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A Study of Access to Nutritious and Affordable Food

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A STUDY OF ACCESS TO NUTRITIOUS AND AFFORDABLE FOOD

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

In recent years, there has been concern that some communities do not have sufficient access to quality food at reasonable prices. The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), which administers the Federal food assistance programs, is particularly concerned with food access for households that have limited resources. In these households, access plays an important role in obtaining a nutritious diet.

FNS has undertaken several initiatives which address food access. The Agency funded a study, released in 1992, which showed that it is possible for supermarkets to do well in low-income communities and to improve access for the residents. In September 1995, FNS sponsored a national Conference on Access to Food to present successful strategies for improving access and to provide a forum for discussion. Speakers and guests were able to frame the issues, highlight the link between access and economic development, and heighten awareness of the need to form public/private partnerships to address the issue. FNS has also collected objective data on access with a study on the availability of food stamp authorized retailers to households receiving these benefits. The recently released findings showed that proximity to supermarkets and large grocery stores that sell a wide range of reasonably-priced food was about the same for the low-income population as the general population. However, the number of supermarkets and large grocery stores was slightly lower in high-poverty urban areas and in rural areas. A second data collection effort sponsored by FNS involved a national survey of low-income households that obtained the households' perspective on their level of access to food. These findings will be released in 1998.

The current report is a descriptive study focusing on communities that identified access as an issue. The report regards access as the availability of a variety of nutritious and affordable foods from stores and markets that are well-maintained and that offer products reflecting the cultural make-up of the community. The intent of this was to determine the types of strategies these underserved communities employed to reduce or eliminate barriers to access and to assess the effectiveness of each strategy. Information was obtained through an extensive review of the literature and a survey of individuals with some expertise in food access. This report presents the findings of this research.

THE RESEARCH STUDY

FNS awarded a contract to CRP, Incorporated, in September 1995 to provide a descriptive and exploratory examination of the factors related to this issue from a community empowerment perspective. The following research questions guided this investigation:

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- What types of strategies are being used to improve food access in underserved urban and rural communities?
 - What food access strategies work best in each of these environments?
 - What are the critical factors that must be met for a strategy to succeed?
 - Are there any strategies that do not work well in either rural or urban communities? If so, why?

The purpose of this study was to extract useful perspectives from those who have been working in the field of food access and have amassed substantial knowledge and experience. In many ways, this analysis focused not only on the "hows" and "whys" of food access work being done in selected communities across America but also on the conditions under which these efforts must operate and to which they must respond. The information in this report is intended to be a technical resource for community organizations, business persons, and public policy officials at all levels of government who seek to ensure that all communities gain adequate and sustainable access to nutritious and affordable food.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The approach of this study was qualitative in nature. Accordingly, the methods and procedures included interviews and document review. These steps allowed for an exploratory approach to be used in the research. The methodology utilized a two-pronged approach, including an extensive review of the literature and a survey of a cross-section of persons with expert knowledge about issues relating to food access.

The literature review resulted in the identification of those food access improvement strategies noted as having the greatest significance for underserved communities. The survey component of this study was designed to provide vital insights into the state of these food access improvement strategies from experts active in and knowledgeable of the field. The 56 respondents participating in this study constituted a purposive sample of nonprofit organization/agency executives, federal government administrators, academicians, supermarket chain executives, local government administrators, food policy advocates, association executives, and food industry consultants. Their insights helped to delineate the most challenging barriers and effective solutions to increasing underserved communities' access to food.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

In a number of urban and rural low-income communities throughout the United States, access to affordable and nutritious food has become an issue of considerable social and economic concern. The need to provide sufficient, nutritious, and affordable food to the families and children living within these settings has led to the increasing visibility and prominence of this issue in the public policy domain over the past three decades. Additionally, the process and problems of food access have garnered the increasing attention of consumers and researchers in multiple sectors, including government, business, and nonprofit organizations. Numerous studies have been conducted that focus on various aspects of this issue. This literature delineates the nature, magnitude, and effects of the lack of access to nutritious and affordable food in underserved communities. Several of these studies have concluded that not only is food access a significant social, economic, and political challenge, but it is one that has been growing in dimension.

Food Access Strategies Identified

Eight strategies were identified in the research literature as the most widely used and effective means of improving the food access of consumers in underserved communities. These strategies, the details of which are described below, include the following:

- (1) the development and construction of new supermarkets or the renovation of older ones, most often as joint ventures involving partnerships between community development corporations (CDCs) and retail grocery firms;
- (2) the creation of farmers markets;
- (3) the creation of public markets;
- (4) the formation of food cooperatives;
- (5) the establishment of urban agricultural initiatives;
- (6) the provision or enhancement of transportation services for consumers traveling to and from food outlets;
- (7) the use of home shopping delivery services; and
- (8) the establishment of food policy councils, usually as advisory and advocacy groups to government agencies; the purpose of these councils is to provide technical assistance and consumer education on food system issues.

LESSONS LEARNED

The lessons learned from this study can be meaningfully assembled into a discernable model for organizing efforts to facilitate underserved communities' successful access to nutritious and affordable food. Such a model has its foundation in the many common themes and patterns of activities and techniques emerging from the literature and supported by insights shared by our sampling of food access experts. The findings of this study suggest that the implementation of this model within a context that emphasizes community empowerment and that offers technical, financial, research, and program development assistance as well as nutrition education offers the earmarks of success. The three major phases of this model are the food access readiness stage, the mobilization stage, and the development and implementation stage.

In the first phase, communities are encouraged to engage in a variety of activities that help prepare them for the implementation of a particular food access strategy. These include:

- (1) efforts aimed at better understanding the dynamics of the community's perceptions and feelings about food access as an issue and dispelling community apathy about existing inadequate food outlets;
- (2) conducting a needs assessment or marketing research to determine the extent of the food access problem;
- (3) gathering feasibility data about a specific strategy;
- (4) fostering a positive climate and attitude among community members, local government, civic organizations, food producers, potential food retailers, business leaders, and other important constituents (e.g., transportation officials); and
- (5) determining the community's level of technical resource capability, including skills in proposal writing, knowledge of funding resources, knowledge of system related requirements and others.

Technical assistance offered at this phase might include the conduct of background research on food access issues and community education as well as assistance in formulating comprehensive strategies for community development and empowerment.

In the second phase of community mobilization around a food access strategy, underserved communities are primarily involved in efforts aimed at securing leadership and advocacy for an improvement initiative. These include such activities as:

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- (1) formulating partnerships with critical organizations or agencies such as CDCs, food councils, and/or city-wide agencies (e.g., transit authority and governments officials);
 - (2) delineating division of responsibility among community activists; and
 - (3) securing finances, land, facilities or other needed resources.

At this phase, communities were found to benefit most from technical assistance that led to the identification of funding sources and that helped in their navigation of regulatory and legal issues.

In the development and implementation phase, plans for implementing a strategy for improving access to food are finalized and put into effect. In this phase, for example, the supermarket or farmers' market opens its doors, the community garden is planted, or the food coop takes its first orders. At this phase, communities benefit most from technical assistance that enhances their operational and management capacity or from advice from other groups in other communities engaged in similar initiatives.

Much was learned to help in providing technical assistance to community members, practitioners, public policy makers, and advocates working to support the best practices for alleviating food access problems. Data relevant to other critical policy areas also emerged during this study. For example, many of the more successful food access projects examined during the literature search and described by the respondents used consumer nutrition education strategies to bring about a heightened understanding of community food access problems. Similarly, one of the more innovative projects detailed in interviews with the food access experts was a farmers' market that capitalized on food stamps in order to bring low-income residents into the venue. Both the literature and the respondents' recommendations suggest the need for more programmatic integration at the policy level. For underserved communities seeking to address their food access problems, such an approach can exemplify leadership and advocacy at a level that can make a difference.

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CHAPTER I

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

Introduction

In recent years, there has been concern that some communities do not have sufficient access to quality food at reasonable prices. The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), which administers the Federal food assistance programs, is particularly concerned with food access for households that have limited resources. In these households, access plays an important role in obtaining a nutritious diet.

FNS has undertaken several initiatives that address food access. The Agency contracted with O'Connor - Abell, Inc. to identify factors critical to the success of supermarkets in low-income inner cities. The findings, which were released in 1992, showed that it is possible for supermarkets to do well in these communities and to improve access for their residents. The retailers appeared to be successful because they were: (1) located in densely populated areas; (2) involved the community in recruitment and hiring of employees; (3) paid attention to security; and (4) established partnerships with the community in developing the supermarkets.

In September 1995, FNS sponsored a national Conference on Access to Food to present successful strategies for improving access and to provide a forum for discussion. The conference brought together food retailers, academicians, financiers, community residents, food access advocates, and government officials to share their knowledge. Over 150 speakers and guests participated in plenary sessions and workshops designed to frame the issues, highlight the link between access and economic development, and heighten awareness of the need to form public/private partnerships to address the issue.

FNS has also conducted a study to collect objective data on availability of food stamp-authorized retailers to households receiving these benefits. FNS commissioned Macro International to conduct a nationwide assessment of the variety, quality, and cost of food available at authorized food retailers. The recently released findings showed that proximity to supermarkets and large grocery stores that sell a wide range of reasonably priced food was about the same for the low-income population as for the general population. Nationally, 90% of the total population and 90% of the low-income population live in areas with at least one supermarket or large grocery store present. The study also found that the number of supermarkets and large grocery stores was slightly lower in high-poverty urban areas and supermarkets offer fewer full service departments. In addition, about 40 percent of the rural population resided in localities without supermarkets or

large grocery stores.

A second data collection effort involved a national survey of low-income households. One objective of that study was to obtain the households' perspective on their level of access to food. They were asked about the alternatives for food shopping in their community, the distance they travel as well as the method and cost of transportation, their level of satisfaction with the store they most frequent and whether they desire other shopping alternatives. These findings will be released in 1998.

The current report is a descriptive study focusing on communities that identified access as an issue. The report regards access as the availability of a variety of nutritious and affordable foods from stores and markets that are well-maintained and that offer products reflecting the cultural make-up of the community. FNS awarded a contract to CRP, Inc. to determine the types of strategies these underserved communities employed to reduce or eliminate barriers to access and to assess the effectiveness of each strategy. Information was obtained through an extensive review of the literature and a survey of individuals with knowledge or experience in food access. This report presents the findings of this research.

Study Objectives

The purpose of this report is to provide a descriptive and exploratory examination of the factors related to the issue of food access from a community empowerment perspective. This purpose led to the following research questions:

- What types of strategies are being used to improve food access in underserved urban and rural communities?
- What food access strategies work best in each of these environments?
- What are the critical factors that must be met for a strategy to succeed?
- Are there any strategies that do not work well in either rural or urban communities? If so, why?

The overall goal of the study was to extract useful perspectives from persons who have knowledge and experience in the area of food access. Thus, in many ways, this analysis focused not only on the "hows" and "whys" of the food access work being done in communities across America but also on the conditions under which these efforts must operate and to which they must respond.

This study seeks to describe what is working and why, to point out the strengths and weaknesses of past and current food access efforts. Thus, the questions asked of and perspectives provided by the respondents regarding the resources, building and infrastructure capacity elements, the diversity of food access strategies and options, and the barriers faced as well as recommendations for overcoming or eliminating those barriers, provide critical data for planning future efforts and further advancing those already under way. The goal of this report is to serve as a technical resource for community members, practitioners, public policy makers, and advocates working to identify, support, and implement the best practices and techniques for eliminating barriers of access to nutritious and affordable food.

Methodology

The approach of this study was qualitative in nature. Accordingly, the methods and procedures included interviews and document review. These steps allowed for an exploratory approach to be used in the research. Such an approach was key to understanding the complexity of both the food access improvement strategies used in various communities as well as the factors that enhance and impede these efforts' success. Where deemed important, quantitative synthesis of the data was done to supplement the narrative findings, thereby allowing a richer interpretation of the patterns, themes, and critical elements contained in the respondents' comments.

Specifically, the methodology used to address these questions included an extensive review of the literature and a survey of a cross-section of people with knowledge about food access. Between April and June 1996, directed interviews were conducted with experts selected from the roster of attendees at the 1995 Conference on Access to Food and screened to determine those whose areas and depths of experience and responsibilities were most pertinent to the objectives of the study. Persons referred by individuals with knowledge about food access issues were also included in the sample. Fifty-six (56) persons made up this purposive sample of respondents.

The respondents' duties and experiences with private, business, or government organizations and agencies made them valuable sources of information and perspectives on initiatives across the country that have been attempted or that are being planned to help underserved communities improve or gain access to nutritious and affordable food. In their interviews, they shared insights on both the successes and barriers they encountered in their efforts to improve food access at the community level. They also described the strategies and techniques they had either developed or used to overcome these barriers. Comments regarding the effectiveness of these methods were sought, as were respondents' views regarding the perceived roles of federal and local agencies at the local policy-making, legislative, or government level in improving community food access.

A conceptual framework illustrating the literature review process can be found in

Appendix A. Identification and Retrieval of Secondary Data Sources: FNS Literature Review. This process yielded a wide variety of sources encompassing approximately 300 references including books, journal articles, newspaper reports, unpublished papers, research project reports, magazine articles, and newsletters. The extensive bibliography listing these items is included in **Appendix B** of this report.

The Food Access Expert Sample

A total of 56 persons were selected to respond to a series of questions developed to gather answers to the above research questions. The respondents came from diverse backgrounds, yet all had either past or current experience working in a private, business, or government sector organization or agency that addresses food access issues. They included nonprofit organization/agency executives, federal government administrators, academicians, supermarket chain executives, local government administrators, food policy advocates, association executives, and food industry consultants. The average number of years that the study participants had been employed with their organizations/agencies was 9.79. **Table 1.1** provides a general profile of the study respondents.

The respondents' experiential base in the area of food access was both direct and indirect in nature. Direct duties and experiences were defined as those related to the production, distribution, or sale of food to consumers. Indirect duties and experiences were defined as those that involve research, finance, real estate development, advocacy, and policy development related to food access issues. A more detailed description of the sample appears in **Appendix C, Direct and Indirect Duties/Responsibilities and Experiences of Respondents.**

Table 1.1

General Profile of Interview Respondents

Type of Respondent	Percent (n)	Type of Duties/Experiences*	
		Direct ¹	Indirect ²
Non-Profit Executives	43% (24)	58%*	95%
Federal Government Administrators	12% (7)	0%	100%
Academicians	11% (6)	33%	100%
Supermarket Executives	11% (6)	66%	50%
Local Government Administrators	9% (5)	60%	100%
Association Executives	7% (4)	75%	100%
Consultant Executives	7% (4)	33%**	100%*
Total	100 (56)		

¹ Refers to consumer education and actions to produce, distribute or sell food

² Refers to consumer education and activities related to food access such as research, advocacy, financing, and real estate development

* Respondents could give multiple responses so data will total more than 100%

** Data were missing for one respondent

Research Procedures

A primary objective of this qualitative study was to gather data that would provide insights on which food access strategies are successful and which are not so successful, and why. Toward that end, respondents were asked to share their opinions about the usefulness or non-utility of various programs for improving food access in underserved communities. The interviewers were trained to rate the effectiveness of each program using a five-point Likert rating scale (with higher scores indicating greater effectiveness). The interviewers also rated the interviewees' comments about the success of a program on a scale with possible rankings ranging from 1 ("little or no success"), to 2 ("somewhat successful"), to 3 ("very successful"). Thus, two indexes were available to rate the various types of food access strategies being used in the programs described by the respondents. For purposes of analysis, both sets of information were deemed important to interpret the respondents' statements about various programs and subsequently the strategies that were employed by them. Utilizing these two scales, a "rating vector," the product of the effectiveness and the success ratings, was devised, which attributed success/effectiveness scores

to each strategy ranging from 1 to 15. This rating vector represented a weighed average of the two opinions and served as the primary index of the utility and viability of each of the food access improvement program described by the field experts. That is, the rating vector was used to evaluate the program and any strategies that these programs reportedly used. For example, a food access strategy that tended to be associated with highly successful programs was deemed "successful" by this procedure. Similarly, a food access strategy consistently associated with poorly perceived programs was regarded as less successful by this method.

A total of 114 programs designed to address food access problems were described and discussed by the 56 study respondents. Of these, 60 (53%) were still in development or not enough information was provided by the respondents for the interviewers to make a judgment of the program strategy's success/effectiveness. The remaining 54 programs (47%) received an average rating vector of 7.44, and most were perceived as being relatively successful and effective.

The instruments were unstructured, thus, no two interviews were exactly alike. Comparability of data across respondents was not as important as the range, depth and variety of responses cited. Interviewers, however, were required to complete extensive training on the methodology and techniques of the study. Additional details on the methodology used in this study is provided in **Appendix D**.

Data analysis was primarily thematic in its approach, although some formalized content analysis was done to reduce the interview data—obtained from conversations, interviews, or diaries—into manageable and analyzable units. Data obtained from the interviews and observations were also quantified to determine frequencies (means) and percentages of responses. In some instances, the occurrence of critical elements in response to various questions was counted and used to verify the qualitative perspectives of the respondents about various subjects related to food access.

Organization of the Report

This report is organized into seven chapters accompanied by supporting technical appendices. This first chapter presents the objectives, research questions, and methodology of the research study. Subsequent chapters accomplish the following:

- Chapter II examines the issue of food access in its historical, social, community, and economic development contexts. It also introduces each of the various food access strategies identified in the literature, the kinds of resources required to implement them, as well as the obstacles and benefits encountered as a result.
- Chapters III through V focus more extensively on individual food access

improvement strategies, expanding the review of literature relevant to each and presenting key lessons about each offered by the study respondents. Chapter III explores the most critical of these strategies, supermarket development, in greater depth. Similarly, Chapter IV elaborates the findings with regard to farmers' markets, public markets, and food cooperatives; while Chapter V focuses on urban agriculture, food shopper transportation services, home delivery and home shopping options, and food policy councils.

- Chapter VI presents supplementary findings, gleaned from the respondent interview data, on topics pertinent to the overall thrust of this study. These data yield important insights on the factors leading to the success or failure of food access improvement efforts. They also present an "expert's eye-view" of the nature and effectiveness of food access technical assistance typically provided to communities in need and the role of local governments in improving these communities' access to nutritious, affordable food.
- Lastly, Chapter VII presents suggestions for modeling a comprehensive approach to improving underserved communities' access to food.

CHAPTER II

FOOD ACCESS: AN OVERVIEW AND DESCRIPTION OF STRATEGIES

This chapter examines the issue of food access in its historical, social, community, and economic development contexts. It also introduces the various strategies by which underserved communities typically address their food access concerns, briefly describing the kinds of resources required to implement each strategy as well as identifying the obstacles and benefits encountered as a result. More detailed and substantive information on each strategy, gleaned from the literature review and from the research study described in this report, follows in subsequent chapters. The purpose of this chapter is to give readers, with limited time, sufficient background information to select the subsequent sections best suited to their interests or needs.

Historical and Regional Perspectives on Food Access Issues

In a number of urban and rural low-income communities in some parts of the United States, access to affordable and nutritious food has become an issue of considerable social and economic concern. The need to provide sufficient, nutritious, and affordable food to the families and children living within these settings has led to the increased visibility of this issue in the public policy domain in the past three decades. Additionally, the process and problems of food access has garnered the increasing attention of consumers and researchers in multiple sectors, including government, business, and nonprofit organizations.

Numerous studies have been conducted that focus on various aspects of this subject. The literature delineates the nature, magnitude, and effects of the lack of access to nutritious and affordable food in underserved communities (e.g., Ashman et al., 1993; California Food Policy Advocates, 1996; Cotterill & Franklin, 1995; Fisher, 1994; Hartford Farm System, 1995; Mantovani & Welsh, 1996; Morris, 1989, 1990; New York City Department of Consumer Affairs, 1991; O'Connor - Abell, 1992; Sustainable Food Center, 1995; Troutt, 1993; Weinberg, 1995; 1996). Several of these studies have concluded that not only is food access a significant social, economic, and political challenge, but it is one that has been growing in dimension and scope.

Scope of the Problem in Urban Communities

To fully understand the origins of concerns about access to food sources, it is necessary to examine the decades of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. Over these three decades, several factors prompted a trend where supermarkets migrated from the inner cities to the suburbs (Becker, 1992). The 1960s was a decade of urban renewal and social unrest as poor urban citizens expressed their frustration with deteriorating living conditions. Interest in food access issues first attracted attention in various news reports and investigations following these civil disturbances. The 1960s also signaled the beginning of the exodus of many White and middle-income Americans from cities to suburbs, a demographic shift that not only weakened the economic infrastructure of most urban centers but also inadvertently adversely affected equitable access to affordable and nutritious food for low-income communities. As these residents relocated to the suburbs, supermarkets followed.

Demographic and economic forces contributed to the continued migration of supermarkets during the 1970s. According to U.S. Census Bureau data, approximately 40% of the nation's central cities lost population between 1970 and 1988; even higher rates were found in the Northeast and Midwest (Becker, 1992). The literature also documents the migration of supermarkets from low-income neighborhoods to the suburbs and the long-term decline in the number of supermarkets serving many inner cities during this period (Ashman et al., 1993; Becker, 1992; Cotterill & Franklin, 1995; Edwards, 1978; Fisher & Gottlieb, 1996; Garry, 1995a; Hartford Food System, 1984; Miller, 1983; New York City Department of Consumer Affairs, 1991; O'Connor - Abell, 1992; Sustainable Food Center, 1995; Turque, Rosenberg, & Barrett, 1992; Weinberg, 1996). During the 1980s, the trend toward more and larger supermarkets located outside the nation's inner cities was fueled by mergers and leveraged buy-outs that affected 16 of the top 20 national chains (Turque et al., 1992). This consolidation or downsizing effect forced many supermarket chains to sell off their less profitable stores, many of which were located in inner cities.

By contrast, the suburbs offered not only more shoppers but also more affluent shoppers. Supermarket developers, hampered by the generally smaller, older, and more obsolete stores in the inner cities, found it more profitable to build larger stores, with ample parking, on open tracts of land available in the suburbs. Additionally, suburban governments were amenable to providing tax concessions and other incentives to attract supermarket development. Moreover, the costs of operating stores in suburban locations are lower than in urban centers. The higher operating costs of inner-city stores—costs that include higher expenses for labor, freight and deliveries, utilities, rent, insurance, workers compensation, parking, and security—have been documented in the literature (Ashman et al., 1993; Becker, 1992; Bennett, 1992; Blalock, 1993; Diesenhouse, 1993; Edwards, 1978; Fisher & Gottlieb, 1996; Garry, 1993, 1995a; McLaughlin, 1994; Robaton, 1996; Schwadel, 1996; Weinberg, 1996; Zwiebach, 1992a, 1992b, 1992c). As a result of the departure of supermarkets from many inner cities since the 1960s, some of today's low-income residents

are not afforded easy access to nutritious, competitively-priced food. Their food shopping options are restricted to small neighborhood stores that generally offer limited selections of higher priced, poor quality food.

The literature provides mixed evidence of the magnitude of the urban grocery gap. Several studies have addressed food access disparities in urban areas on a national level (Cotterill & Franklin, 1995; Weinberg, 1996; Mantovani and Welsh, 1996). The Public Voice for Food and Health Policy's (Weinberg, 1996) review of supermarket trends in urban counties between 1967 and 1994 identified a number of counties whose older cities experienced not only population losses but decreases in the number of food stores and supermarkets as well. This group included Suffolk County (Boston), Massachusetts; Cook County (Chicago), Illinois; Wayne County (Detroit), Michigan; Philadelphia County (Philadelphia), Pennsylvania; Milwaukee County (Milwaukee), Wisconsin; the five boroughs/counties of New York City, New York; and Washington, D.C. Moreover, according to a report presented at the Congressional hearings on the topic, "Obtaining Food: Shopping Constraints on the Poor" (Select Committee on Hunger, U.S. House of Representatives, 1987), 90% of the conventional grocery stores located in low-income neighborhoods nationwide in 1981 either closed voluntarily or went out of business to relocate in the suburbs. The report issued from Congress's "Urban Grocery Gap" hearings in 1992 further note that during the 1970s and 1980s, Cleveland-based First National Supermarkets (Finast) closed two-thirds of its more than 200 outlets, the majority of which were located in inner cities. The company was left with stores in suburban New York, Connecticut, and Massachusetts, and with a declining Pick-N-Pay chain in Ohio. Further, most of the 600 stores closed nationwide by the A&P supermarket chain in the 1980s were in inner cities (Becker, 1992; Select Committee on Hunger, U.S. House of Representatives, 1992). More recently, in a study of hunger and homelessness sponsored by the U.S. Conference of Mayors, close to one-third of the 28 cities surveyed reported that the number of supermarkets in their low-income neighborhoods had decreased between November 1990 and November 1991 alone (Select Committee on Hunger, U.S. House of Representatives, 1992).

On the other hand, as previously stated, a separate study by the Food and Nutrition Service examined the proximity of food stamp recipients to food stores authorized to receive food stamps (Mantovani, Daft, Macaluso, & Hoffman, 1996). The findings showed that most low-income households are in close proximity to a full-line grocery store or supermarket and this population has about the same level of access to these stores as the general population. However, the number of these stores is lower in high-poverty areas than in other areas.

Examples of two affected cities discussed in the literature are described in detail in **Appendix E, Exhibit 1**. The two cities, Los Angeles, California (an Empowerment Zone), and Charlotte, North Carolina (an Enterprise Community), experienced sustained migration of supermarkets from their inner cities to the suburbs. As this exhibit indicates, Los Angeles lost particularly large numbers of supermarkets from its metropolitan and South Central areas,

beginning in the 1970s. **Appendix E, Exhibit 2** shows a map of Southeast Los Angeles and **Appendix E, Exhibit 3** graphically depicts access of the residents to supermarkets and large grocery stores. **Appendix E, Exhibit 4** briefly summarizes the circumstances in other urban areas (revealed in the literature) in which supermarkets left inner-city communities.

Although some inner-city communities and their residents are disproportionately underserved by large, full-service supermarkets, an emerging body of literature suggests that this trend or pattern is slowly being reversed in various urban markets across America. The gradual return of supermarkets to the inner cities began in the 1990s as suburban sites were becoming saturated with retail space, making inner-city areas with their high population densities and lack of competition increasingly attractive as economically viable growth opportunities. Two examples of cities in which supermarkets are returning to the inner city are presented in **Appendix E, Exhibit 5**. The two cities highlighted in this appendix are New York City and Boston, Massachusetts. It shows that the Pathmark, Bravo, and Waldbaum supermarket chains are returning to the New York City metropolitan area; while in Boston, the Stop & Shop, Purity Supreme, and Wollaston's grocery chains are reversing the out-migration trend in that city. Brief summaries of this trend in other cities are highlighted in **Appendix E, Exhibit 6**.

Scope of the Problem in Rural Communities

Relatively little research has been reported on the nature and magnitude of food access disparities faced by the rural poor. However, attention has been drawn to the finding that few supermarkets are located in some rural communities. Morris (1989) observed that the lack of supermarkets in some low-income rural areas limits the rural poor's food buying options to smaller, more expensive, independent food stores, where both the quality and selection of food are poor. These disparities are exacerbated by the lack of access to transportation of many of the rural poor, which constricts their ability to shop outside of their communities.

Morris (1990) further documents the prevalence and disproportionate nature of limited access to competitively priced supermarkets in selected rural areas. Using key indicators, she found that a) urban counties had nearly eight times as many supermarkets; b) rural areas had an average of one supermarket every 265 square miles compared to one every 27 square miles in urban areas; and c) small/medium stores in persistently poor rural America offered extremely limited selections of fresh fruits, vegetables, and meats. Based on these findings, Morris called for creative rural development strategies including the establishment of cooperative wholesale buying programs and the promotion of low-interest loans for the improvement or acquisition of small/medium food stores.

Mantovani et al (1996) also found that the distance between low-income households and supermarkets or large grocery stores is greater in rural areas than other areas. As previously

stated, 40 percent of the rural population in poverty reside in communities without such stores. The same percentage of the total population live in areas without stores, but it is important to note that low-income households have fewer resources at hand to travel that distance. Unlike Morris, Mantovani and Welsh found that the price, selection, and quality of foods were about the same among supermarkets and large groceries in high-poverty and low-poverty areas.

Food Access Strategies

Eight strategies were identified in the research literature as the most widely used and effective means of improving the food access of consumers in underserved communities. These strategies, the details of which are described below, include the following:

- (1) the development and construction of new supermarkets or the renovation of older ones, most often as joint ventures involving partnerships between community development corporations (CDCs) and retail grocery firms;
- (2) the creation of farmers' markets;
- (3) the creation of public markets;
- (4) the formation of food cooperatives;
- (5) the establishment of urban agricultural initiatives;
- (6) the provision or enhancement of transportation services for consumers traveling to and from food outlets;
- (7) the use of home shopping delivery services; and
- (8) the establishment of food policy councils, usually as advisory and advocacy groups to government agencies; the purpose of these councils is to provide technical assistance and consumer education on food system issues.

Supermarket Development

According to the Food Marketing Institute (n.d.), a supermarket is any store selling retail food items with annual sales of \$2 million or more. In addition to full-line grocery shopping for food and other household products, supermarkets offer consumers a number of important food system benefits, including greater convenience, diversity of food choices, lower prices, and nutrition education. As a result, the supermarket is frequently the most important component of

a community's food distribution system.

Development of such outlets in underserved communities can play a major role in improving food access. Several barriers to the implementation of this food access strategy have been reported in the literature, however (Ashman et al., 1993; Becker, 1992; Bookout, 1993; Community Food Resource Center, 1994; Edwards, 1978; Fisher, 1994; Fisher & Gottlieb, 1996; Garry, 1995a; Hartford Food System, 1984, 1994; "The Inner-City Supermarket," 1996; New York City Department of Consumer Affairs, 1991; O'Connor - Abell, 1992; Porter, 1995; Schwadel, 1996; Sustainable Food Center, 1995; Turque et al., 1992; Walsh, 1995; Weinberg, 1996). The most widely cited barriers fall into the following categories:

- (1) restrictive retail building, parking, administrative, and/or zoning prohibitions that impede the construction of supermarkets;
- (2) lack of interest on the part of supermarket developers due to the belief that neighborhood shoppers will not generate sufficient sales volume to make stores profitable;
- (3) potential shoppers' lack of private (personal automobile) or inadequate public (bus, subway, or taxi service) transportation to facilitate convenient and frequent travel to and from the supermarket; and
- (4) concerns about crime (theft, vandalism) and customer and employee security in the areas surrounding potential store sites in underserved areas.

To develop supermarkets in underserved areas, creative approaches are often needed. The formation of viable partnerships between supermarket retailers and community development corporations (CDCs) and/or other community organizations, government agencies, and private lenders have been identified as a promising approach to supporting and advancing inner-city supermarket development.

Two different forms of supermarket development joint ventures have evolved: (a) the sole ownership model and (b) the shared ownership model. In the first arrangement, the CDC develops and owns the store, typically in partnership with a commercial developer. Upon completion of the store, either the CDC or partnership group leases the building to either a supermarket chain or independent operator, who takes charge of the actual operation and management of the store (Community Nutrition Institute, 1982).

The second type of joint venture is one in which the CDC, as partner and co-owner with a grocery firm, participates in the development of the supermarket from the very beginning—from the research and planning stages, through the land assembly process—often a monumental hurdle

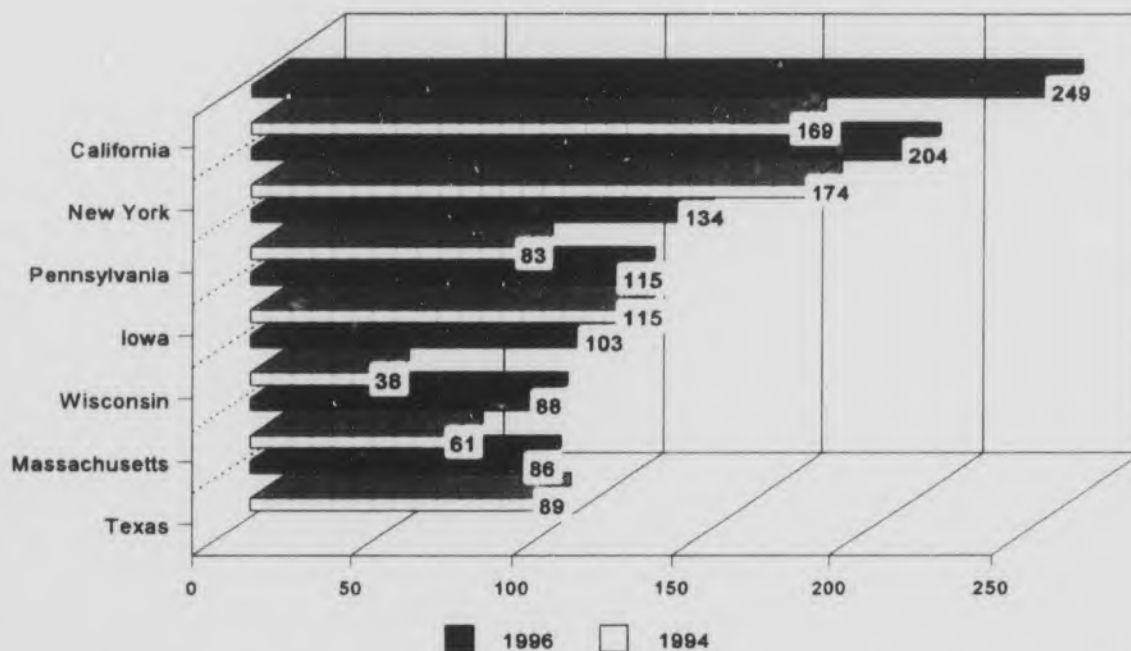
in itself—and the process of overcoming bureaucratic red tape, to the management of store operations. Under this shared ownership arrangement, the partners' resources, strength, and commitment are formally pooled, thereby improving the chance for project success. The grocery firm's ownership stake in such a project from the very start facilitates the availability of its expertise for all aspects of store development including construction, layout, and project oversight. Although the CDC plays a larger role in store operations, the supermarket firm is in charge of day-to-day management and receives a fee for this service. Profits are shared according to each partner's proportional investment in the project (Ashman et al., 1993).

Farmers' Markets

A farmers' market is a retail outlet wherein farmers and vendors lease or rent space in a common facility, typically located in an outdoor setting and on a temporary basis, for the sale of fresh farm products, crafts, and other locally produced items (Johnson & Bragg, 1994). Estes (1985) categorizes farmers' markets into two types: community retail and regional. Community retail farmers' markets serve primarily a single city and its surrounding area, operate seasonally have limited permanent facilities, and depend on locally supplied products. By contrast, regional farmers' markets are located in larger cities, operate year-round, are housed or located in permanent facilities, and offer products from both local and non-local sources.

Farmers' markets typically represent the closest link between farmers and food consumers in inner cities. In recent years, a resurgence of farmers' markets in urban areas has occurred due, in part, to renewed interest in direct marketing activity as a means of providing fresher, cheaper produce for inner-city consumers and increasing both marketing alternatives and incomes for local growers. Nationally, the number of farmers' markets operating in the United States has increased, from 1,755 in 1994 to 2,410 in 1996 (Johnson & Bragg, 1996). These numbers, however, represent only those markets listed as "active" by state departments of agriculture and do not include the smaller, generally informal markets. The overall increase in farmers' markets is reflected in **Figure 2.1**, which illustrates the rise in this type of food outlet in the seven states with the largest number of farmers' markets.

Figure 2.1
Trends in Farmers' Market Development By Selected States
1994 vs. 1996 (By Number of Markets)



Primary obstacles to increased consumer utilization of farmers' markets include the following:

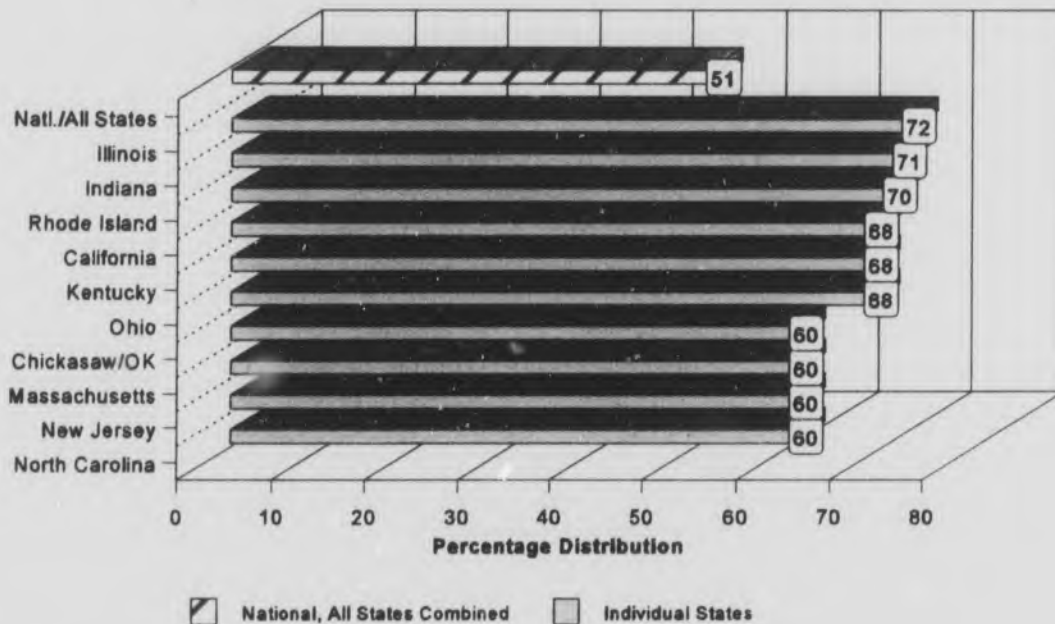
- inadequate publicity about and inconvenient location of these outlets;
- insufficient public transit mechanisms (i.e., shuttle service, convenient bus routes) to transport patrons to and from farmers' markets;
- limited hours of operation;
- inadequate parking facilities; and
- limited product availability.

To expand awareness and use of farmers' markets by low-income consumers, particularly those in areas that are underserved by other types of food outlets, the FNS administers the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP). This program originated as a result of the passage of Public Law 102-314 in July 1992, which established the FMNP as an independent federal program. Under the provisions of this law, states may apply for up to 70% of the funds to

implement and operate the program. Through FMNP, participants in the federal Food Stamps and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) are provided coupons or checks that they can use to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables at authorized farmers' markets. At the time these coupons are issued, recipients also receive consumer education about how to select and prepare fresh produce and how to shop effectively at local farmers' markets. Farmers who are certified to accept these coupons for their produce at markets participating in this program are reimbursed at face value. Among the FMNP farmer's markets mentioned in the literature is the Montgomery State Farmer's Market (MSFM), which serves a multi-county area known as Alabama's Black Belt. Established in 1986, the MSFM includes 40 retail units, 40 trucker units, 12 wholesale units, a garden center, an administrative building, a restaurant and ample parking. Many low-income consumers of the MSFM expressed a high level of satisfaction with the availability of FMNP coupons to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables (USDA, Food and Nutrition Service, 1995c; Baharanyi et al., n.d.).

The FMNP is reaching increasing numbers of the persons for whom it was intended (see **Figure 2.2**). By 1995, the program was active in 26 states and within three Indian tribal organizations and the District of Columbia. As **Figure 2.3** indicates, the number of FMNP recipients almost doubled from over 541,000 in 1993 to slightly over 1,000,000 in 1995. Thus, by expanding the base of consumers who might purchase from farmers' markets, this program also benefits farmers by increasing their earnings (National Association of Farmers' Market Nutrition Programs, 1995, 1996). Similarly, growth in the number of participating farmers' markets was just as precipitous, from 668 in 1993 to over 1,100 in 1995; and the number of farmers participating in the FMNP grew from 4,600 in 1993 to slightly over 8,000 during the same time period. These data suggest that farmers' markets can be mutually beneficial to residents of underserved communities and to farmers.

FIGURE 2.2
FMNP Recipients Who Had Never Visited A Farmers' Market
Before Participating In FMNP, By Selected States

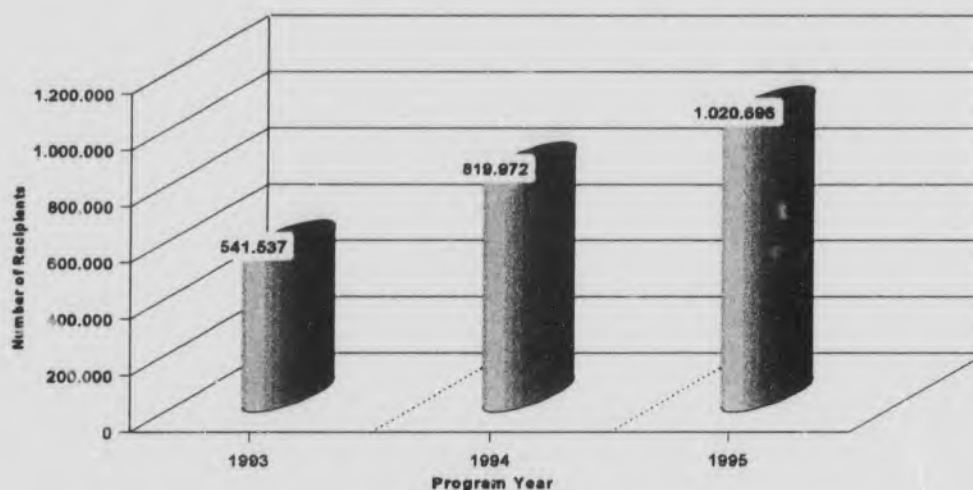


Public Markets

Public markets are municipally owned and operated facilities established for the purpose of allowing vendors to sell fresh produce, vegetables, ethnic food, crafts, and personal services to community residents from open stalls. Four types of public markets are common: open air markets, shed-roof structures, market halls, and market districts (Baum & Spitzer, 1995). For residents of communities underserved by other food outlets, public markets are among the few food shopping options within walking or short ride (by public or private transportation) distance. While public markets often offer cost savings comparable to supermarkets, unlike supermarkets, many public market vendors usually sell food items in bulk quantities rather than prepackaged, smaller quantities.

Numerous obstacles or problems as well as benefits in developing and operating public markets have been identified. For example, a common challenge encountered by public market planners and developers is attempting to develop a "mercado" or indoor market building, the most complex and risky form of public market, rather than less expensive forms. The mercado is a relatively unproven public market format which often requires multiple funders including private sector lenders and an extensive planning phase that can overburden organizational management,

FIGURE 2.3
Distribution of WIC Recipients
Participating in The Farmers' Market Nutrition Program by Program Year



Source: WIC Farmers' Market Program
Operations Reports, 1993, 1994 and 1995

staff and volunteer resources. Further, if the mercado is small, few vendors will be available, resulting in a limited variety of products (Baum & Spitzer, 1995). Other difficulties include lack of sufficient staff capacity and public market management experience of the sponsoring organization, opposition from nearby business owners, adoption of unrealistic development schedules, failure to accurately estimate the types and severity of political impediments, reliance on unqualified entrepreneurs, and inability to secure long-term leases on public space (particularly for open-air markets). Developing public markets in distressed, low-income communities pose additional difficulties such as limited sales or inadequate purchasing power of neighborhood residents and fear of crime among participating vendors.

However, because public markets integrate both public and business goals, they provide numerous benefits to their surrounding areas or communities, participating vendors, and customers. Public markets serve as effective economic development and community revitalization strategies by generating jobs and by attracting businesses, farmers, and customers to a downtown or neighborhood commercial district, thereby enhancing the level of intercultural and social exchange in an area as well as stimulating nearby agricultural production. For their part, participating vendors are afforded an accessible and nurturing environment that offers low overhead and operational costs. Lastly, public markets offer consumers access to affordable,

reasonably priced fresh food, nutrition education, and, in some cases, social services that address the needs of local residents (Baum & Spitzer, 1995).

Food Cooperatives

There are two major types of food cooperatives: cooperative buying clubs (or pre-order cooperatives) and retail cooperative food stores. Buying clubs are organized such that groups of people pool their resources to buy food in bulk quantities at lower cost-per-item (usually 20% to 40%) wholesale prices. They save additional money by performing the work involved in compiling orders, exchanging money, picking up and distributing goods themselves, thereby keeping operating costs as low as possible. Buying clubs generally do not carry an inventory and may operate out of members' homes on distribution days, usually once or twice a month. While most pre-order buying clubs are small, they can range from 10-member groups of neighbors or friends to sophisticated, computerized clubs serving hundreds and thousands of households (Singerman, 1986).

By contrast, retail food cooperatives are co-ops that maintain an inventory of food products and often nonfood items similar to other types of grocery stores (Singerman, 1986). Most of these use members, who receive price discounts in return for their labor, as volunteer workers; yet, convenience and broad offerings of food items are the major benefits offered retail food co-op members. Members can select and purchase food in whatever amounts they wish and whenever they please, within the hours of operation of the store or warehouse.

Although little has been reported on the attitudes and motives of food cooperative members toward their organizations, the research strongly suggests that lower food prices are the principal reason consumers choose this means of improving their food access. According to Thompson, Brown, and Burnette (1982), although co-op members typically do not buy all of their groceries from this source, the average savings on items purchased through food co-ops was 21%. Sommer, Hohn, and Tyburczy (1981) found that the most common reasons for shopping at large retail cooperative food stores were, in order of frequency: convenience, price, and membership privileges.

During the 1970s, food co-ops were championed by the "counterculture," "anti-establishment" movement of the day, as a means of creating more equitable, socially responsible alternatives for the production and distribution of food to those in need. Over the decades, however, the following obstacles to increased utilization of food cooperatives as a means of improving a community's access to food have been recognized: increased competition from other types of food outlets; lack of availability of adequate facilities to house co-op operations, store food items, or refrigerate perishables; less than satisfactory rates of membership participation that render co-op operation unprofitable or expensive, unwillingness of retail cooperative food stores

to locate their facilities in the inner cities, and the inability to acquire financing to establish or support food co-ops.

Urban Agriculture

Urban agricultural initiatives typically involve the allotment by local governments of open spaces or individual plots of land to individuals and neighborhood or other community-based organizations for the purpose of planting vegetables and fruits for individual use or for sale or free or reduced-price distribution to local residents. In contrast to rural agricultural initiatives, urban agricultural efforts generally demand a higher yield per unit of space, have higher requirements for labor and lower requirements for capital, and carry lower risk. Urban agriculture is also dominated by smaller operations. The literature delineates two principal forms of urban agricultural initiatives as food access strategies: (a) community gardening and (b) community farming or community-supported agriculture. Each approach offers nutritional and economic benefits. They provide inner-city residents with modest amounts of fresh, nutritious produce at low cost.

Among the obstacles to implementing community gardening projects in inner-city areas are finding suitable property and securing permission to use the land as a garden. Finding suitable property for community farms in the inner-city can be difficult as well. The city of Philadelphia (PA) addresses this issue by providing long-term leases for the use of its 40,000 city-owned vacant lots zoned for community gardening and by waiving any fees, taxes, and liability insurance stipulations associated with the use of those lots (Ashman et al., 1993). Funding for community gardening and community farming projects alike can also be a challenge, particularly start-up costs. However, both the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the U.S. Department of Labor have funded community gardening projects, and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) provides Community Development Block Grants for this purpose. City agencies and foundations as well as corporations also support the establishment of community gardening and farming projects.

Food Shopper Transportation Services

Underserved areas are more likely to have lower rates of automobile ownership. This can create a need for alternative transportation strategies to facilitate low-income residents' access to outlets that offer nutritious, affordable food. In an underserved neighborhood, consumers find that they have to travel long distances to other areas of the city or to the suburbs in order to shop at competitive supermarkets. This trek often involves mass transit, taxicabs, or other forms of transportation that can be relatively expensive, thereby reducing low-income shoppers' already limited food dollars. Moreover, there are often limitations on the amount of groceries they are

able to physically transport from the store via these methods.

To address this food access dilemma, private and public transportation services linking low-income residents with food outlets have been established to facilitate the improved food access of these residents to better quality, affordable food. One of the most widely utilized options for this purpose includes the provision of vans and shuttle buses to transport persons from neighborhoods underserved by supermarkets to supermarkets in other areas. Such programs, typically sponsored by supermarket chains and nonprofit agencies, provide examples of what communities and retailers alike are doing to enhance access to food through alternative transportation modalities.

As noted in the forgoing discussion, the major obstacle to transportation options is the lack of systematic coordination and integration of food access issues and transportation planning. Minimum purchase requirements of some supermarkets or grocery stores may also deter or discourage the use of such services (Ashman et al., 1993; Fisher and Gottlieb, 1996). Alternative transportation strategies offer significant benefits to both customers and food retailers. The most important benefit to customers is accessibility to additional food resources, particularly for transit-dependent populations. Additional benefits for customers are increased dollars available for food shopping and lower transportation costs. Benefits for food retailers include higher sales, reduced parking lot use, increased customer loyalty, additional shopping trips for new and long-term customers, and reduction in the rates of shopping cart loss.

Grocery Delivery Services and Home Grocery Shopping

Grocery delivery services are another emerging development in strategies to improve food access. To utilize these services, consumers select the desired food items from a listing offered by a food retailer or shopping service provider. Then, at a time that is convenient to their unique schedules, consumers phone, fax, or transmit via computer modem or electronic mail ("e-mail") their lists to the provider, who does all the shopping, sorting, and bagging, and delivers the items to the consumers' doorsteps at a prearranged time for a fee. Payment for the groceries and delivery is usually authorized with a credit card number at the time the order is transmitted, or it is made upon delivery (Chandler, 1995; Dell, 1996; Fox, 1994; Francella, 1996; Garry, 1995; Store Equipment and Design, 1995).

Security concerns, including letting in unknown delivery persons and fears about giving out one's credit card numbers, are the greatest obstacles working against the more widespread use of home delivery and home shopping services ("Home Shopping More Popular for Hi-tech Baby Boomers," 1996). Nonetheless, four major forces point toward an important future role for these strategies:

- (1) increasing time restraints that limit busy consumers' ability to do their own

shopping;

- (2) the entry of large supermarket operations into the home delivery service arena;
- (3) improvements in the basic technology supporting home delivery, primarily the development of more user-friendly computer software and improved telephone/fax message systems; and
- (4) increasing willingness and ability of consumers to experiment and become proficient in the use of technology to conduct their food shopping tasks.

Food Policy Councils

Food policy councils are local advisory groups that work actively to pursue, coordinate, and increase community awareness of food system issues. By working with public agencies, food advocacy groups, community leaders, neighborhood associations, private-sector organizations, and other relevant stakeholders, food policy councils can have a catalytic effect on food access issues. One of the nation's most innovative initiatives targeted to developing and strengthening food policy councils is the Local Food System Project (LFSP), funded by the Kellogg Foundation. Established in 1994, the LFSP provides technical assistance to councils in six sites including Los Angeles (CA), Berkshire County in western Massachusetts, a nine-county region around Rochester (NY), Pittsburgh (PA), Austin (TX), and Moyers (WV) (Program Report, Local Food Systems Project Selects Six Policy Development Sites, n.d.). To date, it has assisted these communities in developing food policy structures and food system components, including those supporting the increased production, distribution, access, and consumption of food to underserved areas.

Impediments to the effective development and implementation of food policy councils primarily encompass issues of administration, funding support, and organizational structure. The operational capacity of food policy councils is often limited because most cannot implement or enforce the policies they advocate. Difficulties in securing adequate and sustained sources of funding also constrain these groups' resources and undermine their overall effectiveness. Further, the start-up process for initiating food policy councils can be long and arduous, particularly if a functional structure is not available.

On the other hand, food policy councils perform important educational, policy development, information dissemination, advocacy, technical assistance, and coordination roles. They can also serve as catalysts for food access improvement efforts by bringing together disparate stakeholders to pursue food access-related matters and other food system issues.

CHAPTER III

SUPERMARKET DEVELOPMENT

Both the literature and the present research corroborate the significance and effectiveness of supermarket development as the most far-reaching and complex strategy for improving underserved communities' access to food. This chapter identifies and explores at length the elements that are unique to this approach and that can make its impact on community development and empowerment so profound. It also examines the factors deemed critical to the success or failure of supermarket development initiatives in urban and rural settings. Exemplary supermarket development projects, both those noted in the literature and by the study respondents, are identified and appraised utilizing criteria deemed important by both sources.

Findings from the Literature

A number of factors have been deemed vital to successful supermarket development in underserved areas. There is strong evidence that the active and collaborative involvement of CDCs (community development corporations), communities, supermarket firms, and local governments is critical (O'Connor - Abell, 1992; Food Marketing Institute, n.d.; Successful Urban Center Supermarkets, 1993; The Retail Initiative, 1996; Weinberg, 1996; Wollaston's Market, 1996). Traditionally, CDCs have focused the bulk of their attention and resources on the development of low-income, affordable housing, with little attention paid to the development of retail outlets. In recent years, however, increasing numbers of CDCs have redefined their institutional missions and roles to facilitate their expansion into new areas of community and economic revitalization including supermarket development. CDC interest in this area has been driven in some cases by the lack or loss of grocery retailers in underserved communities and in other cases by the recognition that supermarket development creates jobs and income for area residents as well as addresses unmet food access needs. For an increasing number of CDCs, supermarket development affords diversification opportunities and is viewed as a form of community empowerment and neighborhood-based economic development.

In 6 of the 14 supermarket development cases studied by O'Connor - Abell (1992), CDCs were identified as the "most effective" in "creating and realizing long-term strategies" (p. 19). As Weinberg (1996) notes:

The most common approach [to supermarket development] is leadership from a community development group with experience in neighborhood revitalization and/or commercial

enterprises, teamed with a food retailer, one or more financial institutions, real estate interests, and local government entities. This combination of non-profit, for-profit and public forces working together can often succeed in bringing supermarkets to underserved neighborhoods. (p. 19)

Although in some cases supermarket chains initiate the supermarket development process, community involvement is an important element. O'Connor - Abell have noted the difference that effective and focused community involvement can make in initiating and advancing inner-city supermarket development:

We found areas that previously had lacked supermarkets where the residents organized to initiate, support, and/or enter into a working relationship with the supermarket of their choice. The communities organized in various ways. This included nonprofit organizations providing specific services, as well as sophisticated nonprofit organizations negotiating financial joint ventures with the supermarket industry. (p. 19)

The Role and Importance of Community Development Corporations

Since the 1960s, CDCs have served as catalysts for initiating joint ventures leading to supermarket development in several major urban centers. For example, the Brooklyn, New York-based Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation (BSRC), the nation's first community development corporation, was established in 1967 with bipartisan support from Senators Robert F. Kennedy (D-NY) and Jacob Javits (R-NY). In 1977, this group entered into a partnership with Pathmark Stores (then known as Supermarkets General) to form the Restoration Supermarket Corporation (RSC) and launch that supermarket chain's first joint venture with a CDC. In 1979, the RSC and Pathmark Stores opened the Restoration Supermarket, the first large supermarket to open in the Bedford-Stuyvesant community in over 25 years (USDA, Food and Nutrition Service, 1995b). In 1994, a \$1.5-million renovation effort was completed on the store to add more check-out lanes, a new entrance, and a modified garage stairway (TRI, 1996). RSC owns two-thirds of the store while Pathmark owns one-third. The grocery store anchors Restoration Plaza, which occupies one square city block, has 70 tenants, and employs an estimated 800 people (TRI, 1996). With its annual sales of over \$25 million, the store has been listed among the nation's top 100 minority-owned businesses (TRI, 1996).

The opening of the Farmer Jack Supermarket in the Virginia Park Community Shopping Plaza in 1981 was the culmination of efforts begun in 1969 by one prominent CDC, Detroit's Virginia Park Community Investment Associates (VPCIA). Since its inception, the VPCIA has been assisted by a local agency, the Detroit Community and Economic Development Department (Richey, 1996). From 1969 to 1979, the VPCIA raised funds for the purpose of developing a supermarket, joining the International Association of Shopping Centers (IASC) in 1972 after

attending the IASC's national convention. At that meeting, VPCIA members were inspired by the presentation of Reverend Leon Sullivan, a minister whose congregation had developed Progress Plaza, a shopping center in Philadelphia. In 1977, VPCIA representatives visited Progress Plaza, where they were impressed by the effectiveness of Reverend Sullivan's fundraising campaign. Upon returning to Detroit, they established a similar program to raise the equity required to become eligible for financial assistance through loans and grants (Richey, 1996).

Another CDC, the Greater Southwest Development Corporation (GSDC), serves Chicago Lawn and West Englewood, two low-income communities on Chicago's southwest side. In 1980, after purchasing and assembling a site next to a Sears department store, the GSDC approached the Jewel/Osco supermarket chain about developing a supermarket. Today, the Jewel/Osco store is recognized as the anchor for the revitalization of the area ("Successful Urban Center Supermarkets," 1996).

In Newark, the New Community Corporation (NCC) began developing plans for a shopping center in 1980 after approaching Supermarkets General, the parent company of Pathmark, as a potential joint venture partner (Pathmark Stores, Inc., & New Community Corporation, n.d.). The biggest hurdle NCC encountered was acquiring parcels of land for the supermarket-anchored project, which serves as a model for Pathmark-CDC joint ventures currently underway in Harlem and the Bronx. The Pathmark store's success to date has been demonstrated by a number of factors. These include a weekly sales volume higher than original projections; job and career opportunities for neighborhood residents; a convenient, high-quality place to shop; competitive prices (approximately 38 percent below the neighborhood convenience stores); and other economic benefits (Food Marketing Institute, n.d.; USDA, Food and Nutrition Service, 1995 c).

The relocation of St. Joseph Hospital from the center of Kansas City, Missouri, in 1975 left the area with a vacant building that soon became a haven for illegal activity. The state's plan to build a prison on the site galvanized Kansas City's Black Ministers' Union (BMU), which organized community opposition to defeat the prison proposal. The BMU subsequently joined forces with the Community Development Corporation of Kansas City, which acquired the site for the development of a supermarket-anchored shopping center (TRI, 1996).

The Tacolcy Economic Development Corporation (TEDC) of Miami, Florida, has developed a Winn-Dixie supermarket on the site of an empty Pantry Pride store that had been vandalized during the Liberty City riots in 1980. Since 1992, after having been contacted by Winn-Dixie grocery chain executives, this group has led efforts to expand Miami's supermarket-anchored Edison Plaza Shopping Center to accommodate a Winn-Dixie marketplace superstore (TEDC, 1996).

In Cleveland, the Finast grocery chain has launched supermarket development alliances and

partnerships with several neighborhood development organizations, churches, and community groups in inner-city Cleveland as part of its innovative Urban Initiative (Finast Supermarkets Urban Initiative, 1995). Since 1987, this \$35 million investment program has established the development and renovation of numerous supermarkets in Cleveland's inner city. Among the factors believed to have attributed to the Initiative's success are: a strong public/private partnership; community acceptance of Finast; commitment of local government; recruitment, training and retention of community residents (Finast employees); the availability of ethnic foods in stores (reflecting the inner city's cultural diversity); security measures such as hiring police officers as security officers; and extensive radio advertising (USDA, Food and Nutrition Service, 1995c).

In Washington, D.C., the Marshall Heights Community Development Corporation used a \$25,000 venture grant from the D.C. Department of Housing and Community Development to leverage a \$3.2 million deal for the purchase and renovations of the supermarket-anchored East of the River Park Shopping Center (Marshall Heights Community Development Organization, n.d.). The idea for another development in Washington, D.C., the Good Hope Marketplace, was first proposed by Safeway supermarket chain executives. The 96,500-square-foot shopping center is located in the Anacostia area of southeast Washington, D.C. Safeway approached the Anacostia Economic Development Corporation and expressed interest in developing a project that would not only address food access but would offer replication potential for other areas of the city and nation. In addition to the supermarket, which will anchor the retail center, the center will also include a bank and a family restaurant (Lundegaard, 1997).

Another example can be found in Alexandria, Louisiana, when the A&P on Bolton Avenue closed in 1993, residents of this high-crime, low-income neighborhood were left without an accessible, full-service grocery store. That same year, the president of the local CDC, the Bolton Avenue Neighborhood Watch Group, began actively searching out new businesses to spur redevelopment in the Bolton Avenue community. His efforts culminated in the opening of a Save-a-Lot supermarket in 1994 (Save-a-Lot Stores, 1993).

Boston's South End neighborhood (population 13,000) suffered a similar loss with the closing of its 20-year-old A&P supermarket in February 1993. In response, the neighborhood's six civic associations, representing citizens of various ethnic backgrounds, formed a group called the Task Force for a Castle Square Supermarket. Initially, this task force worked with the owner of the store property to locate a new tenant for this site. Their efforts were later bolstered by the City of Boston, culminating in a partnership with the Wollaston's supermarket chain that made a new grocery store in the South End a reality (City of Boston & SuperValue, 1996).

The Role and Importance of Local Government Support in Supermarket Development

Still other CDC-based, joint venture supermarket development efforts have been either initiated or facilitated by the involvement of local government officials. For example, in the late 1970s, when the Sears department store chain announced it was closing a store it had operated for 50 years at the corner of Vermont and Slauson streets in South Central Los Angeles, local merchants appealed to the city for help (Ashman et al., 1993). The merchants were concerned about the impact of this action and Mayor Tom Bradley conveyed this concern to Sears, which offered to donate the property to a nonprofit organization for development. Bradley next established the Vermont-Slauson Citizens Advisory Committee, a group of residents, merchants, and community leaders, that incorporated as the Vermont-Slauson Economic Development Corporation in 1979 and successfully developed the Vermont-Slauson Shopping Center in 1981 (Ashman et al., 1993).

San Francisco's former Mayor Art Agnos is credited with significantly improving citizens' access to nutritious, affordable food in the Bayview-Hunters Point section of San Francisco. In 1986, thirty thousand families were left without a full-service supermarket when the Safeway chain decided to close its 29,000-square-foot supermarket on Williams Avenue. Safeway cited high operating costs as the reason for closing the store in this high-crime, low-to-middle-income minority community. The Bayview-Hunters Point community responded by forming the San Francisco Organizing Project, a citizen's group representing 23 community organizations that actively solicited the support of then-mayoral candidate Agnos. Agnos promised to help, if elected, and as mayor he earmarked \$4 million from the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency for the purchase of the Williams Avenue site and the development of a new full-service supermarket. Cala Foods, Inc., one of about 50 supermarket firms that responded to the city's request for proposals, agreed to renovate the vacant site at no expense to the city, opening its new store in 1992 (O'Connor - Abell, 1992).

The late Harold Washington, former mayor of Chicago, played a key role in initiating the development of the Dominick's Supermarket-anchored Jeffery Plaza on the city's low-income South Side. Upon his invitation, Dominick's accepted the offer to establish a modern, new supermarket as the hub of redevelopment in this inner-city community shopping mall. The Neighborhood Institute, a local community organization, and South Shore Bank were instrumental in developing the project. The store, which opened in April 1990, presently has an average weekly sales volume of \$500,000, thirty-five percent of which entails food stamp redemptions (O'Connor - Abell, 1992).

Similarly, Washington, D.C.'s former mayor, Walter Washington, is credited with initiating efforts that led to the development of a new full-service grocery store in that city's impoverished Shaw community. Washington's direct contacts with the chairman of the local Giant Food supermarket chain and the creation, with mayoral support, of the Greater Shaw Community

Development Corporation, resulted in a joint venture between that group and the chain to establish the 8th and O Streets supermarket (O'Connor - Abell, 1992).

The Importance of Research and Planning

Research and planning are vital to the success of any supermarket development efforts, but particularly so for joint ventures between CDCs, grocery firms, and/or local governments. Research documenting the magnitude of a community's food access needs can be conducted by any and all of the key players involved in such efforts. Market analyses and feasibility studies are the usual types of research conducted prior to the development of a supermarket project. Fairclough and Herman (1994), writing for the Community Food Resource Center, recommend that both preliminary and full-stage market/feasibility analyses be undertaken as project planning unfolds. As they contend, the former provides an understanding of the neighborhood and its potential for development, while the latter focuses more specifically on the planned store's future impact on the community, its competition, the population served, and projected revenues.

Several CDCs, often with the assistance of local economic development agencies, banking institutions, and private consultants, have conducted their own forecast and consumer research to determine the feasibility of their supermarket development plans. For example, the Tacolcy Economic Development Corporation of Miami conducted an extensive business development and consumer research study in collaboration with the Dade County Office of Community and Economic Development (O'Connor - Abell, 1992). The Neighborhood Institute, working with the South Shore Bank, retained a consultant who assessed retail shopping opportunities in the South Shore area of Chicago (O'Connor - Abell, 1992). San Diego's Mercado Associates, CDC developers of the supermarket-anchored Mercado Retail Center in San Diego, contracted with a consulting firm to conduct a supermarket forecast analysis more detailed than the feasibility study conducted by the city (San Diego Mercado Associates, n.d.). Extensive survey research was also conducted by the Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation as part of its planning activities prior to the construction of Restoration Supermarket. Internal market surveys undertaken by this CDC during the mid-1970s had revealed the need for a safe and centrally located grocery store in that community. Such research was an extension of the organization's general philosophy of neighborhood development, which called for comprehensive identification and documentation of pressing community needs (USDA, Food and Nutrition Service, 1995b).

Interested supermarket chains have also conducted research to determine whether the planned sites would provide strong traffic and healthy sales opportunities (Sorkin, 1995). For example, before the Vons Companies of Arcadia, California, announced their \$100 million expansion efforts into that state's inner-city areas, it conducted extensive focus-group research to explore security and store design issues and to help determine the types of products desired (Ashman et al., 1993). As part of its Urban Initiative to develop new supermarkets in Cleveland's

inner-city, the Finast grocery store chain made extensive use of qualitative research and focus groups (Finast Supermarkets Urban Initiative, 1995). Safeway, developer of Washington, D.C.'s nearly completed Good Hope Marketplace in the Anacostia neighborhood, conducted its market research as part of the project's joint venture planning activities.

In a few cases, local governments or designated municipal agencies have undertaken research efforts in support of joint venture supermarket development activities. In Boston, for example, a market feasibility study conducted by the city was a critical factor in the Wollaston firms' decision to develop a supermarket in that city's underserved South End neighborhood (City of Boston & SuperValue, 1996). That study showed a large and underserved market population with the purchasing power necessary to sustain a profitable supermarket operation. Additionally, the Detroit Department of Community and Economic Development engaged a consulting firm to prepare a feasibility study used in the development of the Farmer Jack Grocery Store-anchored Virginia Park Community Shopping Plaza in 1976 (Richey, 1996). Moreover, both New York City's Department of City Planning and its Office of Economic Development have conducted supermarket research and market studies, one of which examined the capacity of designated trade areas to support a supermarket (Select Committee on Hunger, U.S. House of Representatives, 1992).

Administrative Considerations

A number of administrative requirements make supermarket development in inner-city urban areas a difficult process. Among the impediments mentioned most prominently are regulatory roadblocks and land assembly challenges. For example, a special report issued by the American Planning Association notes that city governments and local bureaucratic red tape can present the greatest obstacles between a supermarket chain and its desire to locate a store in the inner city ("The Inner-City Supermarket," 1996). Reportedly, the process of obtaining the proper permits, negotiating governmental zoning and regulatory approval, and conducting mandatory research is far more time-consuming and costly for projects planned for urban municipalities compared to those planned for the suburbs. For example, Fisher and Gottlieb (1996) report that the Vons Companies had to meet approximately 29 different requirements before the City of Los Angeles would approve its proposal to build a new supermarket in an inner-city region of that metropolis. Becker (1992) notes the following from a 1995 Food Marketing Institute report:

...zoning and other regulatory procedures tend to be slower in the cities, where starting a new store—from selecting a site to opening for business—can take anywhere from four to five years or even longer, roughly double the suburban time. (p. 3)

However, many urban governments are streamlining their administrative requirements to make it easier to build supermarkets within city limits. One such city is Boston, which recently

passed a law providing developers with a money-back guarantee on project completion dates (Robaton, 1996). Dallas (TX) also simplified its permit and planning process in 1990, following a consolidation of two municipal business and marketing offices (Henderson, 1994).

Site Assembly Considerations

Finding suitable sites on which to build supermarkets in the inner city can often be difficult as sites of the right size at the right location are few and far between. Safeway Stores, for example, generally require a four to five-and-a-half acre site ("The Inner-City Supermarket," 1996); similarly, the California-based Vons chain claims that the minimum amount of space the company needs to build its smallest store is a five-acre lot (Ashman et al., 1993). Since land parcels of this size generally are not available within most urban metropolitan areas, the process of acquiring the amount of commercially zoned land necessary for one store often takes from 5 to 10 years. The severity of this problem of lack of space is further underscored in the cases of Chicago and Los Angeles. The development of Jeffery Plaza, the Dominick's Supermarket-anchored shopping center on Chicago's South Side, required eight years and substantial government involvement to assemble 21 contiguous parcels (Porter, 1995). Moreover, Rebuild LA (n.d.), a Los Angeles-based CDC, estimates that only 9 out of 200 vacant or underutilized lots in South Central Los Angeles are larger than one acre.

On the other hand, examples of how cities have helped with land acquisition or site assembly also abound. For instance, in response to the aggressive and noteworthy efforts of the New York City-based Community Food Resource Center, key city agencies in that metropolis are increasingly focusing their attention on promoting supermarket development on city-owned property. In 1992, the city's Economic Development Corporation offered land for development, with financial incentives, in two areas of Brooklyn, given that the proposals submitted included supermarket development as a part of their plans. Developers were selected for this initiative and supermarket operators signed leases in 1993. Additionally, New York City's housing agency has evaluated the need for setting aside adequate land for large supermarkets as part of that agency's plan for additional affordable housing (Community Food Resource Center, 1994).

Financial Incentives for Supermarket Development

Cities are increasingly taking steps to attract supermarkets to the inner city by offering a variety of incentives ranging from infrastructure site improvements and low-interest loans to EZ/EC-allowed tax credits. A few cities have even absorbed site improvement costs to stimulate supermarket development. One such case involves Finast Supermarkets and the development of the Garrett Square Finast store, which opened on Cleveland's East Side in 1990. This site previously had been used as a streetcar storehouse, bus depot, and repair facility; however, to

facilitate its transition to a supermarket development, the city of Cleveland paid to clean up the oil contamination on the site at a cost of over \$200,000 (TRI, 1995). In another instance, the Greater Southwest Development Corporation (GSDC) of Chicago secured \$400,000 worth of site improvements from the city, including traffic signals, partial sewer relocation, and utility realignment to "sweeten" the development of the Jewel Supermarket and Osco Drugstore in that community in 1985 ("Successful Urban Center Supermarkets," 1996).

Financing arrangements also include low-interest loans to developers, revenue-sharing among CDCs and developers, and city financing of supermarket construction costs, including site acquisition and improvement costs. Among the types of incentives that have been offered by city governments are land and buildings at discounted rents; property and sales tax breaks; tax concessions on development fees, infrastructure costs, and first-year business deductions; and EZ/EC-allowed tax credits.

Federal sources of funding used most often by CDCs for supermarket development are as follows (O'Connor - Abell, 1992; Ement, 1995; Urban Initiative, 1995; USDA, Food and Nutrition Service, 1996; The Retail Initiative, 1996; Weinberg, 1996):

- HUD Community Development Block Grants
- HHS Discretionary Grants
- HUD Section 108 Loan Guarantees
- Economic Development Administration Grants from the U.S. Department of Commerce and the Small Business Administration (SBA)
- U. S. Department of Agriculture-sponsored loan and grant programs, including the USDA's Business and Industrial Guaranteed Loans (commercial lending)

Additionally, the Community Food Projects Program administered by USDA provides funding for competitive grants for organizations working on food access-related projects such as community gardens, farmers' markets, inner-city food store development, community-supported agriculture farms and food policy councils.

Model CDC Joint Venture Supermarket Projects

The CDC joint venture supermarket development model most often cited in the recent food access literature is the partnership between the New Community Corporation (NCC) of Newark, New Jersey, and Pathmark Stores, Inc., of Woodbridge, New Jersey. The 43,000-square-foot store developed by NCC and Pathmark, which opened in July 1990 following a 10-year struggle, serves 50,000 shoppers a week and has generated over 300 full and part-time jobs for neighborhood residents.

As described in the Food Marketing Institute's (FMI) (n.d.) case study of this initiative, the roles played by CDCs such as NCC and RSC are critical to the success of the joint venture. These roles are discussed in the FMI study using the following four CDC effectiveness criteria as a framework:

Criteria #1: A Long-term Commitment to Revitalizing the Neighborhood

NCC's track record in housing and community development began during the early 1970s when its goal was to provide affordable housing for low-income residents. Since that time, it has developed more than 2,500 units of housing, transitional housing for the homeless, day care centers for children, senior citizen housings, career training services, a health clinic, and other services and facilities for the community.

Criteria #2: Ability to Obtain Broad Community Support for its Projects

Over the years, NCC had earned the respect of the community and the municipal government and had built a solid relationship with local businesses. It also understood the community's local needs, priorities, and history. Thus, the organization's joint venture supermarket project was well-received in the community.

Criteria #3: Willingness to Engage in and Effectiveness in Negotiating the Often Very Complex Site Assembly/Land Improvement Process

At the time of the supermarket development project, NCC had close to 25 years experience in working with municipal government representatives and their regulations. The most difficult hurdle the organization had to overcome for this particular project was land assembly—that is, putting together the 3.3-acre site, which was composed of 62 individual lots. The necessary space became available after NCC coordinated a petition signed by 12,000 local residents declaring the need for a supermarket and initiated several lawsuits prompting a civil response to the issue. Additionally, NCC's committed and effective staff and board of community leaders used their influence to keep the development process moving along.

Criteria #4: Ability to Pull Together Sufficient Financing

As a nonprofit organization, NCC was eligible for financial assistance that was not available to for-profit businesses such as grants, low-interest loans, tax exemptions, and subsidies from city, state, and federal sources. Due to its extensive experience in developing financial packages for public projects, NCC was able to raise \$14 million in public and private financing for the supermarket shopping center.

The establishment in 1994 of The Retail Initiative (TRI), a national fund to support CDCs

developed and/or own full-service supermarket-anchored facilities and retail outlets in their neighborhoods, has drawn increased attention to and heightened interest in the roles of CDCs in inner-city supermarket development ("The Inner-City Supermarket," 1996). TRI was formed by the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), the nation's largest financial community development intermediary providing support to CDCs. The LISC was created by the Ford Foundation and six other corporations in 1979. Since then, it has raised approximately \$850 million to help more than 900 CDCs in 30 cities build in excess of 42,000 housing units and 7.7 million square feet of commercial space. TRI was designed to enable CDCs to revitalize their neighborhoods by acquiring ownership interests in supermarket properties or shopping centers. Initially, it worked to facilitate the development of 12 to 14 retail projects in inner-city neighborhoods throughout the United States. As of September 1995, TRI was exploring opportunities in 35 cities (Garry, 1995).

During fall 1995, the National Congress for Community Economic Development (NCCED), a consortium of CDCs, conducted a survey of its members to identify those who were developing or interested in developing supermarkets and/or other types of retail shopping centers. NCCED's report of the survey, entitled "Supermarket/Retail Development in Low-Income Cities," documents significant and emerging contributions of CDCs in inner-city supermarket development. The CDCs highlighted in **Appendix F** were among those participating in the survey. The information presented in this table provides examples of a wide spectrum of current and planned CDC-related supermarket development activities.

Findings from the Qualitative Study

As a strategy for improving access to food, the respondents interviewed for this study indicated that the strategy of supermarket development is a fairly prevalent one employed by communities in both rural and urban areas. Of all the food access projects they discussed, about 30% of them involved supermarket development as a solution to improving communities access to nutritious, affordable food. Moreover, according to the respondents' reports, these projects were very successful, receiving on a scale from 0 to 15, with higher scores indicating greater success, an average rating of about 14.

The respondents noted some of the specific obstacles identified in the literature as being faced by underserved communities in their efforts to implement a successful supermarket development project. These included the following:

- ☛ community members' lack of education and background information about the development;
- ☛ inadequate financing to launch, support, and/or maintain a supermarket

development project;

- ☛ difficulties in obtaining a suitable site or land;
- ☛ lack of support and understanding for supermarket development within the community;
- ☛ lack of cooperation from potential retailers;
- ☛ political issues that impede supermarket development;
- ☛ zoning hurdles;
- ☛ issues of crime and safety in the supermarket locale;
- ☛ limited or poor transportation options for local shoppers;
- ☛ lack of adequate warehouse space; and
- ☛ inadequate refrigeration facilities.

According to the respondents, the strategies generally used to address these obstacles fell into two major categories:

- (1) efforts aimed at helping community food access advocates work more closely with retail food suppliers or large chain store corporations to develop supermarket projects; and
- (2) the creation of CDCs to facilitate supermarket development, primarily via the establishment of joint venture partnerships with retail food firms.

All of the initiatives the respondents described as exemplary models of supermarket development in underserved communities were located in urban areas, and many of these were in distressed areas of the city. Some of the respondents' comments indicated their beliefs that food suppliers and large chain stores, which have participated in several supermarket development initiatives across the country, had to be greatly enticed in a variety of ways to invest in these underserved communities. They also shared important insights on the activities of and directions taken by community groups and retailers alike to successfully complete these projects. These included the following activities:

- ☛ the use of media campaigns and public relations firms;

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- ☛ the initiation of efforts aimed at educating the public and gaining interest and support for the project;
 - ☛ the use of extensive pre-development research;
 - ☛ the establishment of effective relationships with local government officials, with transportation and public safety officials, and other related agencies;
 - ☛ the securing of management firms to assist in the operation of the stores upon completion; and
 - ☛ the creation of community employment and decision-making opportunities.

Such activities were used in conjunction with several kinds of initiatives, including the development of a large, modern, well-known chain supermarket where there was previously none for miles around, rebuilding and renovating an existing dilapidated store, or starting a smaller grocery store effort.

The respondents had high praise for the role of CDCs in supermarket development. They generally maintained that these groups were successful primarily because of the outlets they provided for the emergence and development of strong leadership and advocacy in underserved communities. They also spoke highly of CDCs involvement in establishing partnerships with supermarket firms, garnering support from and consensus within the communities to be served, and gaining access to funding sources.

Despite the success of several supermarket development projects across the country, about 16% of the respondents' comments warned against viewing this strategy as a panacea. They stressed that supermarket chains generally do not have much experience in meeting the food needs of diverse ethnic/cultural communities. An independently-owned grocery chain cited was the Bronx, New York-based Bravo, which focuses on providing ethnic-oriented foods and produce which reflect the food shopping needs of local Hispanic and African American communities.

Three particularly noteworthy public/private partnerships described by the respondents are noted in **Exhibit A** below.

Exhibit A

Exemplary Supermarket Development Projects Described by the Study Respondents

Project One:

According to one respondent, New Jersey-based Pathmark Stores worked closely with a local CDC to secure land for a new inner-city supermarket in order to overcome controversy over the use of the land for store development. The CDC played a critical role as a advocate for the project, conducting important research such as community opinion surveys.

Project Two:

Another respondent described a New York City supermarket development project in which the close working relationship established between a CDC and a retail grocery firm resulted in successful political networking and lobbying for the cause of improving food access in an underserved urban community. The CDC helped to resolve issues such as zoning and financing. The partnership engaged a public relations firm to conduct a media campaign explaining the benefits of a supermarket to community residents.

Project Three:

Another New York City project highlighted by a respondent involved a three-way partnership between a CDC, local churches, and the Urban League to build a very successful supermarket. The CDC took a strong leadership role, but all three partners made significant contributions to the effort. Together, they were able to convince the city to clean up the land identified for development and to address security problems by hiring a guard and building a fence around the property.

CHAPTER IV

FARMERS' MARKETS, PUBLIC MARKETS, AND FOOD COOPERATIVES

Farmers' Markets

The modest attention given farmers' markets by the respondents in the present study belies the extensive body of literature documenting both the positive impact of these outlets on underserved communities' access to nutritious, affordable food and the general widespread support for them in these communities. This alternative is especially important in underserved low-income urban communities, where the availability of fresh produce is typically limited due to the transport, refrigeration, and storage constraints faced by other food outlets. In these settings, farmers' markets have been shown to provide not only a welcome dietary change-of-pace for inner-city residents but also a source and center of community awareness and pride. This chapter presents a more extensive review of the research on farmers' market development as a food access improvement strategy, and explores the respondents' comments about the benefits and impediments associated with this approach. Exemplary farmers' market projects are noted to provide a deeper understanding of the opportunities and obstacles faced by communities opting to utilize this strategy.

Findings from the Literature

Sommer, Wing, and Aitkens (1980) report that the quality of the produce offered for sale at farmers' markets often overrides price considerations for many consumers, yet the savings noted by farmers' market shoppers is appreciable. Pelsue's (1984) survey of consumers at farmers' markets and roadside stands in Vermont and Estes's (1985) survey of North Carolina farmers' market shoppers concur, noting that product quality was the overwhelming reason respondents shopped at these markets. Additional research further documents that a key motivating factor for consumer patronage of farmers' markets is consumers' perceptions that they offer a superior quality of food (Johnson & Bragg, 1994, 1996; Anderson, Smoley, Morris, & Bragg, 1993; Baharanyi, Tackie, Pierce, & Woolery, n.d.; Burns & Johnson, 1996; Cornell University, Department of Rural Sociology, Community Food Resource Center, 1995; Fisher & Gottlieb, 1996; Stegelin, 1988). Sommer's (1985) comprehensive study of 17 farmers' markets in California offers the following conclusions:

- Prices at farmers' markets were 34% lower than prices for similar items in nearby supermarkets.

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- Many shoppers believed the produce they purchased from farmers' markets was fresher.
 - In a double-blind test, both researchers and consumers preferred farmers' market tomatoes, bell peppers, peaches, apricots, and watermelons over those offered for sale at supermarkets.

Indeed, according to Field and Sommer (1987), the foremost benefit to consumers of shopping at a farmers' market seems to be the increased access to fresher, and therefore better tasting (according to consumers), high-quality produce these outlets provide.

Stegelin's (1988) inquiry into the reasons for shopping at farmers' markets cited most often by consumers stressed the following factors: freshness, quality, selection, availability, purchase size, location, and price. When asked the main reason they shop at farmers' markets in a survey conducted by Ashman et al. (1993) for the Interfaith Hunger Coalition, inner-city shoppers most often cited freshness and quality followed by price. Other important factors identified as a result of Cornell University's (1995) examination of farmers' market vendors in the northeastern United States were the variety of produce sold.

The primary obstacles to increased consumer utilization of farmers' markets are inadequate publicity about and inaccessible location of these outlets. However, intensive and favorable publicity and the generation of enthusiasm and knowledge about a market through the use of various media can override location drawbacks (i.e., distance, nonproximity to public transportation), and improved transportation mechanisms (i.e., shuttle service, convenient bus routes) can increase the number and types of shoppers who patronize these outlets. Nonetheless, reports indicate that most consumers usually learn about farmers' markets through newspapers and tourist promotion programs as well as informal means such as word-of-mouth, from friends or neighbors, or by walking or driving by these markets (Johnson & Bragg, 1996; Baharanyi et al., n.d.; Hall, 1990; Merrill-Corum, 1987; Pelsue, 1984; Stegelin, 1989). Whenever possible, farmers' markets should be established in locations that are easily accessible via local consumers normal travel methods and patterns. Other obstacles to utilization of farmers' markets include limited hours of operation, inadequate parking facilities, and limited product availability.

Findings from the Qualitative Study

The establishment of farmers' markets was mentioned in 15% of the respondents' comments about the strategies used by underserved communities to gain access to nutritious and affordable food. However, despite the infrequent mention, their general consensus was that farmers' markets tend to be very successful projects. On a rating scale from 0 to 15, farmers' markets received an average rating of 14.2 from these respondents. Overall, the respondents strongly advocated the farmers' market approach as a viable strategy and solution to the lack of

variety and the poor quality of fresh produce available to underserved communities.

The respondents corroborated the findings from the literature in their comments which noted that farmers' markets did not achieve success in underserved communities unless they overcame some considerable challenges. Those mentioned included:

- ☛ lack of financing to initiate and maintain farmers' markets;
- ☛ communities' lack of background and business knowledge about how to establish and run farmers' markets;
- ☛ difficulties in meeting health codes;
- ☛ inadequate transportation routes to and from the markets; and
- ☛ farmers' unwillingness or inability to accept food stamps as payment for food items.

To overcome these obstacles, the respondents noted that several communities established food policy councils to provide leadership and advocacy in the creation of farmers' markets. Such an organization, they claimed, was often deemed necessary by community members in order to establish effective working relationships with officials in municipal, federal, and other local civic agencies and organizations that were also involved in addressing food access issues. For example, many of the groups interested in establishing farmers' markets in their communities were said to have worked closely with local transit authorities to change bus routes or utilize a special bus to get consumers to and from the markets. The respondents also mentioned as noteworthy farmers' market initiatives wherein community groups found innovative ways to cut the operating costs for their markets by cooperatively sharing food-packaging, storage, and refrigeration facilities with other markets or retail grocers. One of the more innovative projects detailed in interviews with the food access experts was a farmers' market that capitalized on food stamps in order to bring low-income residents into the venue.

About 75% of the farmers' market initiatives they described were located in urban communities, with the remaining fourth located in rural communities. Some exemplary markets described by the respondents include those noted in **Exhibit B**.

Exhibit B

Farmers' Market Projects Described by the Study Respondents

Project One:

A respondent described a highly rated urban farmers' market that was established to provide affordable, fresh produce to residents of a low-income housing development. An important aspect of this market was that it was authorized to receive food stamps, which enabled food stamp customers to purchase fresh food with their coupons just as they would at a regular grocery store. A second factor was that participating farmers were given a \$100 credit on their market fees to facilitate their involvement in the market.

Project Two:

Another similarly rated project involved an urban housing project community that organized to establish a farmers' market in conjunction with a first-class grocery store and a community garden with vegetables being grown along a "living wall" surrounding the project.

Public Markets

Presently, both the number and significance of public markets noted in the literature and by the respondents are relatively small; however, both sources of information indicate that the popularity of public markets as a response to communities' food access concerns is growing. This chapter looks at the factors associated with this phenomenon, and with the strategy itself, and highlights both the challenges and successes met by exemplary public markets.

Findings from the Literature

As a food access strategy, the development of public markets is a recent phenomenon, having evolved to growing prominence over the past 20 years (Baum & Spitzer, 1995). Increasingly, public markets are seen as economic and business development catalysts. A resurgence of public markets has occurred in cities and communities throughout the United States. A number of exemplary and innovative public market projects have been initiated, including: the Country Market in Buffalo (NY), El Mercado in Hartford (CT), El Parion in San Antonio (TX), the Houston (TX) International Market, the Eugene (OR) Saturday Market, the French Market in New Orleans (LA), the Union Square Greenmarket and La Marqueta in New York City, the Farmers' Market in Jamaica, Queens (NY), the North Market in Columbus (OH), the Toledo (OH)

Public Market, the Pasco (WA) Farmers' Market, the Pike Place Market in Seattle (WA), and the Uptown Market in Charlotte (NC). Additionally, when completed, the proposed Grove Arcade Public Market in Asheville (NC) is anticipated to become one of the most innovative public markets for its prospective role in stimulating increased food access and distribution in the western North Carolina area. It also has the potential to impact job creation, community revitalization, and local business development.

Findings from the Qualitative Study

A community initiative involving the establishment of a public market was detailed by only one of the respondents. In this instance, the respondent noted that the market, located in an urban setting, was very successful (rated 14). However, the developers had to first overcome challenges associated with acquiring sufficient financing for the market. In response to these challenges, the developers conducted an extensive campaign to secure funds for capital expenditures and operational support. Local support for the initiative was strong, and the market subsequently was able to thrive. According to the respondent, one of the keys to the market's success was that its developers took advantage of technical assistance in public market development and operations provided by various organizations and agencies. Additionally, it offered a wide range of fresh produce to urban dwellers previously underserved by quality food outlets and hired local people familiar with and to the community, its members, and needs.

Food Cooperatives

Over the past three decades, the popularity of food cooperatives (commonly called "food co-ops") as a response to food access concerns has peaked, waned, and peaked again. Moreover, these ventures have assumed an increasing variety of organizational and operational configurations in response to the shifting dietary, socioeconomic, political, and philosophical orientations of their members. Although but slight mention was made of food coops by the respondents in this study, the rare instance noted suggests that this strategy, when well-conceived and supervised, can yield significant rewards to underserved communities with scarce material and logistical resources.

Findings from the Literature

The National Cooperative Business Association (NCBA) reports the existence of approximately 4,000 cooperative food-buying clubs and 400 storefront cooperatives in the United States (USDA, Food and Nutrition Service, 1995a). Cooperatives are business ventures that are voluntarily organized, collectively owned, and cooperatively controlled by those who use its services and who together contribute to its operation and share and redistribute the risks, profits, and benefits of ownership amongst themselves (Singerman, 1986). Food cooperatives are businesses organized along this line that offer fresh produce and grocery items to their members.

Growth in the number of food cooperatives reached its peak in the 1960s and 1970s, partly due to economic forces, including the closing of supermarkets in inner cities (Cotterill, 1981). Additionally, heightened interest in food cooperatives was attributable to a confluence of social and political forces. A history of this era is provided in the Interfaith Hunger Coalition report, "Seeds of Change" (Ashman et al., 1993). For example, this report notes that social and civil rights workers active during this period encouraged the development of cooperatives in inner cities as a form of community and economic development. Additionally, consumer activists called for food co-ops as a response to food safety issues and the high rates of inflation affecting food prices during the 1970s. As a result of President Johnson's "War on Poverty" programs, the Interfaith Hunger Coalition report notes that financial and technical assistance was made more widely available to those interested in forming food cooperatives in low-income areas. Consequently, by 1979, close to 3,000 cooperative food stores and buying clubs were operating in the United States and Canada. The 1980s ushered in an era of conservatism as the social activism that had provided much of the impetus for food cooperatives began to fade. The 1980s were also characterized by a dramatic reduction in the number of food cooperatives, which, in part, reflected a reluctance of cooperatives to adapt to the changing environment (Bandy, 1992).

Recently, however, retail cooperative food stores have experienced strong competition from national food chains and gourmet food as well as from health food chains that are entering markets traditionally served by cooperative food retailers (Bandy, 1992). Other retail cooperatives were found to operate from a severe competitive disadvantage due to inadequate facilities and equipment including unattractive displays, limited shelf space, and outmoded storage and processing technologies. Additionally, the establishment of retail cooperative food stores often require extensive computer and marketing capabilities, technical assistance, and management expertise, which residents of underserved areas may not have. On the other hand, pre-order food cooperatives were found to be more numerous because they typically are smaller operations that require little technical expertise and smaller initial outlays of funds. However, the inadequate capital often found available to food co-ops negatively affects the desirability of the distribution location, facilities, and equipment as well as the product and services mix. Moreover, food co-ops are greatly dependent on the commitment, time, loyalty, and competence of members, resources that, for many low-income consumers, are often overruled by considerations related to other aspects of survival.

Nonetheless, as the 1990s unfold, signs of increased interest in food cooperatives are emerging. In the Gallup Organization's (1994) survey of the American public on awareness of business cooperatives, a key finding was that two-thirds of those surveyed indicated they would be either "somewhat" or "much more likely" to purchase food products from cooperatives. In their national survey of over 12,000 adults, Sommer, Becker, Hohn, and Warholc (1983) reported that when asked what type of cooperative they would be interested in joining, more than half of the respondents chose a food cooperative. Additional interest in food co-ops is being spearheaded by the NCBA (1996), which is currently conducting a national cooperative food-buying survey in

collaboration with the Consumer Federation of America.

Findings from the Qualitative Study

According to the respondents, the establishment of food cooperatives as a strategy to improve communities' access to nutritious and affordable food was a rare occurrence. Of the food access initiatives they described, fewer than 4% involved this approach. However, this strategy was seen as a viable solution in those communities' with insufficient financial and material resources or personnel to undertake larger, more complicated measures to address food access problems.

Two of the food coop projects described by the respondents were implemented in urban communities, and one was established in an underserved rural community. One of these urban coops received a success rating of 12 on the 15-point scale, while the other was rated as being very unsuccessful (1 out of 15). The rural coop, on the other hand, received a top rating of 15 from the respondent who described it.

Among the challenges and impediments noted by the respondents with regard to food cooperatives as a food access improvement strategy were the following:

- lack of financing to initiate and maintain food cooperatives;
- communities' lack of background and business knowledge about how to establish and run food cooperatives; and
- difficulties in obtaining a suitable site to house a food cooperative.

The respondents noted, however, that organizers of food cooperatives, when they were successful, approached these obstacles in a variety of ways:

- by soliciting support for and involvement in cooperatives at the grassroots level;
- engaging in education initiatives to inform community members of the advantages of food coops;
- seeking grants to fund and support the establishment and operation of food cooperatives; and
- organizing to change public policy at the local and national level to help make communities more conducive to the establishment of food cooperatives as a means of improving food access.

A brief description of the most highly rated food cooperative project identified by a respondent is provided in **Exhibit C** below. In this noted example, a group of residents of a rural midwestern community with no local grocery store formed a successful food cooperative by educating and empowering local consumers.

Exhibit C

An Exemplary Food Cooperative Project

A group of residents of this rural community began their efforts to establish a food cooperative by conducting extensive background research, including consulting with another community that had already formed one. Then, they set about the task of gaining support and cooperation for the initiative from other community residents, to the point that they significantly heightened local awareness of problems of food access in their area and mobilized considerable consensus for the establishment of a coop. The group was soon able to organize volunteers to run the coop, identify a site and other necessary resources, and locate wholesale distributors and suppliers of food who were willing to work with them. They hired a truck and driver to deliver food directly to the community and began operation. This cooperative venture received a success rating of 15 from the expert respondents.

CHAPTER V

ADDITIONAL FOOD ACCESS STRATEGIES

Urban Agriculture

As both the literature and the respondents revealed, support for community gardening and farming projects as a response to underserved urban communities' food access problems has been mixed. Similarly, the results of these projects have also been mixed yet moderately favorable. Some results were indirect and far-reaching and subsequently difficult to measure. This chapter expands the discussion of urban agricultural initiatives to look at this strategy's specific challenges, successes, and potentials.

Findings from the Literature

Community gardening is a form of community-based urban agriculture by which plots of land, typically environmentally undesirable vacant lots, are allocated to and managed by members of an urban community for the purpose of establishing and maintaining individual or group gardens. For their role in providing the poor with increased capacity to feed themselves and generate income from agricultural products, community gardens have been described as an effective food access strategy and self-empowering solution for reducing hunger and poverty (Ashman et al., 1993). They serve additional purposes as well, most notably the regeneration of degraded and unused land (e.g., vacant lots, roadside areas) and improvements in community interaction and civic spirit in urban areas.

Community farming links urban and rural communities through agricultural activities. At the beginning of a growing season, urban families or individuals buy shares, at varied costs, in an urban community farming project. In return for assuming this risk, shareholders are entitled a portion of the farmer's crop, which is typically grown without pesticides and distributed to shareholders the same day it is harvested. During the last decade, the number of community farming projects nationwide has grown from zero to between 300 and 400 ("Community Farming Unites Farmers and Consumers," 1992).

The largest and most innovative urban agricultural program ever undertaken is the Urban Gardening Program, established in 1977 and administered by the USDA's Cooperative Extension Service. By 1993, the program had assisted more than 150,000 city gardeners, including low-income residents, in 23 cities in growing over \$16 million worth of fresh produce (Malakoff,

1994).¹ In 1994, however, Congress virtually eliminated the program by cutting its budget from nearly \$3 million in 1978 to less than \$1.8 million in 1993.

Noteworthy urban agricultural initiatives discussed in the literature include the following:

- the Green Thumb Club of New York City (NY), reportedly the largest municipally sponsored community gardening program in the United States (Rabinovich, 1985);
- the Neighborhood Gardens Program of Cincinnati (OH), which has developed 27 community gardens on over 200,000 square feet of land used by over 800 families each year (Goosman, 1990);
- the Philadelphia (PA) Greens Program, sponsor of close to 1,200 active gardening projects over the past 15 years, including the West Philadelphia Project, which targets low-income city neighborhoods (Bonham, 1990);
- Green Harvest, a Pittsburgh (PA)-based program that has won national awards for its community gardening projects targeted to public housing residents (Schantz, 1994);
- the Milwaukee Community Service Corps, a USDA-AmeriCorps-sponsored anti-hunger project, which has developed several community gardens in low-income Milwaukee neighborhoods (USDA, AmeriCorps, 1995); and
- New Brunswick's (NJ) Urban Ecology Project, which has been developing community gardens in that city's public housing communities since 1993 ("Communities Experiment to Address Food Security," 1995); and
- Food From the Hood, originally a community gardening project in Los Angeles (CA), which has recently ventured into the food product manufacturing line; currently, its salad dressing, made from fresh produce grown on the project's gardens, is sold in over 2,000 stores across the nation ("Food from the Hood Announces," 1996).

¹ Among these cities were Atlanta (GA), Baltimore (MD), Boston (MA), Chicago (IL), Cleveland (OH), Denver (CO), Houston (TX), Indianapolis (IN), Jacksonville (FL), Los Angeles (CA), Louisville (KY), Memphis (TN), Milwaukee (WI), Newark (NJ), New York (NY), Philadelphia (PA), and Phoenix (AZ).

Findings from the Qualitative Study

Urban agricultural initiatives were mentioned in 13% of the respondents' comments regarding community food access improvement strategies and the level of success they attributed to these initiatives was only moderately high—averaging a rating of about 11 on a scale from 0 to 15—they generally viewed agricultural project in urban areas as a "must try" strategy for underserved communities. Community gardening and community farming initiatives were both mentioned. The former was noted as a relatively successful means of providing urban residents with direct access to fresh produce. The latter was cited as a means of establishing constructive partnership linkages between rural and urban communities.

Multiple challenges, several of which corroborate the literature, were noted by the respondents with regard to urban agricultural initiatives. Some of the more notable impediments included the following:

- ☛ communities' lack of background and business knowledge about how to establish and run community gardens or farming projects;
- ☛ lack of community trust and support for such initiatives;
- ☛ lack of financing to initiate and maintain urban agricultural initiatives;
- ☛ difficulties in obtaining a suitable site or land for a garden in urban areas;
- ☛ difficulty in surmounting zoning and ordinance barriers to urban gardens;
- ☛ lack of interest on the part of farmers to become involved in an urban project;
- ☛ lack of adequate refrigeration and warehouse space;
- ☛ poor yields on investment; and
- ☛ small profit margins.

The respondents noted that addressing these challenges frequently required community garden/farming organizers to carefully coordinate their activities with those of local government officials, food retailers, farmers, and the community at large. In some instances, they also involved the creation or assistance of food policy councils or expert consultants to educate the community and offer technical assistance for the establishment of such initiatives.

Some exemplary urban agricultural projects are summarized in **Exhibit D** below.

Exhibit D

Exemplary Urban Agricultural Initiatives Described by the Study Respondents

Project One:

Low-income residents of an urban community in New Jersey sought to solve their food access problems by establishing a community gardening project. Securing the land for their garden was the primary challenge they faced, but this was met by the organizers' efforts to generate and mobilize strong grassroots support for the initiative. The urban garden they established was among the most highly rated (score: 15) of all those noted by the respondents.

Project Two:

Another highly rated (15) urban gardening project involved community members in growing a variety of produce in greenhouses. The challenge for this initiative was to increase the small profit margin attained from sale of the fruits of these participants' labor. Organizers managed to get additional technical assistance and training for the group, which resulted in their being able to offer their products for sale on the retail market and hence increase their profits.

Food Shopper Transportation Services

That food shopper transportation enhancement was the strategy most frequently mentioned by the study respondents for improving underserved communities' access to food—and the one most often mentioned in conjunction with other strategies—underscores the importance attributed to such measures in the literature. As a stand-alone strategy, the provision or expansion of transportation services was perceived as generally ineffective. However, as part of a comprehensive initiative to integrate food access and transportation planning, develop additional outlets to bring the food closer to consumer, and increase public awareness of alternative transportation, food shopper transportation initiatives were more favorably received and rated. This chapter presents a more extensive review of the literature pertaining to this strategy and details the range of respondent comments about the challenges and successes faced by communities seeking to address food access problems in this way.

Findings from the Literature

Several supermarket-sponsored transit programs have been described in the literature. For example, two stores in the Houston (TX)-based Fiesta chain offer a free shuttle service for residents of apartment complexes in the inner city to travel to and from their stores. The vans

serve a average of 60 to 70 shoppers a day from each apartment complex (Fisher & Gottlieb, 1996, Winter/Spring). Additionally, the Kroger Company operates its "Spirit of Kroger Transportation Shuttle" in Savannah (GA), which picks up persons from the inner city with transportation needs and/or the elderly who do not have access to a grocery store near their homes. Since its inception in March 1993, the Kroger shuttle service has averaged 200 riders a month (Wiener & Young, 1995).

In another example, Numero Uno, an independently owned supermarket in South Central Los Angeles (CA), operates a free van service for its customers, many of whom do not own automobiles. The van drives customers a maximum of five miles, depending on the volume of their packages (Ashman et al., 1993). Los Angeles's Vons Supermarkets also operates a van transport service for residents of a senior-living complex, many of whom would have difficulties getting to and transporting their groceries back from the store (Fisher & Gottlieb, 1996, Winter/Spring).

In other cities, community organizations provide transportation services to enhance their residents' access to supermarkets. New Communities Corporation (NCC), New Jersey's largest CDC, provides van shuttle service to a nearby supermarket for its low-income customers, 40% of whom walked to the store prior to the establishment of this service. NCC pays for the cost of the service, although some revenues are recaptured at the fare box. Still, fares are well below those charged by local taxis, and are based on the number of bags shoppers carry, up to a maximum of five dollars a trip (\$2.50 for senior citizens) (Ashman et al., 1993). Another community-based transportation service for food shoppers is provided by the Sustainable Food Center of Austin (TX), which began implementing its "Grocery Bus" service in January 1996. The service is offered every half hour, 12 hours a day, seven days a week (Fisher & Gottlieb, 1996, Winter/Spring). Additionally, the literature notes the Pittsburgh (PA) Food Policy Commission's "Shoppers Shuttle," initiated in 1991 and designed to provide transportation for low-income and elderly inner-city residents to suburban food stores (Select Committee on Hunger, U.S. House of Representatives, 1992).

Another approach to resolving transportation barriers to food access is the deliberate altering of bus or subway routes to get urban consumers more conveniently to and from urban and suburban supermarkets. In many cases, bus or subway stops are rerouted to deliver consumers directly to the supermarket door and are coordinated with the store's hours of operation. Knoxville's (TN) Transportation Authority, for example, offers its "Shop N Ride" program, which provides special bus transportation for the elderly and other city residents to shop in food stores outside their neighborhoods (Ashman et al., 1993).

Additional transportation options identified for improving communities' access to food are those of an entrepreneurial nature. For example, the authorization of privately owned "produce trucks" to bring culturally familiar food to residents of underserved low-income Latino neighborhoods in Los Angeles is another transportation option mentioned in the literature (Ashman

et al., 1993).

In recent years, a number of supermarket chains, nonprofit organizations, and public agencies have been engaged in enhancing access to food on both policy and programmatic fronts. Among the most well-known of these are the Chicago-based Center for Neighborhood Technology (CNT) and the Venice (CA)-based Community Food Security Coalition (CFSC). The former is currently working with a local CDC and public housing communities to transform an existing public transit station into a mixed-use transit center, to be anchored by a transit-oriented grocery store (USDA, Food and Nutrition Service, 1995c). The latter group has been instrumental, from a policy and advocacy perspective, in calling attention to and increasing public awareness of alternative transportation as a viable strategy to address certain systemic food access barriers. Its recently completed report, prepared in collaboration with the University of California-Los Angeles's Pollution Prevention Education and Research Center, is one such example (Fisher & Gottlieb, 1996, Winter/Spring).

This report, which examines the relationship between food access and transportation, suggests a need for a directed food access planning or policy framework for transit-dependent citizens. It argues that integrating food access and transportation planning will enhance the capacity of food retailers, food advocates, policymakers, transit officials, and community-based agencies to develop, expand, and replicate food-related transportation strategies. It also asserts that, despite the significant role supermarkets have played both in contributing to and being influenced by access-related issues, the food retail industry has not developed a consistent or systematic approach to meeting customer transportation needs. Highlights of the report include a review of models and innovative food-access related transportation programs; suggested policy options for the public and private sector are also presented (Fisher & Gottlieb, 1996, Winter/Spring).

Findings from the Qualitative Study

Improving underserved communities' access to food by implementing or enhancing shopper transportation services for elderly and/or low-income residents was one of the most frequently noted strategies discussed by the respondents in this study. It was mentioned in more than a third (36%) of their interview comments on efforts various communities used to improve their access to nutritious, affordable food. However, they typically indicated that such options often fail to achieve high levels of success. On a scale of 0 to 15, such projects received an average success rating of only 6.8. Among the various food access improvement efforts mentioned in interviews with this group of experts, almost 15% of them involved some form of transportation enhancements. Most (74%) were implemented in urban areas, 26% were in rural areas.

The respondents' comments corroborated many of the findings from the literature regarding shopper transportation programs. They confirmed the challenges involved in initiating and

sustaining adequate transportation mechanisms described in the research. As the respondents noted, these impediments include the following:

- ☛ lack of community-wide interest in or support for efforts to enhance or provide public transportation for those whose transportation resources are limited;
- ☛ lack of knowledge and skills in planning for adequate transportation for food shoppers;
- ☛ lack of financing to cover the cost of providing additional transportation facilities and equipment (e.g., buses, subway routes) for shoppers traveling to and from food outlets; and
- ☛ high cost of securing the necessary liability insurance for such a program.

As generally maintained, the respondents noted that the approaches most communities used to address these transportation barriers were generally costly and typically required extensive cooperation from local and federal agencies such as transit authorities. Most approaches involved efforts to get bus routes changed, to get taxicabs to lower their rates, or to get reduced transit service rates for travelers with evidence of food purchases. Other projects described by the respondents sought to provide transportation directly through a fleet system—that is, the procurement of a fleet of vehicles to transport customers to and from the food access site. Still another option mentioned was the use of “food trucks” to bring food directly to consumers in their neighborhoods.

As noted in the literature, the respondents also claimed that the poor location of food outlets frequently results from logistical impediments to transportation. Many of the respondents’ comments regarding the location of these outlets addressed this issue of placing the food venue nearer to the consumer or bringing the consumer to the food source. In discussing shopper transportation enhancements, many of the respondents recommended that food venues that are not situated near available public transportation be relocated closer to major transit routes and/or that new outlets be developed in those areas. They further stressed the importance of fully apprising local decision makers and city planners of matters such as the expected ridership on specific routes, round-trip travel time from shoppers’ homes to the food outlets, and the demographics of the service population.

As was frequently noted by the respondents in discussing other food access improvement strategies, shopper transportation enhancement initiatives were often mentioned as being implemented in conjunction with other strategies such as supermarket development and farmers’ markets, which bring food venues nearer to food consumers. The respondents noted that the success of these latter types of food access improvement efforts was often dependent upon and

enhanced by the provision or improvement of transportation options for elderly or low-income residents. Such services were themselves enhanced by public education initiatives targeted toward community members to increase their awareness of transportation services or to gather support for these services from local officials. The role and involvement of food policy councils was also noted as critical to the success of shopper transportation enhancements as a means of eliminating barriers to food access.

Brief descriptions of exemplary shopper transportation enhancement projects are summarized in **Exhibit E**.

Exhibit E

Exemplary Shopper Transportation Enhancement Initiatives Described by the Study Respondents

Project One:

As noted by one of the respondents, a highly rated farmers' market (score of 12) in Charleston, South Carolina, worked closely with the local food policy council to get a bus route changed to accommodate low-income residents' efforts to travel to and from grocery outlets.

Project Two:

A respondent described the case of a Miami, Florida, community that was concerned that its elderly and low-income residents were poorly served by public transportation systems, particularly in terms of facilitating their access to grocery outlets. In response, the community negotiated a cooperative agreement with the city's taxicab companies to lower their rates for shoppers transportation to and from designated food access facilities. The resulting program was moderately successful; it received a success rating of 9.

Project Three:

Another respondent spoke of a community-based effort originating in Sumter County, South Carolina. A farmers' cooperative was established to sell fresh produce to consumers in nearby cities. This group was noted as having overcome, with limited success, several major obstacles, including obtaining sufficient working capital, securing a fleet of refrigerated trucks to transport their produce, purchasing sufficient liability insurance, and competing with local supermarkets. The program received a success rating of 6.

Grocery Delivery Services and Home Grocery Shopping

Grocery delivery or home grocery shopping services are relatively recent phenomena. They have limited yet growing usage by populations generally identified as underserved, but the impact of these shopping services as food access improvement strategies has been minimal. This is primarily because of these initiatives' increasing reliance on computer or sophisticated electronic technology, which are often unavailable to residents of underserved communities. Notwithstanding, the literature suggests that these services will gain in their potential to improve food access generally and that some of that potential may eventually filter down to meet the needs of residents of underserved communities.

Findings from the Literature

Although home delivery currently accounts for less than 1% of supermarket sales, projections are that in 5 to 10 years they will generate about 20% of such sales (Andrews, 1996). According to Heufelder (1996), 36% of U.S. consumers have expressed a willingness to pay for home delivery, and a fee of about ten dollars was viewed as acceptable payment for such services. Moreover, growth in home delivery is expected to come primarily from computer rather than telephone orders (Andrews, 1996). In a survey of 500 shoppers conducted by the Food Marketing Institute in 1995, approximately 14% of consumers indicated that their supermarkets offered home delivery ("Old Idea, New Technology," 1995).

Home grocery shopping is another recent phenomenon that lends itself to high-tech innovations and the familiar brand names associated with nonperishable, grocery products ("Profs Refute Claims," 1996). In effect, consumers select the food items they want from printed or computerized catalogue listings and place their orders directly, either by modem, e-mail, or telephone (again, typically using a credit card for payment). Delivery is made directly to the home. Presently, most users of home shopping services tend to be "baby boomers," people now in their mid-to-late forties, with two-income households and access to computer or other electronic technology in their homes. Another significant group of consumers who take advantage of this service include the elderly, particularly the disabled elderly ("Home Shopping More Popular," 1996). Many grocery industry experts believe that home grocery shopping will skyrocket with the development of interactive television; estimates are that 30% of households will be connected to interactive television by 2005 ("Peapod Doesn't Sell Groceries," 1995).

Findings from the Qualitative Study

The findings of this study suggest the need for additional research on some of the more innovative and less frequently utilized strategies for addressing food access problems. The use of home delivery services as a food access improvement strategy, for example, does not seem to be widespread, although published accounts and respondent comments indicate that it can work

quite effectively. Moreover, with the advent of more inexpensive and user-friendly technology, home shopping is likely to become the wave of the future. During our interviews with this group of experts, home delivery services as a strategy to address food access concerns was mentioned only once by a sole respondent. Moreover, the program described, located in a rural community, was judged not to be very successful (rated 5 out of 15). This particular delivery service was offered by a struggling farmers' market, which was only in operation during the spring and summer months. The organizers of the market implemented the delivery service as a means of improving their profit margins, believing that by offering such door-to-door services they could charge more for their products. Despite the market's failure to be as successful or profitable as the organizers might have wished, the respondent who discussed this initiative generally viewed home delivery as a viable strategy for improving food access.

Food Policy Councils

Similar to that on grocery delivery and home grocery shopping services, the literature reveals that utilization of food policy councils as a strategy for improving underserved communities' access to food is a new development. Similar to those offered about food shopper transportation services, the respondents' comments about food policy councils were typically noted in conjunction with other strategies as a means of enhancing existing or budding initiatives.

Findings from the Literature

Although the body of literature on food policy councils is scarce, a series of reports are available that describe the activities and experiences of four councils created prior to the start of the Local Food System Project (LFSP): the Food and Agriculture Task Force of Philadelphia (PA), the Knoxville (TN) Food Policy Council, the Onondaga County Food System Council of Syracuse (NY), and the St. Paul (MN) Food and Nutrition Commission (Dahlberg, 1992, 1993a, 1993b, 1995). The reports show several variations and similarities in the purposes, organizational structures, approaches, and priorities of these four councils as well as problems affecting their long-term viability.

For example, the Onondaga County Food System Council, the second such council created in the U.S. and currently the nation's only county food policy council, recently spearheaded a study of grocery store availability, needs, and opportunities in inner-city Syracuse in collaboration with the city's Retail Task Force. Similarly, the Knoxville Food Policy Council helped to improve access to food for that city's inner-city poor by serving a catalytic role in effecting bus route changes to more conveniently transport these residents to and from supermarkets.

The efficiency, effectiveness, and scope of food policy councils and the LFSP have never been qualitatively nor quantitatively examined. However, an evaluation of the LFSP will most

likely be conducted prior to or shortly after the expiration of the Kellogg Foundation grant. In the interim, given adequate resources, operational authority, and community mandates as well as strong support from the highest levels of local and municipal governments, these organizations may offer promise as catalysts for effecting food access improvements and capacity-building in underserved urban and rural communities alike.

Findings from the Qualitative Study

The infrequent mention of the role of food policy councils in the respondents' discussion of nationwide efforts to improve food access is an indication that these entities are not specifically perceived by the respondents as a strategy in themselves. Rather, they viewed the establishment and utilization of food policy councils as a means to implement and/or enhance other food access strategies. The role of food policy councils was typically mentioned in conjunction with their involvement in efforts to educate residents of underserved communities, and communities-at-large, about the benefits and potentials of developing new supermarkets, renovating existing dilapidated ones, establishing farmers' markets and food cooperatives, as well as other creating other community-based food outlets.

CHAPTER VI

SUPPLEMENTARY FINDINGS FROM THE RESPONDENT INTERVIEWS

This chapter reports findings related to factors identified by the respondents as leading to the success or failure of community food access improvement efforts. It also details the respondents' views on the specific challenges facing these efforts and offers both their opinions of and recommendations for counter measures to ameliorate these challenges. Additionally, the respondents' comments on the nature and effectiveness of the food access technical assistance provided to communities in need are shared, as are their views on the role of local governments in improving underserved communities' access to nutritious, affordable food.

Respondent Comments on Critical Factors Leading to the Success or Failure of Food Access Improvement Efforts

Elements of Success

The respondents were asked to indicate the single most important step they believed underserved communities must take to successfully improve their access to nutritious and affordable food. Their comments fell into the following categories:

- Most of the comments (22%) emphasized the primary importance of pre-implementation research and planning. The respondents further maintained that in order to develop a successful plan of action for tackling food access problems, persons living in underserved communities must first accurately assess the nature and scope of their local food access problems, identify food access resource persons and organizations, and enlist the assistance of key players in the field for technical and other support.
- The next most frequently mentioned point (19%) focused on the essentiality of efforts to coalesce community support around the issue of improving food access. In this regard, input and support from as many community residents as possible and from local government, civic organizations, food producers, food retailers, other business leaders, and transportation officials were seen as vital.
- Fourteen percent (14%) of the respondents' comments stressed the primary need for underserved communities to develop an atmosphere that "welcomes" business and promotes competition in order to draw retail and public food outlets to it.

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- Eleven percent (11%) of the comments indicated that underserved communities must above all support existing food venues in their locales—outlets such as neighborhood supermarkets, cooperatives, and farmers' or public markets—by patronizing and collaborating with these businesses to enhance their adequacy and responsiveness to local consumers and improve safety conditions in the areas surrounding them.

The one common element among the more successful food access improvement programs described by these expert respondents was that each was able to generate, utilize, and maintain broad community support. In the respondents' view, for an initiative to succeed in either rural or urban settings, the neighbors and residents of a community had to bond together to solve their collective problems of food access. This factor was noted as particularly important in the more sparsely populated rural communities. Another common success trait was an emphasis on shared responsibility with regard to operations, management, and quality control. This was seen as vital not only to the process of launching food access improvement projects in underserved communities but also to sustaining them.

Failure Factors

The respondents were also asked to identify the one condition they believed most often led to unsuccessful food access improvement efforts in underserved communities. Their comments fell into the following categories:

- The majority of the responses (22%) highlighted the problem of community apathy, noting that by patronizing inadequate food outlets, residents of underserved communities create the perception that there is no demand for bigger and higher quality food retail businesses in their area.
- Sixteen percent (16%) of the respondents' comments indicated that the worst failures came about when community members perceived food access as a static issue and not as an ongoing concern.
- In 14% of the comments, the respondents specifically discouraged communities from over-reliance on supermarket development as a means of eliminating problems of food access; instead, they stressed that underserved communities should be creative and consider alternative strategies or combinations of strategies to ensure success.
- Community members' misperception of the problem of food access as one limited to members of a certain racial or cultural group or limited to members of the lower socioeconomic classes alone was identified as a significant failing in 13.5% of the

respondents' comments.

- Failure to consider the economic hurdles commonly encountered in food access projects was noted in another 13.5% of the comments as being a critical mistake. These respondents stressed the importance of eliminating restrictive zoning and business regulations and keeping utility rates for food businesses low.
- Another group of respondents' comments (11%) warned communities not to acquiesce to the agendas of politicians, large corporations, or advocates from national groups in planning their approach to local food access challenges.
- In another 11% of the comments, the respondents maintained that communities should primarily avoid attempting to tackle the issue in piecemeal, individualized fashion. These respondents emphasized the need to unite the community—its residents, politicians, business leaders, retailers, farmers, transportation officials, and other significant parties—in a broad coalition to eliminate impediments to food access.

The respondents were also queried to determine their views on the relationship between the success of various food access strategies and the number of impediments encountered in implementing them. Correlational analysis of their responses revealed no relationship between a strategy's success and the number of impediments encountered. However, the respondents noted that the food access programs with which they were involved or that they had experience with typically faced at least two or more impediments. For example, some of these experts mentioned that the community-based strategies, particularly the CDC-initiated supermarket development joint ventures, urban agricultural initiatives, and the development of public markets, tended to struggle most frequently with the lack of community support for food access improvement efforts as well as the lack of an advocacy group or person who championed these causes. The lack of a sound economic base, limited transportation options for food-shopping residents, and concerns over public safety were additional issues barring the success of programs aimed at improving food access. Many of the solutions to these problems involved getting outside assistance (i.e., technical, funding, marketing, or other forms of aid) from local, federal, or national agencies and organizations, and launching informational campaigns to expand community support for food access improvement efforts.

Respondent Comments on Food Access Technical Assistance

Other interview questions sought the respondents' opinions about the kinds of technical assistance they believed were most effective in helping underserved communities improve their access to nutritious, affordable food.

The technical assistance needs identified were described as involving five different approaches:

- (1) assistance in procuring financing;
- (2) research assistance;
- (3) community development and empowerment support;
- (4) nutrition education; and
- (5) program coordination and advice.

These types of assistance were also described as being geared toward providing underserved areas with sources of affordable and nutritious food by preparing communities through financial, educational, business, and other means to develop new food outlets or expand existing ones.

The first approach addresses the monetary demands of establishing a food source. This involves assistance in grant writing for resource and economic development, cost-benefit analysis of business services, and help in establishing electronic debit card systems to facilitate optimal utilization of food stamps in the new outlets.

Second, assistance of a research nature was described as involving information gathering, needs assessment, and help in conducting feasibility studies. These efforts also included assistance in gathering information on the demographics of targeted communities as well as reputable development firms, community funding issues, market feasibility, and information referral resources.

Third, community development and empowerment support included program development and assessment activities aimed at addressing community food access needs, problems, and program feasibility. Other assistance entailed creating viable business-community partnerships and contracts, improving communication between food source development players and community and consumer groups. This approach also involved setting up a dynamic business structure that can successfully engage in proposal writing, management, training, and economic and food access policy development.

The final two approaches to technical assistance consisted of information dissemination and coordination efforts. Educational technical assistance was described as encompassing approaches such as nutrition, gardening, and business and leadership skills development workshops (i.e., how to establish a cooperative, how to prepare fresh food, etc.). Lastly, program coordination and advice were described as those general consultation services including, but not limited to:

assistance in coordinating public and business meetings; devising food access improvement strategies; understanding real estate information; and disseminating nutrition information.

Usefulness of Technical Assistance

Most respondents shared opinions about how useful they believed the various types of technical assistance were for the communities with which they had experience or had been involved. For example, several indicated that behind-the-scenes technical assistance in procuring financing for food access improvement projects was particularly useful not only because it saves communities time but also because it provides them with vital insights and experience in the process of procuring funding for food source development and it demands a high degree of community involvement. The benefits of research assistance, according to the respondents, could be found in its capacity to provide a context for understanding the food access issues and needs of a community. Community development and empowerment support was deemed useful because of the shared understanding and sense of direction the respondents believed it gives communities that are actively pursuing solutions to food access problems. For a more detailed listing of respondent's usefulness comments on technical assistance, refer to **Appendix G, *Profile of Field Experiences with Technical Assistance***.

Respondent Comments on the Role of Local Governments in Improving Underserved Communities' Access to Food

Another of the questions asked of the respondents was, "What should local officials be doing to help communities resolve their problems of food access?" Thus, the focus of the respondents' comments was on what should be done, not on what was actually being done in the field on the local levels. Five roles were delineated. These roles are listed below along with the percentage of respondents who identified each:

- (1) Increased leadership and advocacy in food access improvement efforts were mentioned most frequently (28%) and regarded as the primary areas of focus for local governments.
- (2) The local governments' provision of financial assistance was identified by (18%) of the respondents.
- (3) Involvement in creating climates conducive to local food access improvement initiatives (18%) shared second place (in terms of frequency of mention).
- (4) The need for local governments to provide expanded technical assistance to food source developers was third (10%) according to the respondents, who noted that local governments should focus on providing expertise in grant writing, program

development, planning, coordination, and evaluation of food access improvement efforts.

- (5) Providing education and training about food access needs and concerns at the local level was the least mentioned role (9%), and critical comments noted that local government officials should adopt the roles of liaisons and facilitators who both recognize and communicate the needs of their communities to food retailers as well as help create viable partnerships that respond to local food access problems.

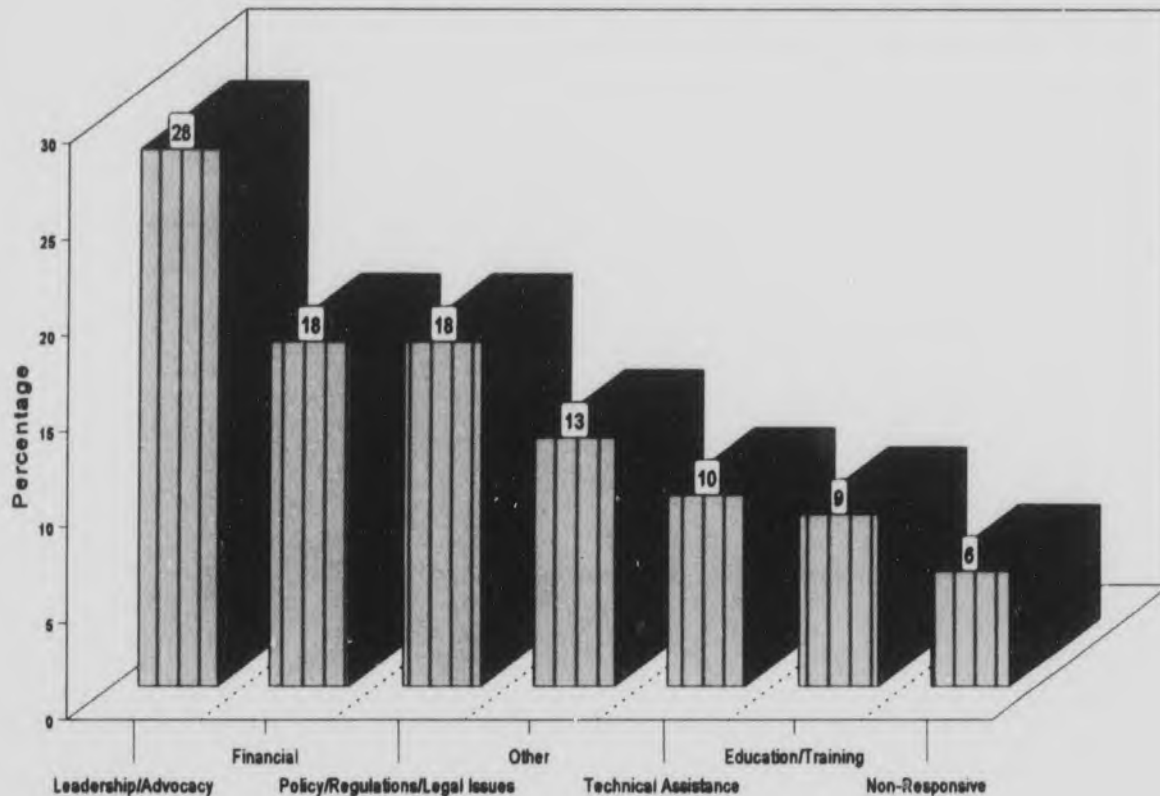
Table 6.1 summarizes the details of the respondents' comments and the relative frequency of their mention of these specific roles. **Figure 6.1** provides a graphic representation of the relative proportion of the respondents' mention of these roles.

Table 6.1
Preferred Roles of Local Government Officials: Summary and Relative Proportion of Responses

Preferred Role of Local Government	Relative Proportion
<p><u>Leadership/Advocacy</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Serve as liaison between government and business persons; act as facilitator (i.e., between the various community groups, CDCs, and community action agencies) ● Help regional organizations or governments develop a stronger voice; help empower local government (i.e., provide resources) ● Address site consolidation issues ● Encourage county agents to become involved in local food processing ● Create partnerships with food distribution facilities ● Create climate for developing zoning laws and tax abatements favorable to streamlining approval process for such projects ● Coordinate and participate in meetings with local government and grocery store officials; coordinate projects with developers ● Recognize needs of communities and deal effectively with retailers ● Encourage schools to participate in available food access programs ● Create partnerships to respond to food access problems (i.e., with Chamber of Commerce, business leaders) 	<p>28%</p>
<p><u>Financial</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Work with local leaders and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) to make resources available for programs in research/outreach ● Provide and maintain grants to community development corporations, community volunteers; provide funding (i.e., federal, grant assistance, money for land acquisitions); provide tax incentives ● Plan and hold community meetings to inform public about ways to secure funds for gaining access to nutritious and affordable foods 	<p>18%</p>

Preferred Role of Local Government	Relative Proportion
<p><u>Policy/Regulations/Legal Issues</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Enforce health standards ● Address permitting ● Lift rules and regulations restricting development on Indian reservations; develop and facilitate partnerships by relaxing red tape and regulations ● Give land to government or make public land available to establish nonprofit farmers' markets; support and facilitate farmers' markets; assure that community gardens have adequate water; provide location for food co-op warehouses ● Formulate policy to encourage community development ● Donate land to nonprofit organizations and pass legislation so that local groups can establish farmers' markets and community gardens; restructure zoning requirements to community gardens, farmers' markets, and support cluster housing ● Increase law enforcement to prevent the selling of products from the back of trucks ● Revise transportation policies, scheduling (i.e., investigate day loops) 	18%
<p><u>Technical Assistance</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provide TA for economic development and for the creation and implementation of strategic plans ● Evaluate projects in terms of their benefits to communities; eliminate special interests ● Make grant writing personnel available ● Explain the complexity of the food system 	10%
<p><u>Education/Training</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Describe and address the issue of lack of access to foods and include initiatives to resolve it in economic development plans ● Provide consumer education ● Educate themselves on the barriers to food access and work with the community to overcome the barriers 	9%
<p><u>Other</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Create a package of incentives that will encourage urban renewal projects (i.e., grocery store development) ● Address barriers (i.e., public safety, poor location) 	13%

FIGURE 6.1
Preferred Roles of Local Government in Increasing Food Access



The respondents' comments further revealed a shared concern for both levels of government, local and federal, to be more proactive in addressing the impediments to food access presented by municipal, state, and federal ordinances, regulations, and policies that make efforts to improve underserved communities access to nutritious and affordable food disproportionately cumbersome, expensive, and frustrating. In this regard, the respondents' overall expectation was that government officials at both levels would make themselves more available to mitigate disputes and to develop, implement, and monitor policies that would facilitate broader acquisition of key resources such as land and building sites for food outlets in these communities. This was noted as being particularly important to supermarket development, food cooperatives, and community agricultural initiatives.

CHAPTER VII

LESSONS LEARNED

The review of the literature and interviews conducted demonstrate that a number of communities have developed strategies to address barriers to access and increase the availability of nutritious, affordable food for residents. This report highlighted some of the advantages and drawbacks of each strategy.

Modeling an Approach for Improving Food Access

The lessons learned from this study can be meaningfully assembled into a discernable model for organizing efforts to facilitate underserved communities' successful access to nutritious and affordable food. Such a model has its foundation in the many common themes and patterns of activities and techniques emerging from the literature and supported by the insights shared by this sampling of food access experts. Overall, the findings of the present research suggest that the model works best within a context that emphasizes community empowerment and offers technical, financial, research, and program development assistance as well as nutrition education. The three major phases of this model are: the food access readiness stage, the mobilization stage, and the development and implementation stage.

In the first phase, communities are encouraged to engage in a variety of activities that help prepare them for the implementation of a particular food access strategy. These include efforts aimed at:

- (1) better understanding the dynamics of the community's perceptions and feelings about food access as an issue and dispelling community apathy about existing inadequate food outlets;
- (2) conducting a needs assessment or marketing research to determine the extent of the food access problem;
- (3) gathering feasibility data about a specific strategy;
- (4) fostering a positive access climate and attitude among community members, local government, civic organizations, food producers, potential food retailers, business leaders, and other important constituents (e.g., transportation officials); and

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- (5) determining the community's level of technical resource capability, including skills in proposal writing, knowledge of funding resources, knowledge of system-related requirements, and other areas.

Technical assistance offered at this phase might include the conduct of background research on food access issues and community education as well as assistance in formulating comprehensive strategies for community development and empowerment.

In the second phase of community mobilization around a food access strategy, underserved communities are primarily involved in efforts aimed at securing leadership and advocacy for an improvement initiative. These include such activities as:

- (1) formulating partnerships with critical organizations or agencies such as CDCs, food policy councils, and/or city agencies (e.g., transit authority and government officials);
- (2) delineating division of responsibility among community activists; and
- (3) securing finances, land, facilities or other needed resources.

At this phase, communities were found to benefit most from technical assistance leading to the identification of funding sources as well as assistance in the navigation of regulatory and legal waters.

In the development and implementation phase, plans for implementing a strategy for improving access to food are finalized and put into effect. In this phase, for example, the supermarket or farmers' market opens its doors, the community garden is planted, or the food co-op takes its first orders. At this phase, communities benefit most from technical assistance that enhances their operational and management capacity or from advice from other groups in other communities engaged in similar initiatives.