition members, the Emmett Till Interpretive Center, and the

Tutwiler Community Education Center partnered to host monthly discussion dinners on topics ranging from hunger in the local community to the effect of racism on the food system. These gatherings served as an opportunity to build relationships among black and white residents, while also raising the consciousness of local residents regarding their personal and communal connection to the food system. Coalition members also used these dinners to mobilize residents for community action.



*Figure 15: Farmland in West Tallahatchie is fertile and abundant*

In order to garner support from state policymakers, the Coalition reached out to other food system organizations across Mississippi, including Mississippi Sustainable Agriculture Network and Mississippians Engaged in Greener Agriculture, to coordinate a policy agenda aligned with their goals and draft potential legislation that would help achieve them. The group decided to target rules that affected both alternative food retail markets and farmers selling at alternative markets, with a focus on developing state-wide funding for the Healthy Food Financing Initiative (HFFI) Bill<sup>27</sup> and changing the rule requiring local farmers to purchase a refrigerated truck in order to sell meat, cheese, and eggs.<sup>28</sup>

West Tallahatchie residents organized letter-writing campaigns, phone drives, on-line petitions, and a State Capitol visit to support changes to the identified legislation. By focusing on the economic impact of these bills, community organizers were able to gain Congressional support for the refrigerated truck ruling. However, Congress failed to create a state funding stream for HFFI. Thanks to the revocation of the refrigerated truck rule, livestock farmers' revenues increased significantly, and farmers markets were able to meet consumer demand for local meat and dairy products.

The changes in this ruling were seen as a tipping point regarding state support for local food systems. Policymakers began to pursue economic growth by supporting local food-friendly policies, and state residents became more aware of, and invested, in their local food system. Due to these new political and cultural opportunities, the state passed a series of bills over the next ten years that supported food retail in high-need communities and the work of small- and medium-scale farmers.

The Coalition's second priority was to develop a nutrition education program for youth and adults to promote increased fresh fruit and vegetable consumption. The Coalition focused on five key learning areas: what people are eating; where food comes from; the health effects of food; the added value of choosing locally produced foods; and the seasonality of foods.<sup>29</sup> To reach youth in West Tallahatchie,

<sup>27</sup> "Policy Efforts & Impacts." Healthy Food Access Portal. PolicyLink. <http://www.healthyfoodaccess.org/policy-efforts-and-impacts/federal>

<sup>28</sup> "Where's the Meat?" Delta Directions. <http://www.deltadirections.com/wheres-the-meat/>

<sup>29</sup> Interviews.

the Coalition partnered with the West Tallahatchie School District and the Mississippi Farm to School Network to integrate nutrition education into the curriculum. The new curriculum also included a teaching garden at R. H. Bearden Elementary School and West Tallahatchie High School. In coordination with the James C. Kennedy Wellness Center, the Tutwiler Community Education Center offered cooking classes for youth and adults.<sup>30</sup> Through cooking classes, residents gained new food preparation skills, becoming more confident in their ability to cook low-cost healthy meals.

In order to further promote healthy eating habits, the Coalition formed a Veggie Rx program. The program provides participants with nutrition education and a \$100 voucher each year to spend at participating markets.<sup>31</sup> Since its inception, the program has relied on partners, such as Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs), the Mississippi Department of Health, and the Tallahatchie General Hospital and James C. Kennedy Wellness Center, for funding and referrals.

The third, and most critical, priority for the Coalition was to grow the local economy through the development and expansion of alternative food retail systems. The Coalition decided to focus on four areas in order to promote economic growth: farmers markets; mobile markets; healthy corner stores; and, farming programs. In order to build out these programs, the Coalition formed a non-profit, also called Growing Tallahatchie (GT). The organization actively pursued and was awarded funding from the USDA, the federal HFFI, the Kellogg Foundation, the Northwest Mississippi Community Foundation, and the Tallahatchie County Board of Supervisors.

Growing Tallahatchie took ownership of the Sumner farmers market, rebranding it the West Tallahatchie Farmers Market in order to promote regional inclusivity. GT used grant funding to increase the promotion of the market and recruitment of vendors. Additionally, GT leveraged relationships with vendors to stock a new mobile market that began with only four stops, but has now expanded to eight stops across two counties (North Sunflower and West Tallahatchie). In order to develop a “stationary” store, GT worked with corner store owners (one in each major West Tallahatchie town) to stock local fresh fruits and vegetables. In addition to the new merchandise, the owners and GT made gradual improvements over a few years to the interior and exterior of each store transforming them into certified “Healthy Corner Stores.”

One of the Coalition members, the Delta Fresh Foods Initiative (DFFI)<sup>32</sup>, expanded their farming initiatives and programs, including the creation of a farming incubator program, mentorship programs, and additional capacity building workshops. DFFI utilized funding from the USDA Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program of the National Institute of Food and Agriculture<sup>33</sup> to purchase land and equipment for the program. DFFI has also partnered with the Coalition and West Tallahatchie High School to develop a year-round youth growing program, with training in agricultural and business skills.

30 Cooking Matters offers seven specialized curricula for community-partner led cooking classes. More information at: <https://cookingmatters.org/courses>

31 “Prescription for Health.” Washtenaw County Public Health. [http://www.ewashtenaw.org/government/departments/public\\_health/health-promotion/prescription-for-health/prescription-for-health](http://www.ewashtenaw.org/government/departments/public_health/health-promotion/prescription-for-health/prescription-for-health)

32 Delta Fresh Foods. <http://deltafreshfoods.org/>

33 “Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP).” USDA. <https://nifa.usda.gov/funding-opportunity/beginning-farmer-and-rancher-development-program-bfrdp>

Additionally, given the threat to health of obesity for Mississippi residents, the Mississippi Department of Health developed a faith-based health initiative that focuses on the role of churches in lowering rates of chronic disease.<sup>34</sup> West Tallahatchie congregations that joined the faith-based health initiative actively promoted healthy eating and active living by hosting community health screenings, serving healthier meals at church functions, and connecting health with faith in church sermons.

## IV: Missed Opportunities

After exploring the possible futures of West Tallahatchie, the previous scenarios discussed—*Business as Usual*, *Growing Tallahatchie*, and *One Stop Shop*—illustrate what might be possible and what may be out of reach in the next ten-year timeline. A future of *Missed Opportunities* is meant to represent a West Tallahatchie that has missed the chance to improve food security, despite the increase of access to local fruits and vegetables.

*Missed Opportunities* considers what future could happen in West Tallahatchie if fresh produce and resources are produced within West Tallahatchie, but community members are unable to come together to make improved food access a reality. The reasons for this could be numerous and include, but are not limited to: lack of political support, lack of community building and agreement, lack of leadership to secure funding and additional resources.

The *Missed Opportunities* drivers are as follows:

- *Less cohesive community empowerment* in the form of low interest in providing, using or cooking with fresh produce, lack of community organization, and weak leadership.
- The improvement/expansion of *local food production* in order to supply community members with local, diverse, and accessible fresh produce that support the West Tallahatchie economy.

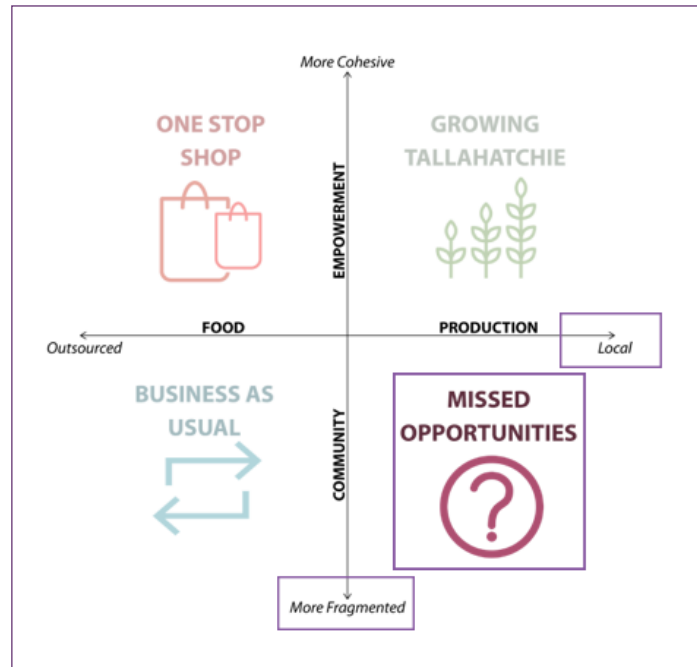


Figure 16: The West Tallahatchie Potential Food Future of *Missed Opportunities*

<sup>34</sup> DeHaven, M. J., Hunter, I. B., Wilder, L., Walton, J. W., & Berry, J. (2004). Health Programs in Faith-Based Organizations: Are They Effective? *American Journal of Public Health*, 94(6), 1030–1036.



## Ten Years From Now

The year is 2027 and West Tallahatchie has experienced a large improvement in access to fresh produce that has been produced within the county. Fresh produce is immediately available, diverse in offerings, and affordable for all residents. The boom in locally sourced fresh produce shows the promise to encourage economic development in the county, and to grow diverse food businesses from farming programs, farmers markets, mobile markets, and healthy corner stores to one stop grocery stores. However, much of this produce goes to waste since local farmers struggle to sell their produce as few people attend the farmers market and there are no local grocery stores to stock their fruits and vegetables. The community lacks strong community organization around encouraging a local food economy to grow. Those who run the farmers market are unable to encourage community members to attend and the community cannot agree on how to make West Tallahatchie more food secure. Community gardens are a popular past time but only small portions of residents learn to grow their own food. Local mayors, superintendents, and other policymakers do not officially support or finance the development of Growing Tallahatchie or One Stop Shop type solutions and a lack of clear leadership means the community continues to miss deadlines to apply for grant funding.

The community has missed the opportunity to improve food access in West Tallahatchie, and the chance to encourage business creation and investment. Local businesses selling fresh produce do not expand their inventory and citizens continue to rely on chain grocery stores that are more than 30 minutes away from Glendora, Sumner, Tutwiler, and Webb. As general investment in the region waned and families began to move away, the population of West Tallahatchie dropped steadily as did the tax base that supported community-owned businesses.



*Figure 17: An abandoned gin mill in West Tallahatchie—a missed opportunity of the past*

## 4. Scenario Analyses, Recommendations, and Case Studies

Following the narratives for each of the four scenarios, this section analyzes the food access outcomes within each scenario. In order to guide our analysis, we use dimensions that community members and our research suggested were most relevant: organizational structure and leadership; accessibility; economic development; public health and nutrition; and education. These particular dimensions help demonstrate what it would take for each food system scenario to become a reality as well as how the system would function and serve the community. Summarized in Table 1, the four scenarios are evaluated for their performance and ability to be implemented. A full discussion of each scenario follows. We omit *Missed Opportunities* from this analysis in order to focus on the aspirational scenarios for the future of West Tallahatchie. For *One Stop Shop* and *Growing Tallahatchie*, we then continue our analysis by highlighting potential challenges to implementation, followed by recommendations and relevant case studies to demonstrate best practices and highlight success stories. These sections provide a more in-depth discussion of potential outcomes within each scenario and highlight the relative strengths, opportunities, and obstacles inherent in each possible future.

**Table 1: Four Scenario Summary**

Each future food scenario is summarized below based on the five dimensions: organization & leadership, accessibility, economic development, public health & nutrition, and education. Based upon these dimensions, the scenario rated on its ability to be implemented. The scale used to assess the scenarios below is from high effort (H), to medium effort (M), to low effort (L).

	Business As Usual	One Stop Shop	Growing Tallahatchie	Missed Opportunities
Organization & Leadership	L	H	H	L
Accessibility	L	H	L	L
Economic Development	L	H	M	M
Public Health & Nutrition	L	M	M	H
Education	L	M	M	L
Ability to Implement	Easy	Difficult to Very Difficult	Possible to Difficult	Easy

## I: Business as Usual

### Dimension Analysis and Discussion

#### *Organization & Leadership*

Institutional leaders across Tutwiler, Webb, Glendora and Sumner have expressed an interest in improving food security in West Tallahatchie, but the Mayors' offices, the Board of Supervisors, faith communities, and the school district have all avoided taking on a central role in addressing the issue in a long-term manner. Small changes started ten years ago have persisted to some degree, but all rely on the incumbent leaders for continued support and implementation. Short-term initiatives undertaken include the following:

- The school district continues to source local produce in school lunches, such as Mississippi sweet potatoes and carrots.
- Several churches have distributed seeds for growing family gardens. However, the success of this initiative has been hard to monitor due to the fragmented nature of this initiative, the lack of education among younger generations about growing fruits and vegetables, and the lack of an organized attempt to follow up with seed recipients.
- The Board of Supervisors continues to support the Sumner farmers market, which has grown in size: the number of vendors has increased as regulations in Mississippi make it easier for meat and other non-produce items to be sold in a market venue. The proportion of black shoppers at the market has increased slightly as efforts to publicize the market and extending the hours made it more accessible. However, many residents of Webb, Glendora and Tutwiler do not attend the market because they lack transportation.

While these changes have resulted in a slight improvement in food security, there has been no effort among institutional and community leadership across West Tallahatchie to engage in a more fundamental effort to provide the economic and logistical support required to improve security through the addition of a grocery store, more markets, or other more sustainable approach.



*Figure 18: This filling station in Tallahatchie, Mississippi occasionally stocks fresh produce items including apples, oranges, and bananas*

### **Accessibility**

Residents with cars continue to make a semi-monthly trip to Clarksdale or other nearby towns to shop at big-box grocery stores such as Walmart, spending the equivalent of \$200 on average per month on grocery expenses (in 2016 dollars).<sup>35</sup> Many without cars must borrow them from others or pay neighbors to drive them to these stores in order to shop for fresh food items. As a result of this lack of accessibility, most residents of West Tallahatchie report making a monthly trip to a grocery store as more frequent sojourns are not possible. The primary fresh produce items purchased are those that will last. Many residents have cultivated their own vegetable gardens in the past, but have abandoned them over time due to lack of time and/or interest. The majority of West Tallahatchie residents report relying most frequently on friends and family who grow food to procure fresh fruits and vegetables inside the county.

### **Economic Development**

Poverty in West Tallahatchie has decreased slightly as growing businesses have provided economic opportunity to residents: the addition of the Sumner Grill in 2015, for instance, has since led to two other restaurants opening around the Sumner town square, providing jobs for those in need and increasing business for local farmers. However, the average resident continues to live below the poverty line. Individuals continue to be reluctant to pay even a slightly higher price for local access to food, and thus prefer to drive long distances to the cheapest store rather than paying more to shop within the county. This dynamic has contributed a significant obstacle to the financial viability of a long-term food security solution for West Tallahatchie: a local market would either have to compete with prices charged at Walmart or would need to convince residents that shopping within the county is worth a slightly higher price.

### **Public Health & Nutrition**

Older residents report that theirs is the last generation with widespread knowledge of how to cook fresh fruits and vegetables. Many parents of young adults, and those young adults becoming parents today, do not know how to prepare or do not feel comfortable preparing fresh greens, beans, squash, and other items that were staples for their grandparents' generation. As a result, most kitchens are stocked with packaged food, processed snacks and, occasionally, fresh fruits or vegetables grown by a neighbor or family member. In 2014, Tallahatchie County's obesity rate was 40% higher than the state average at 50% obesity for adults, compared to 35.5% across the state of Mississippi (which ranked highest in the nation for obesity rates that year).<sup>36</sup> In 2027, the majority of residents are obese, and obesity rates among young children ages two to five could be significantly higher than the 2014 state average of 27.4%. Based on the growing rates of obesity in Mississippi between 2005 and 2015, the overall obesity rate of school-aged children could climb from 40% ten years ago to nearly 55% in 2027.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup> "Community Consumer Survey." Dow Sustainability Fellows Team. 2016.

<sup>36</sup> "Obesity Action Plan 2016." Mississippi State Department of Health. [http://msdh.ms.gov/msdhsite/\\_static/resources/6164.pdf](http://msdh.ms.gov/msdhsite/_static/resources/6164.pdf)

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p. 8.

## Education

While an interest in enhancing food security persists, the lack of an individual or institutional champion for this cause has prevented the emergence of a promising or reliable source of fresh produce. As a result, efforts to educate residents about the importance of these foods remains fragmented at best and irrelevant during times when fresh produce is unavailable. For example, teaching residents about the importance of fresh produce is not helpful when they are unable to access it. Grassroots efforts to educate families about the importance of healthy eating persist, but attendance at these optional events remains low, given the lack of transportation available to many residents as well as the lack of economic means to purchase healthy food.

# II: One Stop Shop

## Dimension Analysis and Discussion

### Organization & Leadership

The Emmett Till Public Market (ETPM) is a joint public-private venture. While the market itself is owned and operated by an experienced small-scale grocer, the community is closely involved in its management and provides additional services through the Emmett Till Public Market Board (ETPM Board). ETPM is the result of the extensive efforts of a group of community members who came together starting in 2017 to meet weekly to strategize about ways to attract a grocery store chain or build a new supermarket in West Tallahatchie.

After several months of meeting and planning, the group conducted a market feasibility study, interviewing residents about what they would need to be able to purchase at the grocery store. Survey results suggested that the community was reliant on a diverse number of fresh fruits and vegetables, the majority of which could not be bought within Tallahatchie County. Deciding that an independently owned grocery store was the best way forward for West Tallahatchie, the group began contacting food vendors to assess willingness to operate in and work with the West Tallahatchie population.

This core group of community members, leaders, and organizations formally became the Emmett Till Market Board of Directors (ETPM Board), an organization of seven members. The ETPM Board is chaired by the Director of the ETIC and is composed of both black and white community members from each of the major towns with experience in food access work. The Board includes two non-profit board members from the Mississippi Grocery Access Task Force and the Delta Fresh Food Initiative, as well as an advisor from the local bank.

Based on the \$2 million estimated for renovations and start-up costs, the ETPM Board began applying to numerous grants and loans in 2021. By applying to numerous sources, they ultimately received \$3 million in 2022 from four different sources: Mississippi Healthy Food Retail Financing Initiative, the USDA Rural Development Guaranteed Business Loan Program,<sup>38</sup> the Mid South

38 "Business & Industry Loan Guarantees." USDA. <https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/business-industry-loan-guarantees>.



Healthy Food Initiative, and the Kellogg Foundation. With these funds the Board was able to approach a grocer who successfully owns and operates two other small markets in the state to open a store in West Tallahatchie.

Working together, the grocer and the ETPM Board filed articles of incorporation with the State of Mississippi and wrote the bylaws for operation, including the basic rules about the appointment process for Board members and the role of the Board in market operations. As soon as the final pieces were in place renovations began on the building structure, interior finishing, and installation of front-of-store and back-of-store equipment. The market was completed in late 2022, opening its doors to West Tallahatchie residents in early 2023.

Since 2023, ETPM continues to be under the same ownership and continues to be supervised by the ETPM Board, which meets on a quarterly basis to assess the operation and financial needs. Through the inclusion of community members on the ETPM Board, community needs remain at the forefront of the ETPM operation and the Board has been able to respond to changing needs in the area. However, there remains some conflict over the affordability of membership at the ETPM and the ability to keep and attract investors to buy the comparatively expensive shares that keep the ETPM running. Community members are concerned about the equity and fairness in choosing ETPM Board members and many worry that turnover in the Board means that management of the ETPM is not very strong and mistakes are being made.

### **Accessibility**

Housed in the old Emmett Till Recreational Complex, the ETPM is a permanent, year-round grocery store in West Tallahatchie. The building and land remain under the ownership of the ETIC, which first purchased the property in 2014. Operating from 9:00am to 7:00pm on weekdays and 10:00am to 5:00pm on weekends, the ETPM is a pleasant place to shop for all West Tallahatchie residents.<sup>39</sup>

When approaching the store, the first thing a customer notices are the murals painted on the sides of the building. The murals, painted by youth from the Tutwiler Community Education Center—depict the past and future of West Tallahatchie and colorful portraits of residents. Inside, the store is clean, well lit, and handicap-accessible. In addition to the grocery area, the store has a small demonstration kitchen and a café area. Residents often meet in the café for lunch or for the occasional birthday party.

The store stocks popular produce including tomatoes, beans, greens, apples, and bananas<sup>40</sup> as well as other grocery items. Colorful tags are used to denote “healthy choice” items to promote smarter diet choices. Easy processing equipment allows residents to use Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and Senior Vouchers to purchase eligible items at the store. Staff welcomes customers as they walk in the door, and wish them a good day as they leave.

<sup>39</sup> “Community Consumer Survey”. Dow Sustainability Fellows Team. 2016.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

The ETPM is centrally located in West Tallahatchie on US-49 East, making it a convenient location for residents with reliable transportation to shop at the store as needed. However, for those without their own car, it is still a challenge to shop. In order to accommodate people without transportation, the ETPM Board converted a donated county vehicle into a grocery shuttle. The shuttle operates on a regular schedule, stopping in each major town and hamlet once a week. Additionally, residents may order groceries online and have them delivered for a small fee.

### **Economic Development**

With the creation of the ETPM, eight community members were employed in full-time positions and another twelve were employed in part-time positions, adding immediate economic benefit to employees and their families. Further, through the provision of adequate fresh fruits and vegetables in a local setting, ETPM encouraged residents to spend money within the West Tallahatchie economy, rather than spending money at grocery stores and supermarkets outside of the county. This input of cash back into the community paid for the salaries of ETPM employees and promoted economic growth in the area. Acting as a new employer in a region which had suffered the loss of industry and jobs, the ETPM enabled residents who had formerly left the county to return and find work in West Tallahatchie. With this shift, increases in local labor meant that earnings were retained within the community, rather than being lost to other regions.

In addition, the development of ETPM as a permanent, year-round grocery store helped create a more food secure environment for residents to live and raise their families. Not only did residents save the time they had been spending each week to travel to grocery stores outside the county, but they also began to save the money and wear-and-tear that had been spent on their transportation to those grocery stores.

The ETPM has also served as a means for West Tallahatchie to slow population decline as families had been leaving the area to pursue more economic and food opportunities elsewhere. However, the ETPM does not have the budget to support a large full-time work force and is heavily reliant on continued revenue from the community, external funders, and shareholders, meaning that the permanence of the grocery store and the jobs it provides may be a challenge.

### **Public Health & Nutrition**

Community members have begun incorporating more fruits and vegetables into their diets, in response to growing availability and targeted nutrition campaigns by ETPM. Residents are no longer



*Figure 19: The original Emmett Till Memorial Walking Path, located next to the Emmett Till Multi-Purpose Complex on US-49 East, before improvements were made*

as reliant on the Dollar General for their local grocery shopping, and this shift toward eating more fresh produce resulted in more at-home cooking and consumption of more nutritious whole foods. The improvement in food security and enhanced nutrition resulted in a reduction in obesity and diabetes incidence in West Tallahatchie over the last ten years. The county also saw a significant return on long-term investment in the local healthcare system, as health care costs lowered due to improved health. Expansion of the Emmett Till Memorial Walking Trail to include benches, gardens, and a drinking fountain has encouraged community members to go for walks and incorporate a healthier lifestyle.

### ***Education***

Under the guidance of the ETPM Board, nutrition education is a key component of the market's outreach campaign and operations. Particularly popular services are the free cooking classes in the demonstration kitchen hosted by the ETPM Board in partnership with the James C. Kennedy Wellness Center. The classes are designed for low- to medium-skill home cooks with a focus on low-cost, fresh, and seasonal ingredients. The ETPM Board also offers taste tests to familiarize customers with new or seasonal items, and places free recipe cards in the produce section of the market. In order to reach the youth, the ETPM Board has a kids' program called the Healthy Kids Club. Parents and guardians may sign up their children for the Healthy Kids Club in order to receive a birthday gift and a free fruit each month. In order to promote overall health, ETPM also hosts health screenings, flu shot clinics, and community health fairs in coordination with James C. Kennedy Wellness Center in the parking lot of the store and/or in the café area.

### ***Potential Challenges***

While the One Stop Shop model has many virtues, there can be large challenges in running a supermarket. What may appear simple from the consumer perspective is in fact a complicated and work intensive operation from an owner or manager's perspective. There can be several barriers to the success of a supermarket. Below we discuss several important challenges in the context of West Tallahatchie.

### ***Ownership Structure & Operational Support***

A possible barrier to a supermarket in West Tallahatchie, and running small supermarkets in general, is the potential for high turnover of leadership and employees. The ETPM would require strong and experienced management to coordinate the operation of the supermarket, including inventory, ordering, budgeting, funding, and hiring. Identifying and attracting a grocer to the area will consistently be a challenge in rural areas. Further, if staff do not stay long term at the market, then the running of the market will be difficult. The necessary tasks of managing finances, responding to customer needs, building relationships with retailers, and overseeing employee needs may fall through the cracks.

### ***Location***

Another possible barrier would be a poor site location. If the ETPM is not built in the Emmett Till Recreational Complex, another central, affordable, and accessible location would need to be

determined. An ideal location is in a safe or visible area, does not displace existing community-based organizations or local businesses, and is easily accessed by all community members. The Emmett Till Recreational Complex is an ideal site as it meets these needs.

### ***Startup Costs & Funding***

The initial expenses, and those incurred during the supermarket's first few months of operation, are considered start-up costs. They can include one-time costs, inventory, equipment and fixtures, security, improvements to the building, insurance, salaries and payroll, advertising, and utilities. Across rural operations, the creation of a new supermarket can cost upwards of several million dollars. Securing this type of funding in a resource-strapped region like West Tallahatchie can be difficult, albeit if not impossible. Finding this amount of funding would likely require several individuals dedicated to sourcing and applying to grants, loans, and private investors for support. In addition to securing funding, it would be prudent for the community to hire an experienced accountant to manage the allocation of funding. Without careful financial planning, the continued operation of the supermarket may be untenable.

### ***Inventory & Suppliers***

In the case of West Tallahatchie, a one stop shop would require the vast majority of products and food items to be ordered and delivered from outside of the county. This requires locating appropriate vendors and scheduling regular delivery times to ensure the market maintains appropriate quantity and quality of fresh produce. While an experienced grocer will have the relationships and knowledge to set up these operations, the added costs of transporting fresh food into West Tallahatchie could raise prices and impact the quality of the produce.

### ***Transportation***

Opening a grocery store in West Tallahatchie would make it much easier for residents to purchase their food. Still, with only one store serving the entire area, many people will still lack access due to unreliable transportation. Those living in some of the smaller hamlets, like Sharkey Road, will be at a particular disadvantage. It will be important to find a way to establish a transportation or delivery system to help those without their own vehicles attain equal access to the store. Coordinating, managing, and operating a transportation or delivery system will require additional equipment, staff, and money. Further a regular pick-up and drop-off schedule might be inconvenient for people who are working or have other conflicting obligations.

### ***Competitiveness***

Many small, rural grocery stores struggle to remain open because they cannot sell food at the low prices offered by large, national chain supermarkets. Though located about a 45-minute drive from West Tallahatchie, any new store within the county will be challenged to compete with Walmart and other regional supermarkets in Clarksdale, Cleveland, Batesville, and Grenada. A grocery store will not last in the long-term unless West Tallahatchie residents commit to purchasing foods at a local store even if the prices are slightly higher and selection is not as diverse.

## Recommendations if pursuing One Stop Shop

- Pursue a public-private partnership to reduce the costs to community members while providing the community the ability to maintain a voice in grocery store operations.<sup>41</sup>
- Form a Board of Directors representative of the diverse people and preferences of the West Tallahatchie community that is responsible for providing community leadership, writing grants, providing additional services, and support decision-making in the market management.
- Identify and recruit an experienced grocer with knowledge and expertise to ensure the long-term operational success of a grocery store solution.<sup>42</sup>
- Establish a regularly scheduled bus or shuttle service to provide transportation opportunities for individuals who do not own or have access to personal vehicles.<sup>43</sup>
- Offer space at the market for casual community gathering and events as well as educational activities.
- Create in-store marketing and labeling systems that inform shoppers about healthy eating choices and how to use fruits and vegetables in recipes.<sup>44</sup>

## Case Studies

### *The Onaga Public-Private Owned Grocery Store | Onaga, Kansas*<sup>45</sup>

In 2010, a devastating fire burned down the town of Onaga's only grocery store. The community of 700 people found themselves facing the coming winter with no community-based access to fresh produce. Residents instead became reliant on driving 45 minutes to the closest big-box grocery store. In particular, the elderly and those without transportation were at risk of food insecurity due to lack of local access. Four important stakeholders came together to create a public-private partnership and solution: Onaga community members, a local business (Wanda's Country Cooking), the Pottawatomie County Board of Commissioners, and policymakers at the City of Onaga.

Together, this public-private partnership in Onaga looked to resolve short-term and long-term needs for food security. In response to the loss of the grocery store, community members of Onaga were empowered to come together and had a unified purpose to bring fresh produce back to the community. Strong leadership by a local business, Wanda's Country Cooking, led to the development

41 Bailey, J. "Rural Grocery Stores: Ownership Models That Work for Rural Communities." Center for Rural Affairs. <http://files.cfra.org/pdf/rural-grocery-ownership-models.pdf>; Proctor, D. "Grocery Stores as Public / Private Partnerships: A Case Study." Kansas State University. <http://www.ruralgrocery.org/resources/Public%20Private%20Partnership%20Case%20Study%20.pdf>

42 Bailey, J. "Rural Grocery Stores: Ownership Models That Work for Rural Communities." Center for Rural Affairs. <http://files.cfra.org/pdf/rural-grocery-ownership-models.pdf>; "Stimulating Grocery Retail Development in Mississippi." The Food Trust. [http://policylinkcontent.s3.amazonaws.com/MS\\_recommFINAL\\_web\\_0.pdf](http://policylinkcontent.s3.amazonaws.com/MS_recommFINAL_web_0.pdf)

43 "Stimulating Grocery Retail Development in Mississippi." The Food Trust. [http://policylinkcontent.s3.amazonaws.com/MS\\_recommFINAL\\_web\\_0.pdf](http://policylinkcontent.s3.amazonaws.com/MS_recommFINAL_web_0.pdf)

44 "Supermarket Strategies to Encourage Healthy Eating." The Food Trust. [http://thefoodtrust.org/uploads/media\\_items/supermarket-toolkit.original.pdf](http://thefoodtrust.org/uploads/media_items/supermarket-toolkit.original.pdf)

45 Proctor, D. "Grocery Stores as Public / Private Partnerships: A Case Study." Kansas State University. <http://www.ruralgrocery.org/resources/Public%20Private%20Partnership%20Case%20Study%20.pdf>



of a temporary grocery store to fill the immediate need of community members for food access. At first the local business expanded from being a café to providing milk, meat, and bread, and then expanded further to offer a grocery pick-up three times a week, when the business owner drove to the grocery store 45 minutes away to pick up food items requested by the community. The Pottawatomie County Board of Commissioners responded to the grocery store loss by setting up a shuttle service two days a week that transported community members (in a county-owned vehicle) to grocery stores in the county, all of which were 30-40 miles away.

These short-term solutions continued while the City of Onaga carried forward the long-term solution: a new grocery store in Onaga. Unable to find an appropriate building, the City of Onaga began a public-private partnership to build a new grocery store in the summer of 2011. Funded by a local bank, the City of Onaga paid all costs for the building of the grocery store. In this partnership, the private partner was the grocery store owner, whom ultimately owned the land and was responsible for purchasing store equipment, inventory, and other start-up costs like employing staff. For the first five years of the 20-year bank payment plan, the City of Onaga assumed responsibility for making all five of the annual payments. At the end of the five years, the City of Onaga and the bank agreed to relinquish ownership of the property and responsibility for the remaining mortgage payments was transferred to the grocery store owner. It was agreed that if the grocery store owner were to pay off the remaining 15 years of the mortgage, the City of Onaga would forgive the five years they paid. The City of Onaga saw building this grocery store as an important investment as it would encourage community members to stay and to continue to contribute to the tax base in Onaga, especially in tax revenue generated at the grocery store.

One year after the grocery store burned down, a new Onaga Grocery Store opened. The new grocery store was able to employ fifteen community members in either part-time or full-time positions, and to provide access to fresh produce to the small rural community of Onaga, Kansas. It was through strong community empowerment that local citizens, businesses, city policymakers, and county policymakers were able to come together in a cohesive effort to improve food security in Onaga, Kansas.

## III: Growing Tallahatchie

### Dimension Analysis and Discussion

#### *Organization & Leadership*

The Growing Tallahatchie Coalition (Coalition) and non-profit (GT) manage the West Tallahatchie Farmers Market, the mobile market, the healthy corner store initiative, and the Veggie Rx program. They are also the lead organization for the school nutrition education curriculum and teaching garden, and are an active partner with DFFI in the high school agriculture program.

By recognizing the historical legacy of white privilege and racism, the coalition and nonprofit have together worked to actively create an inclusive space for all West Tallahatchie residents. Coalition leadership is diverse, with members representing each major town, different socioeconomic classes,

the black and white communities, and various professional sectors. Non-profit employees include people from outside of the community, long-time residents, and post-graduates participating in the AmeriCorps program.

Local governments are visible champions for the local food system, promoting programs by appearing at events and advocating for funding at the town, county, and state level. Corner store owners, market vendors, and farmers communicate regularly with GT employees, through emails, phone calls, and regular meetings. GT considers community residents as stakeholders, and gathers feedback through quarterly open meetings and program evaluations.

DFFI manages the farming incubator program, farmer mentorship program, and capacity building workshops. DFFI is an active member of the Coalition and relies on GT for assistance with program evaluation and recruitment for the mentorship program and workshops.

### *Accessibility*

All food retail markets work hard to create a welcoming atmosphere for all residents—black and white, young and old. GT utilizes culturally diverse marketing strategies, and employs non-exclusive language such as “no-spray” instead of the word organic. Markets are open at convenient hours and locations, and accept all forms of benefits including Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and Senior Vouchers.

At the farmers market, residents using a credit/debit card or an electronic benefit transfer (EBT) card are each given wooden tokens in order to eliminate social stigma associated with public benefits. Since transportation is still an issue for many residents, shuttles are made available from Tutwiler, Webb, and Glendora to the market.

People that cannot travel to the farmers market rely on the mobile market or the healthy corner stores for fresh fruits and vegetables. The mobile market travels throughout West Tallahatchie and North Sunflower County, stopping at the Tutwiler Community Education Center, R. H. Bearden Elementary School, and the Tallahatchie Senior Center. Many places in the county do not have addresses, so the mobile market uses a market map to advertise stops.

The farmers market and mobile market stock a variety of goods, including fresh fruits and vegetables, meat and dairy products, prepared foods, and local crafts. Due to the year-round growing season, the farmers market and mobile market are open all year. At the mobile market, customers may pre-order their produce through the website for a 5% discount, saving money and reducing food waste. A healthy corner store is centrally located in each of the four major communities, and is open longer hours on Fridays and Saturdays to accommodate work schedules. The stores are clean, safe, and inviting spaces, and a few have become gathering places for local residents.

The farming incubator program offers a buy one/give one community-shared agriculture (CSA) model in order to promote healthy eating among the most economically impoverished in the community. Residents with higher economic income purchase two CSAs—one for themselves

and one for a low-income family. All donors and recipients are encouraged to attend volunteer days at the farm, strengthening social ties across racial and economic lines. Any unsold produce is donated to food banks and food pantries.

### **Economic Development**

Investment in the local food system has been the primary economic driver over the past ten years. New jobs and businesses have developed increasing resident's income and the acceptance of public benefits at markets has dramatically increased sales of local food. The increase in jobs has encouraged young people to remain in the area, or to return after finishing post-secondary education. GT is a large employer in the community. Although they started with only one employee, the organization has now grown to four full-time employees, an AmeriCorps member, and over six part-time employees. Farms and new food businesses also employ community residents at livable wages.

The high school youth program prepares students to become future leaders in transforming the food system. Students are trained to grow, harvest, and sell produce, and they build skills in customer relations and sales that can be transferred to other jobs. In fact, a few graduates of the program have gone to work on nearby farms or found jobs with GT or DFFI.

Many residents who are active gardeners have also taken advantage of Mississippi's Cottage Food Law<sup>46</sup> and are gaining additional revenue from selling the produce they grow, whether at the farmers market or the mobile market. These side businesses and local farms are flourishing due to the success of the markets. The conversion of the corner stores helped to revitalize certain parts of the community, with new stores opening nearby and the value of nearby homes and properties increasing. The success of the corner stores has allowed the corner store owners to employ at least one additional employee for each store.

Farmers sell their produce at the farmers market, mobile market, healthy corner stores, schools, and local restaurants. The incubator program has led to an increase in small- and medium-sized farms, and the capacity building workshops have led to an increase in production for existing producers. The youth farming program also provides a small stipend for hands-on farm and community organizing work.

Although the farmers market and mobile market are now self-sufficient, many of these projects continue to rely on grant funding. Over the past ten years, funding has come from a diverse array of sources, including the USDA, the Kellogg Foundation, the Board of Supervisors, the Northwest Mississippi Community Foundation, the federal HFFI, and the Mississippi Farm to School Network.

*A community shared agriculture (CSA) program is a network, or association of individuals, who have pledged to support one or more local farms, with growers and consumers sharing the risks and benefits of food production.*

<sup>46</sup> "Cottage Food Operation: Frequently Asked Questions." September 2016. Mississippi State Department of Health. [http://msdh.ms.gov/msdhsite/\\_static/resources/5375.pdf](http://msdh.ms.gov/msdhsite/_static/resources/5375.pdf)

## Public Health & Nutrition

By increasing food access, GT has succeeded in increasing rates of fresh fruit and vegetable consumption among all socioeconomic categories, although health inequities still exist between the highest and lowest earners in West Tallahatchie. According to the most recent countywide health assessment, rates of chronic disease (e.g. heart disease and obesity) are the lowest they have been in over ten years.

Residents report an increased sense of community and social cohesion due to increased interaction among community members at the markets, as well as at events such as community festivals. Cooking classes have increased social support by pairing younger participants with senior mentors, many of which spend time together outside of the classroom.



*Figure 20: The Tutwiler Community Education Center offers programming and events for the entire West Tallahatchie community*

GT measures public health and nutrition outcomes through regular program evaluations, which measure process and point-of-sale data, knowledge and attitudes, and self-reported public health outcomes. Evaluations are used to determine if changes should be made, such if programs are ready to become self-sustaining or if new programs should be added. The Veggie Rx and school nutrition curriculum program have become models for other communities in Mississippi, and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation recently honored West Tallahatchie as a healthy rural community.

The focus on sustainable farming methods has pressured many conventional farmers in the area to use more ecologically friendly farming methods leading to a reduction in nutrient runoff and pesticide drift. Soil quality has improved and yields have increased for both conventional and sustainable farmers, while the water quality of the Tallahatchie River has also improved.

## Education

GT and DFFI integrate nutrition education and capacity building into all programs. Educational programming empowers community members by equipping them with the knowledge and skills needed to make changes within their life and/or their organization.

GT's nutritional education programs focus on removing barriers to fresh fruit and vegetable consumption, such as cooking skills or unfamiliarity with produce. R. H. Bearden Elementary School and West Tallahatchie High School have integrated nutrition education into the curriculum, and students are now choosing healthier options in the cafeteria. The Tutwiler Community Education Center and churches throughout the county regularly host cooking classes. In order to

decrease barriers to healthy eating, the cooking classes are participatory and skills-based, with a particular focus on quick and easy recipes with low-cost ingredients. The farmers market, mobile market, and healthy corner stores also offer cooking demos and taste tests of seasonal produce. They also display colorful and engaging handouts on storage and nutritional value of fresh fruits and vegetables, along with budget-friendly recipes.

In capacity building workshops, GT and DFFI use a co-learning approach in order to honor the wisdom and experience of business owners and farmers. DFFI conducts marketing, business, grant-writing and growing methods workshops twice a year in coordination with GT and the Mississippi State Extension Service. Market and store vendors regularly participate in these trainings, along with other small- to medium-size producers located in Mississippi. GT also hosts trainings on business management and marketing for corner store owners. Corner store owners also convene on a monthly basis to discuss challenges, strategies, and successes.

Capacity building is also an integral part of the high school agriculture and incubator farm programs. In the high school agriculture program, students participate in a food justice and policy advocacy curriculum, while also learning business and hands-on farming skills. Only ten students are added to the program each year, creating a tight-knit and supportive learning environment. The incubator program is a three-year program that supports four farms at a time. Each farm is given access to land, as well as technical assistance and training, in order to jumpstart their farming operations. Farmers pay “rent” by working with the high school agriculture program participants. At the end of year three, each farm receives a low-interest small business loan to start their own farm. However, a few graduates of the program have chosen to create a farming cooperative where they co-own land and farming tools.

## Strategy 1: Farmers Markets

Farmers markets can be an important component of local food systems as well as an economic development tool. In general, farmers markets are most often used by small- to mid-sized farmers to increase their farm income.<sup>47</sup> The number of retail farmers markets has been increasing nationwide. In addition to providing access to a variety of fresh and affordable fruits and vegetables in “low-access communities,”<sup>48</sup> they provide market opportunity for farmers; act as business incubators for beginning farmers; help circulate money within a local community and economy; support the development of business management skills; and foster social connection and trust.<sup>49, 50</sup> High quality products and produce freshness are among the most important factors motivating people to shop at farmers markets, while inconvenient locations, hours, and lack of awareness are the most significant deterrents.<sup>51</sup> West Tallahatchie currently hosts the Sumner farmers market. However, the market

47 “Farmers’ Markets: Lakes Area Farmers’ Market Cooperative, Detroit Lakes, MN.” North Dakota State University. May 2000. <http://www.und.edu/org/ndrural/case%20study%208.farmers%20market.pdf>

48 Larsen, K. & Gilliland, J. (2009). A farmers’ market in a food desert: Evaluating impacts on the price and availability of healthy food. *Health & Place*, 15(4), 1158-1162. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2009.06.007>

49 Colasanti, K., Conner, D., & Smalley, S. (2010). Understanding Barriers to Farmers’ Market Patronage in Michigan: Perspectives From Marginalized Populations. *Journal Of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition*, 5(3), 316-338. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19320248.2010.504097>

50 Brown, A. (2002). Farmers’ market research 1940–2000: An inventory and review. *American Journal Of Alternative Agriculture*, 17(4), 167-176. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1079/ajaa2002167>

51 Colasanti. “Understanding Barriers to Farmers’ Market Patronage in Michigan.”



has had mixed success due to a lack of vendors, a reputation that produce is overpriced, and the perception that the market is a white space.

### Potential Challenges

Although farmers markets often seem like a quick and easy solution to food security, prosperous and thriving markets are difficult to create and sustain over time. Below we address a few barriers to implementing a successful farmers market:



Figure 21: The Sumner farmers market is held on Thursday evenings by the Sumner Grille restaurant on the town square

### Accepting Public Benefits

A major obstacle for markets is the ability to accept SNAP benefits<sup>52</sup> and Farmers Market Coupons (distributed through the Mississippi Department of Health).<sup>53</sup> As of 2010, over 200,000 households and over 550,000 individuals received over \$69 million in monthly SNAP food assistance benefits.<sup>54</sup> At that time, Mississippi had just begun to implement EBT technology, and is still working to implement wireless EBT technology so that farmers markets can accept SNAP benefits.<sup>55</sup> This device is much like the credit card machine in a grocery store, and can be difficult to implement in farmers markets where there generally is not an on-site phone line or electrical outlet.<sup>56</sup> Wireless EBT terminals are much more expensive than wired ones, are not funded by the Food and Nutrition Service, and must be implemented to make accepting and processing SNAP benefits at farmers markets feasible.<sup>57</sup>

The Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce (MDAC) runs two programs, the WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) and the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP). Both of these public benefit programs provide eligible recipients (low-income women and children and low-income senior citizens over age 60, respectively) with coupons with a value of five dollars that can be spent at certified farmers markets and redeemed by participating farmers for cash.<sup>58</sup> Since there are no eligible markets in Tallahatchie County, this likely means that these coupons may not even be available to community members. If a market were to be certified, residents of West Tallahatchie could begin to receive this important public benefit.

52 Accepting public benefits often involves many cumbersome, and often confusing, steps. For assistance, contact Purvie Green at the Mississippi Department of Agriculture at [purvie@mdac.ms.gov](mailto:purvie@mdac.ms.gov) or 601-359-1168.

53 "Increasing Federal Food Assistance Access at Farmers Markets in Mississippi: Analysis and Recommendations." 2010. Harvard Law School Mississippi Delta Project and Delta Directions. <http://www.chlpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Mississippi-Farmers-Markets-Food-Assistance-Benefits-FORMATTED.pdf>

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid.

58 WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP). USDA. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fmnp/wic-farmers-market-nutrition-program-fmnp>

## Size

On average a majority of markets that fail are micro (5-8 vendors) or small (9-30 vendors) in size.<sup>59</sup> These markets cannot offer the variety of products necessary to entice regular customers nor do they generate enough steady administrative revenue—from membership fees or grants—to keep the overall market functional. This is a challenge of managing supply and demand: having enough vendors to attract customers and enough customers to attract vendors.

The Summer farmers market may bring in more vendors by recruiting vendors that are selling at other nearby markets, home growers with large gardens, or farmers that may not be selling their products currently.<sup>60</sup> When recruiting new vendors, it is important to specify the economic benefits of selling at a market.<sup>61</sup> In order to increase consumer demand, the market should be held at a convenient day and time and accept government benefits. Additionally, a marketing campaign may increase the number of both customers and vendors. The market may be advertised through flyer distribution at local churches and schools, as well as through newspaper feature stories and advertisements.<sup>62</sup>

## Management

In many cases, markets fall apart because of poor management, which is sometimes due to a lack of skills and experience in running farmers' markets.<sup>63,64</sup> Other markets cited ineffective management with underpaid or volunteer managers.<sup>65</sup> Successful managers must be communicative leaders who are organized and connected to the community. The manager should also be aware of farmers markets rules and regulations, and be able to strategically grow the market. Managers should be paid a livable wage, which may be a flat fee, hourly rate, or a percentage of market income.<sup>66</sup>

## Recommendations if pursuing Farmers Markets

- Create a racially diverse farmers market advisory board with members representing nonprofits, religious organizations, and the business community.<sup>67</sup>
- Develop a handbook of market rules and policies, including vendor guidelines, management responsibilities, and safety regulations.<sup>68</sup>
- Petition the MDAC and the Mississippi State Department of Health to become a certified farmers market.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> "Farmers Market Planning Toolkit: Vendor Recruitment and Retention." December 2014. West Virginia Farmers Market Association. <http://wvfarmers.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/WVFMA-Vendor-Recruitment-and-Retention-Toolkit-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>61</sup> Meier, A. "Attracting Vendors and Customers to Rural Farmers Markets." 2009. University of Nevada Cooperative Extension. <https://www.unce.unr.edu/publications/files/cd/2009/fs0918.pdf>

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Schmit, T. & Gómez, M. (2011). Developing viable farmers markets in rural communities: An investigation of vendor performance using objective and subjective valuations. *Food Policy*, 36(2), 119-127. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.foodpol.2010.10.001>

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> "Starting a New Farmers Market." 2005. UC Small Farm Center. <http://sfp.ucdavis.edu/files/144690.pdf>

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> The closest markets certified are in Bolivar County (Cleveland Farmers Market for FMNP) and Sunflower County (Indianola Open Air Market for SFMNP). <https://www.mdac.ms.gov/agency-info/programs/mississippi-farmers-market-nutrition-program/authorized-wic-markets/>.

- Create a marketing publicity plan, including strategies to reach both potential vendors and customers.<sup>70</sup>
- Apply to the USDA for authorization to accept SNAP benefits at the farmers market,<sup>71</sup> and obtain free equipment from the Farmers Market Coalition.<sup>72</sup>
- Connect with organizers from other regional markets in order to recruit new vendors.

## Case Study

### *Growing Hope | Ypsilanti, Michigan*

The Ypsilanti Farmers Market was founded in 2006 by Growing Hope, a nonprofit dedicated to improving food security. Growing Hope has used the market as a tool to grow healthy people, healthy places, and healthy economies. Since inception, they have worked to consciously create an inclusive space for all socioeconomic groups and races. In order to create a welcoming environment, they host musicians, offer craft tables, and partner with the local library to offer a children's story hour. The market has an alternative currency system of wooden tokens, increasing accessibility and allowing them to accept seven forms of payment including Senior and WIC farmers market coupons, SNAP, Prescription for Health,<sup>73</sup> and Double Up Food Bucks<sup>74</sup>. Growing Hope also hosts economic development workshops for farmer vendors on topics such as GAP certification and scaling up production. The market is financially supported by grants and business sponsors (including banks, restaurants, and hospital systems).<sup>75</sup>

## Strategy 2: Mobile Markets

Due to the centrality of farmers markets, people that live in the outlying areas or people without access to transportation are unable to take advantage of the benefits of the market. Mobile markets can address these issues by bringing produce to the community. Removing the barrier presented by the lack of transportation in rural, lower income communities can mean much greater access to fresh produce.

Mobile markets can act as a mobile component of a single stationary market, or they can act as an anchor to help establish multiple markets throughout a rural region. They often involve a refurbished truck or bus, which travels on a set schedule to several different locations to meet demand in areas away from the stationary location of the main farmers market. Mobile markets have been incredibly successful in urban areas, and are beginning to see greater traction in rural areas. USDA's Farmers Market Promotion Program has funded 17 mobile markets since 2008 and provides funding to launch and maintain mobile markets across the country.

70 "Starting a New Farmers Market"

71 SNAP and Farmers Markets. USDA. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/ebt/snap-and-farmers-markets>

72 Free SNAP EBT Equipment Program. Farmers Market Coalition. <http://www.fmtoolbox.org/>

73 A partnership with the Washtenaw County Department of Health, Prescription for Health connects patients to their local farmers market through their clinic. [http://www.ewashtenaw.org/government/departments/public\\_health/health-promotion/prescription-for-health/prescription-for-health](http://www.ewashtenaw.org/government/departments/public_health/health-promotion/prescription-for-health/prescription-for-health)

74 Double Up Food Bucks is a statewide incentive program that doubles the value of federal nutrition (SNAP or food stamps) benefits spent at participating markets and grocery stores. <http://www.doubleupfoodbucks.org/>.

75 Edmonds, A. Change and Place. Dow Fellows Symposium. November 12, 2016.

## Potential Challenges

Mobile markets are a popular solution for achieving food security when residents of a community face transportation challenges. However, mobile markets face unique implementation barriers, including the following:

### Accepting Public Benefits

In order to accept farmers market coupons in Mississippi, a market must be certified and the farmers selling at the market must be authorized to accept such coupons. While a stationary farmers market may easily become certified, there are additional barriers for a mobile market. One of the requirements for a farmer to become authorized to accept coupons is that they cannot “be a wholesaler, unless proof can be shown that vendor also goes and harvests produce” and the farmer “[m]ust be the person selling the produce or designated an authorized employee or family member to sell produce at market sites during the program period.”<sup>76</sup> This is a problem, because the most successful mobile markets purchase produce outright from the farmers and then sell the fruits and vegetables from the mobile site. The mobile market then no longer is selling produce directly sourced from the farmer, because of this intermediary step. Other markets have considered seeking a waiver from the state for rural communities to use their public benefit coupons at their market.

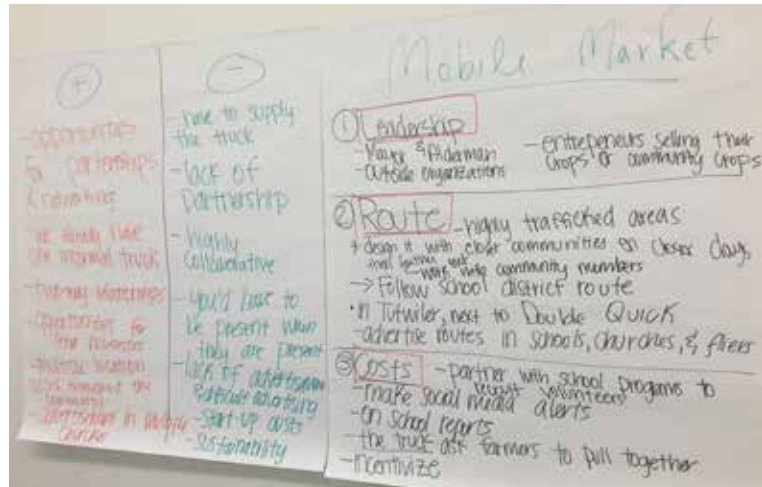


Figure 22: In August 2016, community members discussed the implementation of a mobile market in West Tallahatchie at a workshop hosted by the University of Michigan research team

### Lower Wholesale Prices for Farmers

Farmers who sell to mobile markets are often paid about 25% less than they would make in traditional retail, such as a farmers market. One way to reduce the risk to the farmer is by purchasing the produce from farmers outright. By selling produce wholesale, farmers do not have to worry about how many customers come out to the market, and they do not have to take time away from their farm to sell directly to consumers.

<sup>76</sup> “Program Guide for Farmers 2016.” March 2016. Mississippi Farmers Market Nutrition Program. [http://www.mdac.ms.gov/wp-content/uploads/wic\\_farmer-manual.pdf](http://www.mdac.ms.gov/wp-content/uploads/wic_farmer-manual.pdf)

## Managing Perceptions & Expectations

Many studies on mobile markets have found that managing perceptions and expectations is a key to success. According to these studies, community members viewed markets as being too expensive, even if they had never shopped there; as being exclusive and elitist; and as operating on a for profit basis. Finally, community members also viewed fresh fruits and vegetables as a luxury and not a necessity.<sup>77</sup>

## Recommendations if pursuing Mobile Markets

- Purchase produce directly from farmers in order to pay them upfront and thus reduce their financial risk.<sup>78</sup>
- Develop a pre-order program for customers, which reduces food waste and helps farmers plan what to grow.<sup>79</sup>
- Offer food preparation education programs in coordination with the market, such as cooking classes.<sup>80</sup>
- Offer a variety of grocery items including fresh fruits and vegetables, dry goods, eggs, meat, dairy, bread, and cooking staples.<sup>81</sup>
- Have special promotions at the end of the month when public benefits are running out, or offer a regular discount for customers paying with an EBT card.
- Establish consistent stops with convenient locations, such as schools, low-income living facilities, and healthcare providers.
- Create a racially-diverse farmers market advisory board with members representing nonprofits, religious organizations, and the business community.<sup>82</sup>

## Case Study

### Rural Resources Mobile Market Program | Greeneville County, Tennessee

Rural Resources' Mobile Market Program received a USDA grant to start their program, which delivers fresh produce in a retired mini school bus throughout Greeneville County.<sup>83</sup> The non-profit organization purchases produce outright from approximately 25 local farm suppliers, which is dropped off at Rural Resources' headquarters.<sup>84</sup> The program runs from May to October (the peak growing season) and the bus makes biweekly deliveries to low-income housing and senior

77 Zepeda, L., Reznickova, A., & Lohr, L. (2014). Overcoming challenges to effectiveness of mobile markets in US food deserts. *Appetite*, 79, 58-67. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2014.03.026>

78 "Farmers Market 2.0: Next-Generation Market Models for Farmers & Market Managers." 2010. Michael Fields Agricultural Institute. <http://michaelfields.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/farmers-market-2.0.pdf>

79 Ibid.

80 "A Directory of Mobile Markets Addressing Food Access in Low-income Communities." August 2012. California Institute for Rural Studies. <http://www.cirsinc.org/publications/current-publications#>

81 Ibid.

82 "Starting a New Farmers Market"

83 "Farmers Market 2.0: Next-Generation Market Models for Farmers & Market Managers."

84 Ibid.



facilities.<sup>85</sup> The market reaches about 1000 residents, makes about \$12,000 a year, and accepts both cash and food stamps.<sup>86</sup> The market has found that about 10% of their sales come from SNAP and that the demand for market produce is greatest at the beginning of the month when SNAP and other nutrition assistance arrives. Rural Resources has worked to do more than just provide access to fresh produce, it also includes several education components for farmers and community members.<sup>87</sup> Many of the farmers involved with the market farmed on a lower scale or were new to the industry. In order to ensure their success, Rural Resources incorporated training programs into the annual meeting it held with partner farmers. These included mentor training and other farmer networking as well as training workshops to identify farmer needs and to educate farmers on different techniques.<sup>88</sup> It also received a three-year grant from the USDA Community Food Project to implement a “soil to table” initiative which included offering after-school gardening and cooking programs and using a mobile kitchen to teach community members how to prepare foods purchased at the market.<sup>89</sup>

### Strategy 3: Healthy Corner Stores

Healthy corner store initiatives ask local corner store owners to commit to making healthy changes for their customers and their business.<sup>90</sup> Corner stores are often limited to packaged food and have very little, if any, fresh produce, often due to viability issues, like pricing, food quality, and freshness.<sup>91</sup> In order to increase the availability of healthy foods in a community, a non-profit organization may partner with corner store owners to stock healthier products like fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins. In exchange for participation, corner store owners receive incentives before, during, and after store transformation. Incentives may include cash, free equipment (e.g. refrigeration and shelving), marketing materials, and technical assistance and training.<sup>92</sup> Store changes are conducted in stages in order to



*Figure 23: These two corner stores are both located on Highway 32 in Webb, MS. The small size of local corner stores prohibits owners from being able to order fresh fruits and vegetables from bulk produce distributors*

85 “Farmers Market 2.0: Next-Generation Market Models for Farmers & Market Managers.”

86 Ibid.

87 Ibid.

88 Ibid.

89 Ibid.

90 “Healthy Corner Store Initiative: Overview.” 2014. The Food Trust. [http://thefoodtrust.org/uploads/media\\_items/healthy-corner-store-overview.original.pdf](http://thefoodtrust.org/uploads/media_items/healthy-corner-store-overview.original.pdf)

91 “Retail Strategies: Corner Stores.” Healthy Food Access Portal. PolicyLink. <http://www.healthyfoodaccess.org/retail-strategies/corner-stores>

92 “Healthy Corner Store Initiative: Overview.”

reduce the risk on store owners and to allow for relationship building between project staff and owners.<sup>93</sup> Healthy corner store programs are a significant opportunity to improve neighborhood stores that already exist in the community and are owned and operated by community members.

## Potential Challenges

By investing in local businesses, and business owners, healthy corner store projects transform existing markets into healthier shopping environments. While corner store projects require less funding and time than building a new store,<sup>94</sup> these projects do present several challenges, including:

### *Competing with Price, Quality and Selection of Grocery Stores*

As small scale stores do not have the buying power of big-box stores, they often must charge a higher price to the consumers. Also, they are often unable to provide a variety of products, meaning they cannot serve as a one stop shop for community members, and the produce they do carry may not be of the same quality. This was a concern raised by several West Tallahatchie residents, who found that they would rather pay a higher price at a full service grocery store in order to get more produce, of better quality, all in one place. Overcoming this barrier requires a commitment from the community to purchase their groceries at the healthy corner store in order to increase demand. If corner store owners know that the demand is present and that produce will not go to waste, they may be more willing to provide fresh fruits and vegetables and may be willing to purchase larger quantities in order to reduce prices to consumers.

### *Sourcing, Pricing, and Stocking Produce*

One barrier to providing fresh fruits and vegetables, noted by local corner store owners, is the lack of owners' knowledge on stocking produce as well as a lack of proper refrigeration units or adequate shelf space. This is a barrier for many corner stores, and overcoming this issue requires technical training and financial assistance that may not be available.

## Recommendations if pursuing Healthy Corner Stores

- Identify receptive retailers that are willing to commit to the project for the long term.<sup>95</sup>
- Provide financial and technical assistance to small businesses, such as how to purchase, display and market fresh fruits and vegetables.<sup>96</sup>
- Make small gradual changes to help the store adjust to the demands of selling perishable inventory.<sup>97</sup>

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> "Healthy Food Healthy Communities: Promising Strategies to Improve Access to Fresh, Healthy Food and Transform Communities." 2011. PolicyLink. [http://www.policylink.org/sites/default/files/HFHC\\_FULL\\_FINAL\\_20120110.PDF](http://www.policylink.org/sites/default/files/HFHC_FULL_FINAL_20120110.PDF)

<sup>95</sup> "Healthy Food Healthy Communities: Promising Strategies to Improve Access to Fresh, Healthy Food and Transform Communities." 2011. PolicyLink. [http://www.policylink.org/sites/default/files/HFHC\\_FULL\\_FINAL\\_20120110.PDF](http://www.policylink.org/sites/default/files/HFHC_FULL_FINAL_20120110.PDF)

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> "Healthy Corner Store Initiative: Overview."

- Assist stores with certification for SNAP, WIC, and other public food assistance benefits.
- Promote healthy corner stores and healthy eating in the community to increase demand.<sup>98</sup>
- Pass a county-level ordinance requiring all food retailers to carry a specific amount of fresh fruits and vegetables and other healthy foods.<sup>99</sup>

## Case Study

### *Literacy for Environmental Justice (LEJ) Good Neighbor Program | San Francisco, California*

After surveying residents and local merchants, LEJ found that residents primarily used corner stores to purchase groceries, however the stores “devoted an average of only two percent of shelf space to fresh foods.”<sup>100</sup> In response, the Good Neighbor Program was born to improve the quality of foods accessible to the community. The program created a list of criteria that were to be met by “good” store neighbors, and the stores that agreed to comply with the criteria “received technical assistance, energy efficiency upgrades, and marketing assistance.”<sup>101</sup> This assistance was made possible through a private-public partnership between community organizations, businesses, and local government. As a result, stores saw increases in sales of produce and overall profits.

## Strategy 4: Farming Programs

Local farming programs are intended to support and grow local agricultural activities. They can help young farmers get started through training programs and increase consumer access to local produce. Currently, there are few successful programs in the area, but farming programs are necessary to support other locally sourced food initiatives like farmers markets, mobile markets, and healthy corner stores.

In a fertile area like the Mississippi Delta, these programs can be instrumental in ending food insecurity. Farming programs may include beginning farmer training programs, incubator programs, farming cooperatives, farmer-to-farmer training networks for mentoring and business planning, youth programs, and community-supported agriculture. In implementing various farming programs, any community must consider land capability, biodiversity needs, water availability and other demands, increasing climatic events, as well as support for the business community, employment needs, and the social viability of local communities. However, even with these risks, farming programs have the opportunity to positively impact the community through job creation and health and nutrition improvements. Funding sources for farming programs include the Mississippi Land Bank, the MDAC, and the USDA.

<sup>98</sup> “Healthy Food Healthy Communities: Promising Strategies to Improve Access to Fresh, Healthy Food and Transform Communities.”

<sup>99</sup> “Creating Healthy Corner Stores: An analysis of factors necessary for effective corner store conversion programs” 2012. The University of Southern California. <http://goodfoodla.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Pages-from-Creating-Healthy-Corner-Stores-Report-prepared-for-LAFPC.11.pdf>

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

## Potential Challenges

The creation and promotion of small- and medium-sized farms is critical for creating a sustainable and local supply of fresh produce. This may be accomplished by creating farming programs for youth and adults; however, such an endeavor requires significant knowledge of agricultural practices and policy and adequate funding. A few other significant barriers are listed below:

### *Access to Land*

Because the Mississippi Delta has primarily been developed to support commodity agriculture, the best farming land is often being used for conventional agriculture. Additionally, many black landowners in Mississippi face the challenge of heirs' property laws, which states that if the original landowner dies without a will then each heir receives an equal share. Over time, land plots become smaller and property holders often lose access to titles and deeds disallowing them eligibility for government grants.<sup>102</sup> Access to land is also limited by the ability to access the capital needed to purchase and maintain the property.<sup>103</sup> In order to overcome this barrier, incubator programs should be targeted at black residents with a desire to farm. Additionally, nonprofits should host workshops educating black landowners on how to prevent land loss.



*Figure 24: Common agricultural crops grown in Tallahatchie County include soybeans, cotton, wheat, and corn (pictured)*<sup>104</sup>

102 "Building the Case for Racial Equity in the Food System." 2014. Center for Social Inclusion. <http://www.centerforsocialinclusion.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Building-the-Case-for-Racial-Equity-in-the-Food-System.pdf>

103 "Key Informant Interviews." Dow Sustainability Fellows Team. 2016.

104 "2015 Mississippi Agriculture, Forestry and Natural Resources." 2015. Mississippi State University, Division of Agriculture, Forestry and Veterinary Medicine. <http://www.dafvm.msstate.edu/factbook.pdf>

### *Institutional Racism and the Marginalization of Black Farmers*

The legacy of slavery and the USDA's history of discriminatory lending practices contributed to the decline of African-American owned farms in the 20th century. By denying loans or offering only high-interest rate loans, the US government kept African Americans from owning land and having an economically secure future. For example, in 2012, there were 54 farms with a black principal operator in Tallahatchie County<sup>105</sup> compared to 453 farms with white principal operators.<sup>106</sup> Viewed another way, Tallahatchie County's population is 54% black, but black people only operate 10% of farms in Tallahatchie County. Today, the number of black farmers in the US is growing; however, many African Americans are still distrustful of the USDA and affiliated land-grant universities.<sup>107, 108</sup>

### *Conventional Agriculture Economy*

For decades, US agricultural policy has supported conventional agriculture by offering subsidies for commodity crops, such as corn, wheat, and cotton. There are no subsidies currently available to support small farmers who grow fruits or vegetables, or raise livestock. Since farmers of color are more likely to grow vegetables and fruits or raise cattle, they are hurt the most by these policies.<sup>109</sup>

### *Overuse of Chemical Inputs*

The overuse of pesticides and herbicides in conventional farming systems contributes to pesticide drift and nitrogen runoff, which may damage the crops on nearby sustainable farms. Without a large buffer, sustainable farms may not be able to receive certification or market their product as organically grown.<sup>110</sup>

### *Recommendations if pursuing Farming Programs*

- Host workshops for local farmers focused on production methods and business skills, including sustainable growing methods, scaling up production, and applying for USDA grants and certifications.<sup>111</sup>
- Connect beginner farmers across the Delta and throughout the Southeast in order to build knowledge of farming practices.

105 "Black or African American Operators: 2012." USDA. [https://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2012/Full\\_Report/Volume\\_1,\\_Chapter\\_2\\_County\\_Level/Mississippi/st28\\_2\\_052\\_052.pdf](https://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2012/Full_Report/Volume_1,_Chapter_2_County_Level/Mississippi/st28_2_052_052.pdf)

106 "White Operators: 2012." USDA. [https://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2012/Full\\_Report/Volume\\_1,\\_Chapter\\_2\\_County\\_Level/Mississippi/st28\\_2\\_054\\_054.pdf](https://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2012/Full_Report/Volume_1,_Chapter_2_County_Level/Mississippi/st28_2_054_054.pdf)

107 Harvey, S. "For Decades, the USDA Was Black Farmers' Worst Enemy. Here's How It Became an Ally." July 8, 2016. yes! magazine. <http://www.yesmagazine.org/people-power/the-resurgence-of-black-farmers-20160708>

108 "Key Informant Interviews." Dow Sustainability Fellows Team. 2016.

109 "Immediate Policy Opportunities for an Equitable and Sustainable Food System. Center for Social Inclusion. <http://www.centerforsocialinclusion.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Food-Equity-Policy-Opportunity-Document-2013.pdf>

110 "Key Informant Interviews." Dow Sustainability Fellows Team. 2016.

111 Niewolny, K. & Lillard, P. (2010). Expanding the Boundaries of Beginning Farmer Training and Program Development: A Review of Contemporary Initiatives To Cultivate a New Generation of American Farmers. *Journal Of Agriculture, Food Systems, And Community Development*, 65-88. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5304/jafscd.2010.011.010>



- Join a regional farming network, such as Southern Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE)<sup>112</sup> or the Southeastern African American Farmers' Organic Network.<sup>113</sup>
- Develop an incubator farming program<sup>114</sup> in order to encourage the growth of small and minority-owned and operated farms.<sup>115</sup>

## Case Studies

### *Dirt Works Incubator Farm | Johns Island, South Carolina*

Located in South Carolina Lowcountry, Dirt Works Incubator Farm aims to support beginning farmers from traditionally underserved backgrounds. Participants farm on one- to two-acre plots and pay \$2000 per year for access to land and equipment. Business planning is a key part of the curriculum, and Dirt Works staff meet with participants every six months to review their progress in creating and implementing their individual plans. Participants sell their produce at restaurants, through CSA programs, and under the Dirt Works label at the Charleston farmers market. After three years, participants transition off the farm with the assistance of a land-matching program.<sup>116</sup>



*Figure 25: The community garden at the James C. Kennedy Wellness Center located in Charleston, Mississippi was established in 2014*

### *Youth Agriculture Project | Vermont*

Since 2006, the Youth Agriculture Program (YAP) in Vermont has provided agricultural opportunities for at-risk and disengaged youth ages 16 to 21. YAP students (Yappers) maintain more than five separate organic gardens, help maintain town and community lands, and volunteer with the local Meals on Wheels. In addition to learning agricultural skills, Yappers also learn business and marketing skills through classes and reinforce these skills by managing a farm stand at the local market. Through the curriculum, YAP grows participants' self-confidence, knowledge, and curiosity. While two-thirds of YAP youth are high school dropouts, many go on to finish high school and find jobs.<sup>117</sup>

112 Southern Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education. <http://www.southernsare.org/>

113 Southeastern African American Farmers' Organic Network. <http://www.saaon.org/>

114 "The Farm Incubator Toolkit: Growing the Next Generation of Farmers." New Entry Sustainable Farming Project. 2013. [http://nesfp.nutrition.tufts.edu/sites/default/files/uploads/nifti\\_toolkit\\_v2.pdf](http://nesfp.nutrition.tufts.edu/sites/default/files/uploads/nifti_toolkit_v2.pdf).

115 Ballantyne, K., Baylor, R., Bowe, A., & Stewart, J. (2015). Expanding Food Bank Impact: Healthy Food Access and Sustainable Farm Production. <http://sites.lsa.umich.edu/sustainablefoodsystems/wp-content/uploads/sites/139/2016/05/FINAL-PAPER.pdf>

116 "Farm Incubator Case Studies: A supplement to the Farm Incubator Toolkit." New Entry Sustainable Farming Project. 2013. [http://nesfp.nutrition.tufts.edu/sites/default/files/resources/farm\\_incubator\\_case\\_studies\\_-\\_nifti\\_v2.pdf](http://nesfp.nutrition.tufts.edu/sites/default/files/resources/farm_incubator_case_studies_-_nifti_v2.pdf).

117 "What's YAP?" The Tutorial Center, Inc. <http://tutoringvermont.org/yap/>

## Conclusion

West Tallahatchie faces a crisis of food access. Situated in the middle of some of the most fertile land in the country, the community has been unable to find a solution that successfully incorporates the abundance of local resources. The *Growing Tallahatchie* and *One Stop Shop* scenarios seek to provide ideas for different approaches to harness West Tallahatchie's resources to improve food security and healthy eating. The suggestions provided are only the beginning. The community may use this report to work together and with local nonprofits to seek funding to implement food security solutions that will bring greater access to fresh fruits and vegetables, as well as other healthy foods.

Through implementation of some or all of the food access strategies, West Tallahatchie may ensure that desired change is sustainable. Local solutions like these can drive economic revitalization, create an inclusive community space, empower youth, and improve citizen health. While a one stop shop grocery store might be ideal in some ways, we believe that growing, selling, and buying local fresh fruits and vegetables has incredible benefits for the community that cannot be found by bringing in a big-box store. Continuing with business as usual will not bring about the change the community wants to see and every effort should be made to avoid the missed opportunity to improve food access for the community.

With these strategies in hand, the community may garner the support of nonprofits as well as local governments to bring in funds for the creation of a healthier West Tallahatchie. We are hopeful that the community will come together and initiate real change in food access using this report as a starting point.

## A Roadmap for Moving Forward

The stories, knowledge, and experiences our community partners have shared with us have grown into four possible food futures, which offer visions of what food access may be like in West Tallahatchie in 2027. Each scenario discussed possible barriers and recommendations, offering a particular roadmap for each future. In order to create a more food secure future, we have included next steps that the community of West Tallahatchie can take to improve food access—the first roadmap for moving forward.

The two drivers we chose based on interview and workshop feedback—community empowerment and food production—were a significant decision. They are critical aspects of the food access story in West Tallahatchie, and the success of the community's food future is dependent on both being strong. The first step in this community work is to encourage cohesive community empowerment where all people, groups, and beliefs are represented and welcomed. From that point, some leaders will naturally arise or nominate themselves, but there may also be those that are important to leading the work but may not have spoken up themselves—they should be nominated by others as a wide range of voices and experiences are necessary for the success of food access for the whole community. With these nominations a representative and experienced coalition of leaders can be formed to carry forward the food access work. With strong leadership, the coalition—with transparent feedback to and from the community at continuous stages along the way—can begin to decide where and how to best obtain fresh produce.

## Getting Started: Recommendations for Next Steps

To begin this necessary and meaningful work, we suggest the community come together to work through which potential food future is best for the community as a whole and to identify those leaders who will begin the coordination of this work.

### ***Community Meetings in Glendora, Sumner, Tutwiler, and Webb***

1. Hold a minimum of four community meetings in each town to share the four possible food futures with residents. The Tutwiler meeting may be hosted at the Tutwiler Community Education Center, the Sumner meeting at the Emmett Till Interpretive Center (ETIC), the Webb meeting at West Tallahatchie High School, and the Glendora meeting at Glendora Town Hall.
  - a. Additional spaces for community meetings may include:
    - i. *Glendora*: Gracen Chapel; Emmett Till Historic Intrepid Center (ETHIC)
    - ii. *Sumner*: West Tallahatchie Courthouse; Sumner Grille
    - iii. *Tutwiler*: Tutwiler Town Hall; Delta Interfaith Community Outreach; Habitat for Humanity
    - iv. *Webb*: Blue House; Webb Library
2. These meetings, hosted by a central coordinator, will help ensure that all interested residents in West Tallahatchie are able to voice their opinion about the four scenarios.
  - Extend an invitation to all residents of West Tallahatchie and provide transportation to the meetings in Glendora, Webb, Sumner, and Tutwiler. This will help ensure more complete community representation.
  - Hold community meetings within one month of each other. Preferably, choose a time and day that works best for the community and does not interfere with church services or work hours. Providing childcare will help make it easier for individuals with children to participate.
  - Ask individuals who are interested in helping lead and shape the food access work to identify themselves or ask for nominations at the meetings. Compile a list of all names and nominations so that once general community meetings have finished, the coalition can begin meeting.

### ***Leadership – Formation of the West Tallahatchie Food Access Council***

1. Form a group of eight to twelve people including community residents and representatives of nonprofit organizations that serve the region to create the West Tallahatchie Food Access Council.<sup>118</sup>

118 Becker, A., Israel, B., Gustat, J., Reyes, A., and Allen III, A. Strategies and Techniques for Effective Group Process in CBPR Partnerships. In B. Israel, E. Eng, A. Schulz, and E. Parker (Eds.), *Methods for Community-Based Participatory Research for Health*. (pp. 69-96). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

2. Identify one or two people from the community to serve as Council coordinators and perform project management tasks, such as organizing meetings and connecting with partner agencies. Coordinators should be paid an hourly salary or stipend, which may be funded through grants.
3. Focus on setting group expectations, determining schedules for future meetings, writing group rules or bylaws, and determining the location of future meetings at the first Council meeting.<sup>119</sup> Attention should be paid to finding a location that is easily accessible for all coalition members as they will be coming from different towns. If one “best” location cannot be found, then a schedule could be created such that the meeting rotates between two (or more as is necessary) locations to accommodate the group.
  - a. One of the most crucial aspects of a successful council is to create strong relationships between the members. Therefore, spending time connecting with each other is an important component of the first meeting. Team building exercises may be helpful for the first meeting to learn about how each member works best, what is important to them, and to discover the shared goals that unite the group.<sup>120</sup>
4. Hold West Tallahatchie Food Access Council meetings at least twice a month to maintain continuity and momentum.
5. Establish group consensus on which food future and specific strategies to pursue. More specifically, it is recommended that the Council choose a single idea as a starting point to focus their efforts. Once this is established, more methods can be built out to continue increasing and diversifying food access over time.
6. Plan the next steps for the chosen food future focusing on both short- and long-term goals, focusing on the suggested recommendations and avoiding the identified barriers within the scenario section of this report. The Council will seek out potential funding, identify any necessary physical spaces for the scenario, plan the budget, and identify additional people as needed to help carry out the future.
7. Seek an outside group(s) to assist with grant funding, planning, implementation, and evaluation. Outside groups may include a student research group, the University of Mississippi Center for Population Studies, local nonprofits, or a consultant. In order to apply for grant funds, it is critical to identify a partner organization that has 501(c)3 status and is willing to serve as a financial intermediary.

The primary goal of the West Tallahatchie Food Access Council is to build, strengthen, and represent the entire community. These first steps in community organization and leadership building are critical to creating a strong foundation for a more food secure West Tallahatchie. Together the community shares in opportunity and can weather hardships. The strength of West Tallahatchie is its people, and by beginning work toward an improved food access future, the community as a whole will be made stronger, healthier, and more resilient.

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

## Appendix A - Key Informant Interviews

### Key Informant Interview Protocol

The below 'Key Informant Interview Protocol' includes the script followed and questions asked by the University of Michigan team during the key informant interviews conducted in May 2016.

#### Key Informant Interview Protocol Dow Sustainability Fellowship Project 2016 Food Security in West Tallahatchie, Mississippi

This protocol contains key informant interview questions surrounding food security, food access, and perceptions about healthy food, policy, and sustainable food alternatives. These questions were created or adapted by the Food Security in Mississippi Delta team as part of their Dow Sustainability Fellowship at the University of Michigan.

#### **BEFORE THE INTERVIEW:**

**Note to interviewer(s):** Take the time to introduce yourself to the key informant, and get to know them more personally before beginning the interview. Explain the consent form to the key informant and obtain their consent & signature.

If the key informant seems to become uncomfortable at any time, say "I just want to remind you that everything you say during the interview will be kept anonymous." If they still feel uncomfortable, say "You may skip a question or stop the interview at anytime you like. Just let me know." Remember to check-in with the key informant periodically. Remember to begin recording of the interview after the consent has been signed.

#### **INTERVIEW:**

**Say (can adlib):** It was nice to meet you over the phone on \_\_\_\_\_, when we spoke about the food security project. This week, our entire team is in West Tallahatchie meeting with community leaders like you and others, like Ben Saulsbury, Tia Love, and Patrick Weems, to partner on the project.

I apologize if this next part doesn't feel very conversational but we have a lot to talk with you about and we want to make sure we cover everything.

**Say exactly:** We are here to partner with the community to find more long-term solutions to food security. It's a process and it is going to take a long time. We are here to listen first and will go back to Michigan to think about what we've heard. We'll be coming back in June or July



to share what we have put together based on what we've heard from you and the community. So, we're starting now with square one and we will be working on this with the community over this year to find long-term ways to improve food access.

The information we gather in our interview today will be combined with the comments of other community experts and used to identify solutions to food access for community residents. We're looking forward to getting to know each other today and learning more about your community. The questions should take about an hour, depending on the time that you have available for us today.

**Say (can adlib):** \_\_\_\_ and I are interview partners and will be talking with you today. I will be asking questions and \_\_\_\_ will be typing up notes. We hope that the sound of typing will not be distracting. The information you share with us today is incredibly important, and we want to make sure that we are able to get everything down on paper. We will also be recording the interview audio as well. We've scheduled an hour for the interview. So, to be mindful of our time, \_\_\_\_ will give us a time update when we have about fifteen minutes left.

Before we start the interview, we wanted to clarify that any information you share today will be kept confidential. Take a moment to read our consent form, it allows us to record this audio interview so that we can go back to listen again. (Give key informant the consent form and allow them time to read and sign it. Once signed, you can go on with the interview.)

If you have any questions at any time during our chat or want to share anything with us, please don't hesitate to say. We have a printed copy of our main questions here (hand over the copy) as a reference if you would like it.

## COMMUNITY QUESTIONS:

Say (can adlib): We would like to learn more about you and what it's like living in your community.

1. Could you start by telling us a little bit about yourself?
2. What is the name of your community?
3. How long have you lived here?
  - 3.1. What community organizations and activities are you most involved in now or in the past? (These can be volunteer positions, unpaid jobs, or paid jobs)
    - 3.1.1. Probe: Have you held a leadership position in any of these? (This could be any position in which you made decisions on behalf of the organization.)
    - 3.1.2. Probe: If so, what was the title of the position?
4. What do you like about living in (name of community)?
  - 4.1. What do you like about living in West Tallahatchie? (strengths)

- 4.2. What is difficult about living in West Tallahatchie? (barriers)
  5. How connected do you feel to your community in (name of community)?
    - 5.1. How connected do you feel to other communities and towns in West Tallahatchie?
      - 5.1.1. Do you participate in community activities or organizations outside of your immediate community?
    - 5.2. Probe: Where do you connect with your community in (name of community)?
  6. Think of a time when there was a problem in (name of community) that community members tried to resolve:
    - 6.1. Could you describe that scene for me?
    - 6.2. How was the need determined?
    - 6.3. How did the community organize themselves?
    - 6.4. In what ways was the community unified or together about how to tackle the issue?
    - 6.5. In what ways was the community divided about how to tackle the issue?
    - 6.6. Who had the most influence in helping the issue get resolved?
      - 6.6.1. What strengths did they draw upon to help resolve the issue?
  7. Think of a time when there was a problem that affected all of West Tallahatchie:
    - 7.1. Could you describe that scene for me?
    - 7.2. How was the need determined?
    - 7.3. In what ways was the community unified or together about how to tackle the issue?
    - 7.4. In what ways was the community divided about how to tackle the issue?
    - 7.5. Who had the most influence in helping the issue get resolved?
      - 7.5.1. Describe the diversity of race or social class in this group of people.
  8. What do you think are the major problems facing communities in this area?
    - 8.1. How are the needs of West Tallahatchie different from your community?
- Say (can adlib):** This feedback on (name of community) has been great. Our next few questions are going to focus on food in your community. Are you comfortable with continuing the interview or would you like a short break?
- Say (exactly):** We think of food security as the ability of all people to have access at all times to enough safe and nutritious food so that they can lead healthy and active lives. (WHO, World Food Summit 1996).
9. What role do you think food plays in (name of community)?
    - 9.1. Probe: Cultural significance, historical significance, agricultural history, etc.

10. How do you define healthy eating?
11. Do you think people in (name of community) think healthy eating is important?
12. Who do you think are the healthy eating ‘champions’ in (name of community)? (The people that are most concerned with improving healthy eating.)

### **FOOD SECURITY QUESTIONS:**

**Say (can adlib):** Now I'd like to ask you about fresh fruits and vegetables.

1. Do you purchase most of your fresh fruits and vegetables in West Tallahatchie?
  - 1.1. Do you go outside of West Tallahatchie to purchase any fresh fruits and vegetables?
  - 1.2. What are the most important things to you when you make choices about where to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables?
    - 1.2.1. Probe: Cost, quality, quantity, type of produce available, etc.
2. If fresh fruits and vegetables were available in a convenient location in West Tallahatchie, what might still prevent community members from purchasing them?
3. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being very familiar and 5 being very unfamiliar, how familiar do you think community members are with cooking fresh fruits and vegetables?
  - 3.1. 1-Very Familiar; 2-Somewhat Familiar; 3-Neither Familiar Nor Unfamiliar; 4-Somewhat Unfamiliar; 5-Very Unfamiliar
4. Are there certain groups, members, neighborhoods, or areas of (name of community) that you think have a greater need for improved food access?
  - 4.1. Who are they?
  - 4.2. How do you think their needs could be met?
5. What do the communities of West Tallahatchie identify as potential solutions to lack of access to food in the area?
  - 5.1. What solutions do you think should be implemented?
  - 5.2. What are the barriers to these solutions?
6. Can you think of a way that improving food access could also promote economic growth? (This could be any way of increasing resources or income in your community.)
7. What do you think could encourage and support more community involvement around food access issues?
8. Do you know of any solutions for food security that have already been explored or are ongoing in West Tallahatchie?
  - 8.1. Do you work on any of these directly?
  - 8.2. Do you know anyone that we should reach out to that is working on these?

9. What factors have prevented these solutions from being implemented or prevented their success?
  - 9.1. Probe: Community factors? Economic? Political?
10. Is there anything I haven't asked today, that you would like to share with us?
11. Would you be interested in attending a meeting in late July or early August to find out the results from these interviews?
  - 11.1. What do you suggest as a time and places to hold such a meeting?
  - 11.2. If they say no: Are there any other ways that we can keep in touch with you to share the results?
    - 11.2.1. If they say no: If you feel comfortable, would you mind sharing why you are might not be interested in keeping in touch?

### **AFTER THE INTERVIEW:**

**Say (can adlib):** Thank you again for sharing your time with us today. Your feedback is invaluable and we appreciate the time you have taken to share your experience and knowledge with us.

**Say (can adlib):** Just as a reminder, the goal of our project is to identify a way to improve long-term access to healthy foods, like fruits and vegetables, in West Tallahatchie. Our first step in this process is partnering with community experts like you to learn more about the community and your ideas for how to improve food access in the county. We will be using the information from your interview and the other interviews to help us identify solutions to improve food access in West Tallahatchie.

**Say (can adlib):** We enjoyed hearing from you, and we hope you will continue to be involved in future actions related to the project. We want to assure you that everything you have said during the interview will be kept anonymous.

We have created a fact sheet about the project that we will leave with you today. My contact information is listed on here, along with the rest of the team members contact information. Feel free to call or email me if you have any questions or concerns regarding your interview today or other activities related to the project.

## Key Informant Interview Guide for Key Informants

The below 'Key Informant Interview Guide' was given to key informants to follow along as the University of Michigan team asked questions during the key informant interviews conducted in May 2016.

### Key Informant Interview Guide

#### Food Security in West Tallahatchie, Mississippi

##### COMMUNITY QUESTIONS:

1. Could you start by telling us the name of your community?
2. How long have you lived here?
3. What community organizations and activities are you most involved in now or in the past?
4. What do you like about living in this community?
5. Think of a time when there was a problem in your community that community members tried to resolve:
  - Could you describe that scene for me?
  - How was the need determined?
  - How did the community organize themselves?
  - In what ways was the community come together to tackle the issue?
  - In what ways was the community divided about how to tackle the issue?
  - Who had the most influence in helping the issue get resolved?
6. Think of a time when there was a problem that affected all of West Tallahatchie:
  - Could you describe that scene for me?
  - How was the need determined?
  - In what ways was the community come together to tackle the issue?
  - In what ways was the community divided about how to tackle the issue?
  - Who had the most influence in helping the issue get resolved?
7. What do you think are the major problems facing communities in this area?
  - How are the needs of West Tallahatchie different from your community?
8. What role do you think food plays in your community?
9. How do you define healthy eating?
10. How important do you think healthy eating is to your community?
11. Who do you think are the healthy eating 'champions' in your community?



## FOOD SECURITY QUESTIONS:

**Food security definition:** the ability of all people to have access at all times to enough safe and nutritious food so that they can lead healthy and active lives.

1. Do you purchase most of your fresh fruits and vegetables in West Tallahatchie?
2. What are the most important things to you when you make choices about where to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables?
3. If fresh fruits and vegetables were available in a convenient location in West Tallahatchie, what might still prevent community members from purchasing t?
4. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being very familiar and 5 being very unfamiliar, how familiar do you think community members are with cooking fresh fruits and vegetables?



5. Are there certain groups, members, neighborhoods, or areas of the community that you think have a greater need for improved food access?
6. What do the communities of West Tallahatchie identify as potential solutions to lack of access to food in the area?
7. Can you think of a way that improving food access could also promote economic growth?
8. What do you think could encourage and support more community involvement around food access issues?
9. Do you know of any solutions for food security that have already been explored or are ongoing in West Tallahatchie?
10. What factors have prevented these solutions from being implemented or prevented their success?
11. Is there anything I haven't asked today, that you would like to share with us?
12. Would you be interested in attending a meeting in late July or early August to find out the results from these interviews?

## Key Informant Interview Consent Form

The below 'Key Informant Interview Consent Form' includes information to the key informant of the intent of the research project, their rights, and the consent to record and release information related to the audiotape and interview by the University of Michigan team during the key informant interviews conducted in May 2016.

### The University of Michigan Dow Sustainability Fellowship Project 2016

### Food Security in West Tallahatchie County, Mississippi Consent Form

#### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

**Title of the Project:** Food Security in West Tallahatchie, Mississippi

**Principal Investigator:** Lee Taylor-Penn, MPH & MPA Candidate, University of Michigan

**Co-investigator:** Anna Bengtson, MS & MUP Candidate, University of Michigan; Kathleen Carroll, MS & MBA Candidate, University of Michigan; Sarah Ladin, JD Candidate, University of Michigan; Grace van Velden, MPH Candidate, University of Michigan

**Faculty Advisor:** Laurie Lachance, PhD, School of Public Health, University of Michigan

#### INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

We invite you to be part of a research study about food security in West Tallahatchie, Mississippi. The purpose of this study is to collaborate with the community to determine sustainable alternative food systems to improve access to healthy foods for the people of West Tallahatchie, Mississippi. The study is funded by the University of Michigan Graham Sustainability Institutes' Dow Sustainability Fellowship program, of which the five student researchers are Fellows.

#### DESCRIPTION OF YOUR INVOLVEMENT

If you agree to be part of the research study, we will ask you to participate in a key informant interview with one or more of the student researchers. The interview will be roughly 90-minutes long and will include questions about your role in your community, community needs, food access or food security in West Tallahatchie, Mississippi, and your ideas about improving food access. You will also be invited to participate with other community members in one of more community workshops or meetings. Participation in community workshops is not required.

## **BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION**

You may directly benefit from being in this study because many residents of West Tallahatchie do not have reliable access to fresh fruits and vegetables, and this project aims to identify alternative healthy food systems for the county. These alternative healthy food systems are a potential benefit in improving access to healthy food for everyone in West Tallahatchie.

## **RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS OF PARTICIPATION**

There may be some risk or discomfort from your participation in this research, including that you or other members in your community may reveal your identity. The project team will never share your identity without your consent and will remove your name and identifying information from your data to take steps to prevent this risk.

## **COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION**

For your participation in this research project, you will receive one \$15.00 gift card to the Dollar General at the time of completion of your first key informant interview. This compensation will be paid to individuals that complete the key informant interview in entirety. Compensation will not be provided for participation in community workshops or other community meetings.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

We plan to publish the results of this study. We will not include any information that would identify you. Your privacy will be protected and your research records will be confidential.

It is possible that other people may need to see the information you give us as part of the study, such as organizations responsible for making sure the research is done safely and properly like the University of Michigan, government offices or the study sponsor, or the Graham Sustainability Institute Dow Fellowship Program.

## **STORAGE AND FUTURE USE OF DATA**

We will store your data to use for future research studies or program development in West Tallahatchie, Mississippi. Your name and any other identifying information will be secured and stored separately from your research data that is held in Qualtrics, a password protected program licensed by the University of Michigan. The Principal Investigator, Co-Investigators, and Faculty Advisor will have access to your research files and data. Research data may be shared with other investigators, stakeholders, sponsors, or others, but will never contain any information that could identify you.

### **VOLUNTARY NATURE OF THE STUDY**

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. Even if you decide to participate now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. You do not have to answer a question you do not want to answer. Just tell us and we will go to the next question. If you decide to withdraw before this study is completed, we will retain the data collected up until that point unless you request for that data to be destroyed. Any data that must be destroyed will be deleted from all online storage and hard copies will be shredded.

### **CONTACT INFORMATION FOR THE STUDY TEAM**

If you have questions about this research, including questions about scheduling or your compensation for participating, you may contact Lee Taylor-Penn at leetp@umich.edu, and/or our faculty advisor, Dr. Laurie Lachance at lauriel@umich.edu.

### **CONSENT**

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in the study. I/we will give you a copy of this document for your records. I/we will keep one copy with the study records. Be sure that I/we have answered any questions you have about the study and that you understand what you are being asked to do. You may contact the researcher if you think of a question later.

I agree to participate in the study.

---

Printed Name and Signature

I agree to be audio/video recorded. YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B - Food Audit Survey

The below 'Food Audit Survey Protocol' includes the grocery store/food supplier survey completed by community partners trained by the University of Michigan team and conducted in May 2016.

<b>West Tallahatchie Food Audit – 2016</b>	
Date (mm/dd/yyyy):	Observer name:
Name of store:	Is this a food store?
Short description:	Store operating hours: Weekdays: _____AM to _____PM
Audit start time: _____AM/PM (circle one)	Audit end time: _____ AM/PM (circle one)
What is the reputation of this store as far as you are aware? If this store did offer produce, are there aspects of it (owners' attitudes, cleanliness, safety, etc.) that would still prevent people from purchasing fresh fruits and vegetables here?	
What are the top 5 edible things you think people buy at this store (ex: bananas, milk, eggs, candy, junk food (if so, what kind of junk food? Chips? Pot pies? Etc.)	1. 2. 3. 4. 5.
Are the prices here reasonable based on your knowledge of what else is available nearby? Based on the prices you see here, would you purchase produce at this store if it were offered?	



**Availability: Fresh Fruits and Vegetables**

Does the store sell fresh fruit YES/NO (circle one)

Does the store sell fresh vegetables? YES/NO (circle one)

Item	Available?	Item	Available?	Item	Available?
Apple (any variety)		Honeydew melon		Sprouts (alfalfa, bean)	
Artichoke		Kiwi		Squash (acorn)	
Asparagus		Leeks		Squash (butternut)	
Avocado		Lemon		Squash (hubbard)	
Banana		Lettuce (endive, Belgian, curly)		Squash (spaghetti)	
Beet		Lettuce, Iceberg		Squash (yellow)	
Blackberries		Lettuce, Green leaf		Squash (zucchini)	
Blueberries		Lettuce, red leaf		Strawberries	
Bok Choy		Lettuce, Romaine		Tangerine	
Broccoli		Lettuce (other)		Tomato	
Broccolini		Lime		Turnip	
Brussels sprouts		Mango		Watermelon	
Cabbage (green or red)		Mushroom		Other:	
Cabbage, Napa		Nectarines		Other:	
Cantaloupe		Okra		Other:	
Carrot		Onion (yellow/white)		Other:	
Cauliflower		Onion (green)/Scallions			
Celery		Onion (red/shallot)			
Chard		Papaya			
Cherries		Parsnips			
Cilantro		Peach			
Clementine (Mandarin)		Pear			
Corn (on the cob)		Peas			
Cucumber		Pepper (hot)			
Eggplant		Pepper (bell)			
Fennel		Pineapple			
Garlic		Plantain			
Ginger		Plum			
Grapefruit		Potato (white)			

Grapes (any variety)		Potato (sweet/yam)			
Greens (collard)		Pumpkin			
Greens (kale)		Radish			
Greens (mustard)		Raspberries			
Greens (turnip)		Rhubarb			
Green beans (string beans)		Spinach			

### Price: Fresh Fruits and Vegetables

Item	Price (lowest available)	Unit at Store (circle one and indicate quantity)
Apples	\$_____._____	Per ____ pound Per ____ item
Bananas	\$_____._____	Per ____ pound Per ____ item
Oranges	\$_____._____	Per ____ pound Per ____ item
Mustard greens	\$_____._____	Per ____ pound Per ____ item
Turnip greens	\$_____._____	Per ____ pound Per ____ item
Collard greens	\$_____._____	Per ____ pound Per ____ item
Onion	\$_____._____	Per ____ pound Per ____ item
White potato	\$_____._____	Per ____ pound Per ____ item
Sweet potato	\$_____._____	Per ____ pound Per ____ item
Corn on the cob	\$_____._____	Per ____ pound Per ____ item
Squash (specify type: _____)	\$_____._____	Per ____ pound Per ____ item
Iceberg lettuce	\$_____._____	Per ____ pound Per ____ item

**Availability and Price: Canned or Jarred Fruits**

Does the store sell canned fruit? YES/NO

How many varieties of canned fruit? 1. 1-5 2. 6+

Item	Available?	Size (for price)	Quantity for price (lowest cost)
Peaches		Size:	_____ for \$____.____
Pears			_____ for \$____.____
Pineapple			_____ for \$____.____
Other:			_____ for \$____.____
Other:			_____ for \$____.____

**Availability and Price: Canned Vegetables**

Does the store sell canned vegetables? YES/NO

How many varieties of canned vegetables? 1. 1-5 2. 6+

Item	Available?	Size (for price)	Quantity for price (lowest cost)
Corn		Size:	_____ for \$____.____
Green beans			_____ for \$____.____
Sweet peas			_____ for \$____.____
Tomatoes			_____ for \$____.____
Other:			_____ for \$____.____
Other:			_____ for \$____.____

**Availability and Price: Canned Beans**

Item	Available?	Size (for price)	Quantity for price (lowest cost)
Black beans		Size:	_____ for \$____.____
Black-eyed peas			_____ for \$____.____
Garbanzo beans (chickpeas)			_____ for \$____.____
Red/white kidney beans			_____ for \$____.____
Pinto beans			_____ for \$____.____
Red beans			_____ for \$____.____
Other:			_____ for \$____.____
Other:			_____ for \$____.____

**Availability and Price: Dried Beans**

Item	Available?	Quantity for price (lowest cost) per pound
Black beans		_____ for \$____.____
Black-eyed peas		_____ for \$____.____
Garbanzo beans (chickpeas)		_____ for \$____.____
Red/white kidney beans		_____ for \$____.____
Pinto beans		_____ for \$____.____
Red beans		_____ for \$____.____
Other:		_____ for \$____.____
Other:		_____ for \$____.____

**Availability and Price: Frozen Fruits**

Does the store sell frozen fruit? YES/NO

How many varieties of frozen fruit? 1. 1-5      2. 6+

Item	Available?	Size (for price)	Quantity for price (lowest cost)
Blueberries		Size:	_____ for \$____.____
Peaches			_____ for \$____.____
Mixed berries			_____ for \$____.____
Raspberries			_____ for \$____.____
Strawberries			_____ for \$____.____
Other:			_____ for \$____.____

**Availability and Price: Frozen Vegetables**

Does the store sell frozen vegetables? YES/NO

How many varieties of frozen vegetables? 1. 1-5      2. 6+

Item	Available?	Size (for price)	Quantity for price (lowest cost)
Collard greens		Size:	_____ for \$____.____
Green beans			_____ for \$____.____
Spinach			_____ for \$____.____
Sweet peas			_____ for \$____.____
Broccoli			_____ for \$____.____
Other:			_____ for \$____.____

### Availability and Price: Other Staples

Item	Available?	Number of types (e.g. four types of whole wheat pasta)	Size (for price)	Quantity for price (lowest cost)
Milk (whole)			Size:	_____ for \$____.____
Milk (2%)				_____ for \$____.____
Milk (Skim)				_____ for \$____.____
Cheese				_____ for \$____.____
Yogurt				_____ for \$____.____
Breakfast cereal (boxes)				_____ for \$____.____
Brown rice				_____ for \$____.____
White rice				_____ for \$____.____
White pasta				_____ for \$____.____
Whole wheat pasta				_____ for \$____.____
Loaf of bread (sliced), white				_____ for \$____.____
Loaf of bread (sliced), whole wheat				_____ for \$____.____
Snack chips				_____ for \$____.____
Chicken meat				_____ for \$____.____
Beef meat				_____ for \$____.____
Pork meat				_____ for \$____.____
Turkey meat				_____ for \$____.____
Juice				_____ for \$____.____
Soda				_____ for \$____.____
Ready-to-eat meals				_____ for \$____.____

### Additional Observations

Does the store accept...	<input type="checkbox"/> EBT Cards <input type="checkbox"/> WIC Coupons <input type="checkbox"/> Neither
How many operational cash registers does the store have (in the main check-out area)?	_____ registers
Do any of the check-out lanes carry candy or gum?	1. Yes 2. No
Do you see any health promotion sides in the store? If so, what kinds?	

<p>Does the store have any of the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Fresh meat or poultry section</li> <li>2. Butcher</li> <li>3. Fresh produce section</li> <li>4. Deli section</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Bakery</li> <li>6. Carry-out foods/fast food/café</li> <li>7. Pharmacist</li> <li>8. Gas station</li> <li>9. None of the above</li> </ol>
<p>What is the primary product for sale?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Meat or seafood</li> <li>2. Fruits and vegetables</li> <li>3. Medications (drug store or pharmacy)</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Liquor</li> <li>5. Deli</li> <li>6. Bakery</li> <li>7. No primary good</li> <li>8. Other: _____</li> </ol>
<p>Are most of the foods pre-packaged or high-convenience (e.g. ready-to-eat, ready-to-heat items)?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Yes</li> <li>2. No</li> </ol>
<p>Are most of the items sold in bulk?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Yes</li> <li>2. No</li> </ol>
<p>How would you categorize this store?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Bakery</li> <li>2. Grocery store or supermarket</li> <li>3. Deli</li> <li>4. Convenience store</li> <li>5. Drug store/pharmacy</li> <li>6. Dollar/discount merchandise store</li> <li>7. Liquor store</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8. Limited assortment store</li> <li>9. Fruit and vegetable market</li> <li>10. Meat or seafood market</li> <li>11. Supercenter</li> <li>12. Warehouse store</li> <li>13. Wholesale member club</li> <li>14. Other: _____</li> </ol>
<p>Does the store have signs (inside or outside) in languages other than English (excluding store name)?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Yes. If so, what language? _____</li> <li>2. No</li> </ol>
<p>Does the store have any of the following security features? (Mark all that apply)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Security guard</li> <li>2. Security camera</li> <li>3. Security bars (on doors or windows)</li> <li>4. Bullet-proof or thick glass at checkout counter</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. All check-out counters are enclosed with turnstile</li> <li>6. Security mirror</li> <li>7. None of the above</li> </ol>
<p>Store cleanliness:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Very clean</li> <li>2. Somewhat clean</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Somewhat dirty</li> <li>4. Very dirty</li> </ol>
<p>What is the environment like inside the store? (Mark all that apply)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Visible trash/debris</li> <li>2. Well-lit</li> <li>3. Poorly-lit</li> <li>4. Dirty floors</li> <li>5. Foul odor</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. Secure, closed off area/office for store management</li> <li>7. People 'hanging out' or loitering</li> <li>8. Panhandling</li> <li>9. None of the above</li> </ol>



Do you notice any of the following behaviors from the owner or employees? (Mark all that apply)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Swearing/cursing</li> <li>2. Joking around/talking loudly</li> <li>3. Smoking</li> <li>4. None of the above</li> </ol>
Observed race/ethnicity of employees and owners: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. White</li> <li>2. African American</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Latino/Hispanic</li> <li>4. Asian</li> <li>5. Middle Eastern/Arab/Chaldean</li> <li>6. Don't know</li> </ol>
Are there any ads for tobacco products on the store fronts?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Yes</li> <li>2. No</li> </ol>
Are there any ads for alcoholic beverages on the storefront?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Yes</li> <li>2. No</li> </ol>
Is liquor (including beer or wine) the largest 'sign' (including word) on the storefront?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Yes</li> <li>2. No</li> </ol>
What is the environment like outside of the store? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Visible trash/debris</li> <li>2. Broken glass</li> <li>3. Graffiti</li> <li>4. People 'hanging out' or loitering</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Panhandling</li> <li>6. Shopping cart guard rails (to prevent removal of carts)</li> <li>7. Parking lot available</li> <li>8. None of the above</li> </ol>
Does the store sell any alcohol, including beer or wine?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Yes</li> <li>2. No</li> </ol>
Additional comments—what else is important to note about this store?	

### Food Audit Survey Distribution Points

The University of Michigan team and partners at the Emmett Till Interpretive Center contacted 15 stores that provide food, processed or fresh, to consumers. Of these stores, six consented to allowing the food audit survey to be conducted and are named below. We thank these stores for their participation in allowing us to conduct the work.

## Appendix C - Community Consumer Survey

The below community consumer survey was distributed to West Tallahatchie residents to gauge food access needs and food shopping preferences.

1. How old are you?

- 12-17 years old
- 18-24 years old
- 25-34 years old
- 35-44 years old
- 45-54 years old
- 55-64 years old
- 65-74 years old
- 75 years or older

2. Including you, how many people live in your household?

3. What is your race?

- African-American
- White
- American Indian and Alaska Native
- Asian
- Hispanic or Latino
- Other Race (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- Prefer not to say

4. In the last 60 days, have you purchased or received fresh fruits and vegetables from any of the sources listed below?

- Stores in West Tallahatchie
- Food Bank in West Tallahatchie
- Church Pantry in West Tallahatchie
- Personal Garden
- Family Member or friend

5. How often do you normally shop for groceries? (please circle one answer)

- Three times a week  
 Twice a week  
 Once a week  
 Every other week  
 Once a month  
 Other frequency (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

6. How much money do you usually spend each month on groceries purchased at stores outside of West Tallahatchie? (please circle one answer)

- Between \$1 and \$100  
 Between \$101 and \$200  
 Between \$201 and \$300  
 Between \$301 and \$400  
 Between \$401 and \$500  
 \$500 or more

7. When you go to the grocery store, how do you get there? (please circle one answer)

- I have my own vehicle  
 I ride with a friend or family member  
 I take other transportation (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

8. Which of these factors are most important to you when buying groceries?  
(please rank in order from 1 to 4)

	1	2	3	4
The price of the food is low				
The store is nearby and easy to get to				
There are many different ingredients available				
The available food is fresh				

9. Please name five fresh fruits and/or vegetables that you purchase most often (for example: lettuce, collard greens, etc.):

Tomatoes	Bananas	Cabbage
Beans	Oranges	White Potatoes
Green beans	Grapes	Carrots
Lettuce	Strawberries	Celery
Greens (collards, kale, mustard, turnip)	Watermelon	Cherries
Salad mix	Melons	Blueberries
Onions	Peaches	Nectarines
Sweet Potatoes	Lemons	Spinach
Mushrooms	Apples	Limes
Peppers	Cucumbers	Ginger
Squash	Broccoli	Other (please specify): _____

10. Have you ever grown fresh fruits and/or vegetables in a garden? (please circle one answer)

- Yes, I grow a large fruit/vegetable garden every year
- Yes, I grow a small fruit/vegetable garden every year
- Yes, I grow a fruit/vegetable garden some years
- Yes, I grew a fruit/vegetable garden in the past
- No, I have never grown a fruit/vegetable garden

11. Have you ever been to the farmers market in Sumner? (please circle one answer)

- Yes
- No
- I was not aware of the market

12. How often do you cook meals at home? (please circle one answer)

- Twice a day
- Once a day
- Several times per week
- Once a week
- Other frequency (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- Never

13. Where or from whom do you get information about how to eat healthily? (please circle all answers that apply)

- Friends
- Family
- TV shows
- News
- Magazines
- Radio
- Doctor
- School
- Work
- Church
- Internet
- Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**The next questions are about what you would do in the future.**

14. Say you could purchase all your items, including fresh fruits and vegetables, in West Tallahatchie. What time of day and which day of the week would you go grocery shopping? (please mark up to 3 answers)

	Morning (7am-12pm)	Afternoon (12pm-5pm)	Early Evening (5pm-7pm)	Late Evening (7pm-9pm)
Monday				
Tuesday				
Wednesday				
Thursday				
Friday				
Saturday				

15. What food items would be most important to you to have available locally? You can include fresh fruits and vegetables, or anything else you would like to purchase in West Tallahatchie. (Below list compiled based upon consumer responses.)

Tomatoes	Grapes	Meats
Beans	Strawberries	Lean meats
Green beans	Watermelon	Frozen peas
Lettuce	Melons	Fruits
Greens (collards, kale, mustard, turnip)	Peaches	Vegetables
Salad mix	Lemons	Frozen vegetables
Onions	Apples	Cheese
Sweet Potatoes	Corn	Milk
Mushrooms	Scallions	Bread
Peppers	Pears	All kinds/All
Squash	Chicken	Locally grown
Avocados	Fish	Other (please specify):
Bananas	Turkey	
Oranges	Beef	

16. Would you be willing to spend more money on groceries if you could buy them in West Tallahatchie? For example: if tomatoes at Walmart are \$2/lb and tomatoes in West Tallahatchie were \$2.50/lb. (please circle one answer)

- Yes
- No



17. Which of the following programs do you think would be beneficial for West Tallahatchie residents who want to start farms or grow their current farming program?

- Farming Cooperatives
- Hands-on Farmer Training Program
- Sales/Marketing Courses
- Farmer Certification Courses
- Season Extension Courses
- Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

18. Do you have any comments or suggestions? (if yes, please write them below)

19. Do you have any questions or concerns? (if yes, please write them below)

**Thank you for taking this survey!**

We're grateful to be partnering with you to improve food access in West Tallahatchie.

### **Community Consumer Survey Distribution Points**

The University of Michigan team and partners at the Emmett Till Interpretive Center distributed the Community Consumer Survey at six sites in West Tallahatchie. We thank the following sites and the 105 community members who completed the survey for their participation in allowing us to conduct the work.

Episcopal Church of the Advent

First Baptist Church

R. H. Bearden Elementary School

Rollins Methodist Church

Silver Star Missionary Baptist Church

Sumner farmers market

Tutwiler Community Education Center

## Appendix D - Community Workshops

### Community Workshop - Small Group Discussion Instructions

The below small group discussion instructions were used by University of Michigan team members and the trained workshop assistants from University of Mississippi to facilitate discussion at the two community workshops in August 2016.

#### SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION INSTRUCTIONS: (6:50pm to 7:30pm)

##### Reminders:

- Make sure one facilitator (student volunteer or UM team member) is taking notes on their computer and the other facilitator is writing on the newsprint.
- Facilitate conversation:
  - If one individual is dominating conversation, gently ask others directly what their opinion is or if they have any other suggestions
  - If someone is speaking for a long time, try to find a way to cut in by summarizing their thoughts and asking others their opinion.
    - e.g. I understand. So what you are saying is \_\_\_\_\_. Does anyone else want to add or share a different idea? (If not, move to the next question.)
- Your notetaker will be the timekeeper. They will give a 15 and 5 minute reminder to the group. After the 5 minute reminder, please wrap up the discussion.

##### Introduction/Ground Rules (5 minutes)

- Begin the small groups asking everyone to say their name.
- Read the ground rules to the group listed at the front of the room.
  - “We are here tonight to hear from all of you, so all ideas are welcome and it is important that we are respectful of others’ perspectives.”
- Define the scenario again for the group.
  - Grocery store: *We define a grocery store as a permanent standing building/store that sells food items primarily. It can be a small or large store.*
  - Community garden: *We define a community garden as a piece of land that is gardened by a group of people living nearby. Community gardens can be large or small, on private or public land, and can have individual or shared plots.*
  - Farmers market: *A farmers market is a food market at which local farmers can sell fruits and vegetables as well as other food products like meat, cheese, and baked goods directly to consumers.*

- **Mobile market:** *We define a mobile market as a food truck or trailer that will follow a designated route to bring fruits, vegetables, and other food products into a community on a regular basis.*
- **Healthy corner store:** *The Food Trust defines a Healthy Corner Store Initiative as a program that builds relationships with store owners and asks them to make gradual changes with support and training. With this assistance, store owners are willing to sell healthy products and believe these changes can be sustainable and profitable.*
- **Farming programs:** *Farming programs may include farming cooperatives, where farmers co-own a piece of land; farming entrepreneurship programs, where beginner farmers receive mentorship from established farmers and low-interest rate loans to start a business; and farmer assistance programs, where current farmers are given the tools and knowledge to scale up their current production and to market their products.*

**Advantages/Disadvantages Activity: (about 15 minutes)**

- Ask each group member to name one potential advantage. After, ask if anyone has other advantages to add.
- Ask them to name a potential disadvantage. After, ask if there are other disadvantages to add.
- Ask the group if anything is missing from either side.

**Envisioning Activity: (about 20 minutes)**

- Start the discussion using the General Discussion questions below.
  - Tailor questions as needed depending on the group's scenario.
- Move onto Scenario Specific Discussion after completing General Discussion.

**GENERAL DISCUSSION:**

1. How would you decide who would be responsible for overseeing or running this?
  - Who do you think this could be?
2. What are important factors for determining its location/route?
  - e.g. ease of transportation, central to most people, vacant land/buildings
3. What sources of funding do you think could help pay for this?
  - Start-up costs?
  - Continuing sources of revenue?
4. What community needs do you think should be met through this?
  - e.g. employment/job creation, transportation time back for other activities, opportunity to create other diverse future businesses, health initiatives, youth education
5. What other factors would be important in making this work?

### GROCERY STORE DISCUSSION:

*Definition: We define a grocery store as a permanent standing building/store that sells food items primarily.*

1. What type of grocery store would work best?
  - e.g. co-op, supermarket
2. What are the main fresh fruits and vegetables the store should provide?
  - Do you know of anyone locally who grows these? (Ask for names.)
  - Is it important that the store also provide other types of products (food/household items)?
3. What other community programs could come from this to promote healthy eating and the use of fresh fruits and vegetables?
  - How would they integrate with the grocery store?
    - e.g. community cooking class held at the grocery store

### COMMUNITY GARDEN DISCUSSION:

*Definition: We define a community garden as a piece of land that is gardened by a group of people living nearby. Community gardens can be large or small, on private or public land, and can have individual or shared plots.*

1. Can you describe how you would imagine a community garden?
  - How would the community work in the garden?
    - e.g. each household gets a plot they are responsible for and keep whatever they grow
    - e.g. a group responsible for growing and it is distributed from a location at a certain frequency
2. What types of ground rules should be in place for the community garden?
  - e.g. assigning plots , tending crops, harvesting, distributing crops
3. What crops would be grown in the garden?
4. Would the garden operate year round?
  - e.g. outside in the summer-fall; hoop houses in the winter-spring
5. What other community programs could come from this to promote healthy eating and the use of fresh fruits and vegetables?
  - How would they integrate with the community garden?
    - e.g. community potluck or community cooking class using crops

### FARMERS MARKET DISCUSSION:

*Definition: We define a farmers market as a food market at which local farmers can sell fruits and vegetables as well as other food products like meat, cheese, and baked goods directly to consumers.*

1. Can you describe your ideal farmers market?
2. What types of ground rules should be in place for the farmers market?
  - How do you determine who is selling?
  - How much would having a stall cost, or is it free?
3. What crops would be sold at the farmers market?
  - Do you imagine the farmers market would sell other food or non-food items?
4. Would the farmers market operate year round?
  - How many days per week would it be open?
5. What type of payments would the farmers market accept?
  - e.g. cash, SNAP, credit card
6. What other community programs could come from this to promote healthy eating and the use of fresh fruits and vegetables?
  - How would they integrate with the farmers market?
    - e.g. vendors give out a recipe with a certain type of food

### MOBILE MARKET DISCUSSION:

*Definition: We define a mobile market as a food truck or trailer that will follow a designated route to bring fruits, vegetables, and other food products into a community on a regular basis.*

1. What are the main fresh fruits and vegetables the mobile market should provide?
  - Do you know of anyone locally who grows these? (Ask for names.)
  - Is it important that the store also provide other types of products (food/household items)?
2. What other community programs could come from this to promote healthy eating and the use of fresh fruits and vegetables?
  - How would they integrate with the mobile market?
    - e.g. mobile market provides recipe cards with produce

### HEALTHY CORNER STORES DISCUSSION:

*Definition: The Food Trust defines a Healthy Corner Store Initiative as a program that builds relationships with store owners and asks them to make gradual changes with support and training. With this assistance, store owners are willing to sell healthy products and believe these changes can be sustainable and profitable.*

1. Can you describe how you would imagine a healthy corner store?
2. What are the main fresh fruits and vegetables the healthy corner store should provide?
  - Do you know of anyone locally who grows these? (Ask for names.)
  - Is it important that a healthy corner store also provide other types of products (food/ household items)?
3. What other community programs could come from this to promote healthy eating and the use of fresh fruits and vegetables?
  - How would they integrate with the healthy corner store?
    - e.g. healthy corner store provides recipe cards with produce

### FARMING PROGRAMS DISCUSSION:

*Definition: Farming programs may include farming cooperatives, where farmers co-own a piece of land; farming entrepreneurship programs, where beginner farmers receive mentorship from established farmers and low-interest rate loans to start a business; and farmer assistance programs, where current farmers are given the tools and knowledge to scale up their current production and to market their products.*

1. What type of farming program would work best for community members?
  - e.g. farming co-op, community shared agriculture (CSA), farmer entrepreneurship program
  - Can you describe what the program would look like?
    - e.g. membership fees, number of farmers, etc.
2. How do you imagine the food reaching the community?
3. What other community programs could come from this to promote healthy eating and the use of fresh fruits and vegetables?
  - How would these programs integrate with the farming programs?
    - e.g. farming program hosts school field trips

### Community Workshop - Post-Discussion Survey

A shortened version of the Community Consumer Survey found in Appendix C was distributed to workshop attendees by University of Michigan team members following the close of the two community workshops in August 2016.



# Appendix E - Dow Sustainability Fellowship Poster, 2016

## 'Food Security in West Tallahatchie, Mississippi' Poster

The following poster was presented at two events: the Dow Sustainability Fellowship Symposium for funders, fellows, and stakeholders on November 12, 2016 and the Dow Sustainability Fellowship Symposium for the wider University of Michigan community and the public on December 7, 2016.

**2016 Symposium  
Masters: Professional**

**DOW SUSTAINABILITY FELLOWS PROGRAM**

# Food Security in West Tallahatchie, Mississippi

Anna Bengtson (MS/MUP), Kathleen Carroll (MS/MBA), Sarah Ladin (JD), Lee Taylor-Penn (MPH/MPA), and Grace van Velden (MPH)

### BACKGROUND

Tallahatchie County, MS  
 Population (2015): 14,588  
 (48% Black / 42% White)  
 Median household income: \$31,860  
 Living below poverty level: 28.5%  
 Less than high school diploma: 37.6%  
 MS food insecurity rate: 22%

Source: The 2014-2015 Census Bureau, census.gov; MS State Department

### METHODLOGY


**COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP, engagement, and buy-in** is fundamental to ensuring this initiative sustains beyond the involvement of our fellowship team.

**COMMUNITY-BASED PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH**, enabled our project to partner with community organizations, leaders, and members in all aspects of the research process. West Tallahatchie community resources, needs, and opportunities for increasing access to fresh produce were identified through:

- KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS (16)
- INFORMATIONAL CONTACT INTERVIEWS (10)
- COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS (3)
- FOOD AUDITS (6)
- COMMUNITY CONSUMER SURVEYS (105)

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Partners: Emerald 79 Horticulture Center, Tutwiler Community Education Center, and the West Tallahatchie Community Foundation; One Chemical Company, Graham Sustainability Institute, and Rig School of Public Health; Office of Health Behavior & Health Education; Advisors: Dr. Laura Luchessa, Dr. Barbara Israel, Dr. Rob Goodson, Dr. Arnis Wirth, and Hester Berg




**KEY FINDINGS**

**EDUCATION:** Improved education about the importance of healthy food may increase consumption of fruits and vegetables and increase demand of healthy food at local businesses.

**COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP:** Sustainably improving food access in West Tallahatchie requires the active backing of a local leader, organization, and/or partnership that is able and willing to oversee implementation. Any outside effort that aims to prescribe solutions will risk a less robust, resilient, and long-term outcome.

**FUNDING:** Demand for goods in West Tallahatchie is extremely elastic; a local source of fresh food must either compete with prices offered at the closest grocery stores or differentiate its product to justify a higher price. A profitable business may be difficult to support and initial solutions should seek financial support (through grants, investment, or loans) during the startup phase.

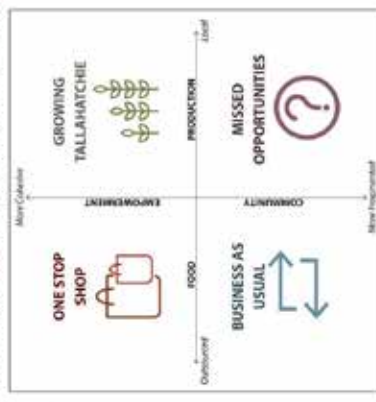


**Tutwiler Community Education Center**

### FUTURE OF FOOD ACCESS

**SCENARIO PLANNING** is an approach communities use to envision and assess possible futures. Plausible stories demonstrate potential changes, allowing scenario planning to critically evaluate and proactively develop strategies to shape a community's future.

**FOUR FOOD SYSTEM SCENARIOS** were developed for West Tallahatchie, Mississippi, with drivers: **FOOD PRODUCTION & COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT.**



**BUSINESS AS USUAL:** People's priorities and attitudes remain unchanging leading to a continuation of normal circumstances.

**GROWING TALLAHATCHIE:** The community and businesses purchase locally sourced produce at a variety of alternative food environments, including healthy corner stores, mobile markets, farmers markets & farms.

**ONE STOP SHOP:** Community members are able to purchase fresh produce, sourced from outside of the county, at one supermarket location within West Tallahatchie.

**MISSED OPPORTUNITIES:** A future where food security is possible, but unrealized.

