Analyzing Healthy, Local Food Systems: A Case Study of Owensboro, Kentucky

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ANALYZING HEALTHY, LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS:
A CASE STUDY OF OWENSBORO, KENTUCKY

THESIS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Science in the College of Agriculture at the University of Kentucky

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

ANALYZING HEALTHY, LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS:
A CASE STUDY OF OWENSBORO, KENTUCKY

Analyzing Healthy, Local Food Systems: A Case Study of Owensboro, Kentucky
Across the US, support is ever-growing for the local food movement. This growing trend promotes food security, supports farming families, ensures universal access to safe and healthy food products, enhances local economies, and encourages environmental and social well-being. People around the US are implementing sustainable local food systems as a means of meeting their individual community’s needs. While this movement is being popularized dramatically around the world, many cities and regions have yet to address it. This study reviews the existing literature on local food system models in an effort to answer the research question: What are the “ingredients” of a healthy local food system? The local food system of Owensboro, KY was analyzed via interviews with key players in its food system. In addition, experts in this field at the state level were also interviewed to understanding the functions of and the degree of support for local food systems in KY. Recommendations were then made for the city of Owensboro on how to further enhance its local food system into one of greater vibrancy and overall health.

KEYWORDS: local food, food system, food movement, sustainability, food policy council

Callie Hayden
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ANALYZING HEALTHY, LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS:
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Across the United States, support is ever-growing for local food systems. Not only is support for local farming families increasing, developing relationships with the growers is also an emerging trend. The focus on local food systems promotes food security within communities, which “seeks to enhance the capacity of communities to ensure universal access to safe, healthy, and culturally appropriate food” (Guptill & Wilkins, 2002, p. 39). According to Feenstra (1997), “the way food is grown, distributed, and eaten profoundly affects the environmental, social, spiritual, and economic well-being of the community” (p. 28). While the concept of local food systems continues to gain backing from Americans, the definition of the term remains ambiguous. In a 2010 publication, the USDA declared that there is no universally accepted definition of “local” food. In the 2008 Food, Conservation, and Energy Act, the US Congress affirmed that “the total distance that a product can be transported and still be considered ‘a locally or regionally produced agricultural food product’ is less than 400 miles from its origin or within the state in which it is produced” (Martinez et al., 2010). Despite the uncertainty of the term itself, the importance of supporting local food systems is gathering in intensity.

Setting and Purpose of Study

This study reviews the existing literature on local food system models in an effort to gain greater clarity of what the “ingredients” of a healthy local food system are. A case study is used to explore Owensboro, Kentucky, a city located in Daviess County in the western part of the state. The city of Owensboro has a population of just over 57,000, with a metropolitan population of nearly 115,000 (“About Owensboro,” 2013). With a
favorable climate, fertile soil, and availability of natural resources, Daviess County is home to many farming operations. According to the USDA Atlas of Rural and Small Town America, 1,008 farms existed in the county, and 87.8% of the land was in farms in 2007 (USDA, 2013). As a region, Western Kentucky (specifically, the Owensboro Grain Company) has been a major player in developing soy biodiesel as an alternative to foreign oil. Also, the area is very involved in the budding biomedical field as interest in and demand for plant-based pharmaceutical products continues to increase. Additionally, the popularity of agritourism is widespread in the region. Across the state, farming operations have expanded their foci to encompass the entertaining and educational values of their daily work. Families and schools can visit agritourism locations to experience farm life in a recreational manner while gaining the educational aspects, thus boosting the agricultural and tourism sectors. As of 2007, four farms existed in Daviess County with agritourism or recreational services (Green River Area Development District, 2012).

Interviews were conducted with key players in the food system of Owensboro, as well as with people familiar with the food system of the Commonwealth as a whole. The purpose of the interviews in Owensboro was to ascertain how the city compares to other cities and regions demonstrating high levels of support and involvement in local food systems. Interviewing people at the state level was intended to reveal the stance of Kentucky as a whole in terms of supporting local food systems. Recommendations are then made for Owensboro on how to further enhance its local food system into one of greater vibrancy and overall health.

Currently there is no generally accepted definition of a local food system. In fact, the Merriam-Webster dictionary has no listing of the term. However, in layman’s terms, a
general food system simply refers to the processes involved in feeding a population. These include growing, harvesting, processing, packaging, transporting, marketing, consumption, and disposal of food and food-related items. This study examines more than just a common food system. More specifically, healthy, local food systems are the focus. Scholars and experts have disagreed on how to characterize this term, and many labels have been applied, such as “community supported agriculture,” “sustainable agriculture,” and “ecoagriculture,” each of which has its own definition. However, most of these concepts refer to a diet that is more “socially, economically, and environmentally sound” (Bodwitch et al., 2008, p. 5).

**Background**

For the purpose of this study, a local food system will be defined according to Thomas Lyson’s (2004) definition of civic agriculture. In his book *Civic Agriculture: Reconnecting Farm, Food, and Community*, the term refers to the rebirth of locally based agriculture and food production… activities (that) are tightly linked to a community’s social and economic development. The term ‘civic agriculture’ references the emergence and growth of community-based agriculture and food production activities that not only meet consumer demands for fresh, safe, and locally produced foods but create jobs, encourage entrepreneurship, and strengthen community identity… Civic agriculture brings together production and consumption activities within communities and offers consumers real alternatives to the commodities produced, processed, and marketed by large agribusiness firms (p. 1-2).
Lyson (2004) writes that civic agriculture provides not only a source of income to farming families and the food processors, but that it additionally contributes to the “health and vitality of communities in a variety of social, economic, political, and cultural ways.” For instance, agricultural literacy is gained by consumers through their links with producers. Also, money spent on local agricultural products is retained in those communities longer than money spent in supermarket chains (p. 62). Producers in local food systems become committed to “developing and strengthening an economically, environmentally, and socially sustainable system of agriculture and food production that relies on local resources and serves local markets and consumers” (p. 63).

Today, the United States is largely dependent on imported food. There isn’t a region in the nation that has a sustainable food system, one which utilizes methods that do not use up natural resources. Sadly, many regions produce none of their own consumable products. The grocery stores in America are filled with food products that have been shipped from thousands of miles away. Most consumers are not aware of the external costs that come with the long shipments of goods. The great quantities of fossil fuels used to transport food items long distances and the subsequent increase in greenhouse emissions caused from the burning of the fossil fuels are very costly to the environment.

The advantage of buying local products obviously cuts down on these emissions and lessens the harm to the environment. A 2001 study by the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University calculated the food miles of produce arriving in the Chicago, IL terminal market, a distribution center for surrounding groceries and supermarkets. A food mile is “the distance food travels from where it is
grown or raised to where it is ultimately purchased by the consumer or end user” (Pirog et al., 2001, p. 1). Results showed that, in 1998, produce arriving by truck traveled an average distance of 1,518 miles to reach Chicago. This distance was compared to three Iowa local food projects in which producers sold to institutions such as hospitals, restaurants, and conference centers. This local food traveled on average 44.6 miles. The saving of fuel and the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions in the local and regional food systems was calculated: “the conventional system used 4-17 times more fuel and released 5-17 times more CO₂ from the burning of fuel than the Iowa-based regional and local systems” (Pirog et al., 2001, p. 2). The energy efficiency of local food systems is illustrated by this study.

Numerous other reasons to support local food are detailed by Cat Lazaroff, writing for the Organic Consumers Association. Major US cities that are highly dependent on imported food are vulnerable to any act that could impede transportation, such as oil shortages or terrorist attacks. In addition, long travel distances create opportunities for food contamination. Artificial additives and preservatives are required to keep food from spoiling during transportation (Lazaroff, 2012). Rather than harvesting fruits and vegetables at their peak ripeness, products that are to be shipped must be picked early and infused with chemicals to allow the items to withstand the journey and the shelf time at supermarkets.

Communities that encourage and enable consumers to buy locally-grown and processed foods gain many benefits, including “a more diverse variety of regional crops, cheaper foods that avoid added costs from intermediate handlers and shippers, and a boon for the local economy as money spent on food goes to local growers and merchants”
In addition, consumers may choose local products simply for the freshness and bolder flavors.

A brief history of the American food system reveals how the country became involved in and is now dependent on the global food system, and explains the emerging local food movement that is challenging people to focus more on their own communities’ potentials for producing food.

According to Martinez et al. (2010), “nearly 40% of Americans lived on farms in the early 1900s, compared with a mere 1% in 2000. Much of the food bought and consumed in the US was locally grown.” Because of their direct contact with producers, consumers were knowledgeable of the quality and origins of their food (Martinez et al., 2010, p. 1-2). By World War I, countless industries became dominated by huge firms using specialized equipment to produce unheard of amounts of standardized goods at a cost that small farmers just could not meet. Sadly, “craft production,” the traditional ways of farming that people had demonstrated for generations, morphed into mass production. Following World War II, though, big business had become the main proponent of military production. At this time, tractors, synthetic fertilizers, and pesticides emerged on the scene, and as the prevalence of these increased, the number of farms decreased. With better technology, less land and fewer farm hands were needed (Lyson, 2004).

As a result of the industrialization of agriculture, production has become vastly concentrated on a small number of very large farms. This has caused many regions that once were agriculturally active to all but lose farming operations. Additionally, farms all around the nation are becoming progressively more specialized. While farms a century ago produced a variety of fruits and vegetables and raised a number of different animals,
today’s farms often produce just one or two goods. Finally, the connections between local production and local consumption have vanished for the vast majority of commodities (Lyson, 2004). Rather than marketing local products, communities are shipping products great distances away and importing mega amounts of products.

Lyson (2004) writes that large-scale producers are responsible for an ever-growing amount of US food.

In 1997, very large farms, those generating over $500,000 a year in sales, comprised less than 3.6% of all farms in the country. However, they operated nearly 20% of the farmland and accounted for 56% of all farm sales. At the top of the heap are the mega farms… These million-dollar farms represent only 1.4% of all US farms, but they produce almost 42% of all farm products sold (Lyson, 2004, p. 34).

As a result, small farmers are rapidly being pushed out of business. Unable to compete with these massive operations, the number of farming families has dwindled exceedingly. This concentration of the food system has allowed decision-making to fall to just a handful of firms. “A small set of individuals control an empire that accounts for most of the products we see on supermarket shelves” (Lyson, 2004, p. 60).

Now, a new attitude toward agriculture is emerging across the country. Rather than follow the conventional mode of the global food system, individuals are cultivating a more “organic” approach to agricultural production. Consumers are actively learning about the food system and where their food comes from. People are making efforts to raise their own food items and to support local farmers. Relationships are being forged
between consumers and producers as local economies are gaining boosts and communities are coming together around food.

Civic engagement with the food system is taking place throughout the country as citizens and organizations grapple with providing food for the hungry, establishing community-based food businesses, and organizing food policy councils. Policies and programs at the local level that support the development of farmers’ markets, community-supported agriculture (CSAs), organic production, agricultural districts, community kitchens, community gardens, and all sorts of direct marketing and on-farm processing will foster a more community-friendly and sustainable system of production and consumption (Lyson, 2004, p. 103).

Other venues for supporting local food include farm stands, ‘pick-your-own’ operations, foraging and gleaning programs, and even simply home gardening. “While diverse, these efforts have one thing in common: they are all local problem-solving activities organized around agriculture and food” (Lyson, 2004, p. 103).

Not only is supporting local food appealing to consumers, but the government is backing the movement as well. There are a growing number of programs and policies that support and encourage local food systems. Existing federal policies include the Community Food Project Grants Program, the WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program, Senior Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program, Federal State Marketing Improvement Program, National Farmers’ Market Promotion Program, Specialty Crop Block Grant Program, and the Community Facilities Program.

State and local policies include those related to farm-to-institution procurement, promotion of local food markets, incentives for low-income consumers to shop at
farmers’ markets, and creation of State Food Policy Councils to discuss opportunities and potential impact of government intervention (Martinez, et al. 2010, p. iv-v).
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Discussion of Food Policy Councils

An emerging approach that communities and regions are employing to encourage local food systems is establishing food policy councils. Many of the other methods of supporting local food, such as farmers’ markets and farm-to-school programs, are the products of these councils, which track changes in the local food system, lobby for farmland protection, point citizens towards local food options, and help create incentives for local food businesses (Lazaroff, 2012). An explanation of food policy councils is helpful to illustrate the widespread initiatives and successes that these entities are accomplishing across the nation.

Food policy councils (FPCs) originated in the 1980s in the US and are becoming very popular entities in states and regions around the country. Traditionally, the food system is directed by a range of government departments that lack coordination or recognition of impacts across food sectors. Because of such fragmentation of food policy, stakeholders in the food system are usually quite disconnected, which leads to problems of food access, security, economic equality and health (“Los Angeles Food Policy Council”). According to the North American Food Policy Council webpage, “Food Policy Councils bring together stakeholders from various food-related sectors to examine how the food system is operating and to develop recommendations on how to improve it.” While FPCs may assume a number of forms, they are usually commissioned by state or local governments or are the results of grassroots efforts. Members come from all areas of the food sector, “including farmers, gardeners, chefs, food processors and wholesalers, farm and food worker advocates, grocers, consumers, public health
practitioners, anti-hunger and food security advocates, and government officials” (“Los Angeles Food Policy Council”). FPCs seek to educate the public and officials, to shape public policy, to improve collaboration between existing programs, and to initiate novel programs. Examples of these new programs include “mapping and publicizing local food resources, creating transit routes to connect underserved areas with full-service grocery stores, persuading government agencies to purchase food from local farmers, and organizing farmers’ markets and community gardens” (“North American Food Policy Council”).

Not only are FPCs vital in community networking, they also serve as community educators. As Schiff (2008) so aptly writes, “food policy councils can act as a ‘hub of knowledge’ or a resource and learning center for those interested in food systems work and activities” (p.225). FPCs provide public education about food issues and how to increase food security. They also educate government officials and organizations as well as public and private businesses as to how they have a relationship in the food system and how they can contribute to sustainability. While the structure, policies, and practices of food policy councils are still developing, these units are becoming ever-popular. Currently, there are over 100 FPCs in the United States (“North American Food Policy Council”).

Not only can FPCs work together with local governments to promote urban agriculture, Kaufman & Bailkey (2000) write that these councils can influence the federal government as well. FPCs can urge the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to recognize urban farming as an important community-building activity and thus support it via grants and funding programs. For instance, the Community Development
Block Grant (CDBG) currently funds many small agriculture projects in cities. With the endorsement of FPCs, perhaps this source would choose to allocate more funds to the activities of urban farmers. Furthermore, FPCs can connect the EPA with those community gardeners who need funding and technical assistance to establish remediation sites for potential farming plots. This expensive prerequisite often hinders those who wish to partake in urban gardening, yet this aid could open opportunities for more people in a shorter time. Because the USDA, HUD, and the EPA have similar interests, FPCs can act as facilitators in the creation of pilot studies in various cities to ascertain success levels of certain agricultural endeavors.

A pilot program could provide support for a range of activities, including management, marketing and budget training for urban ag staff; providing start-up capital to individual operations; supporting the activities of citywide farming networks; providing interested nonprofits with incentives to form partnerships with knowledgeable urban agriculture groups; and encouraging university researchers to undertake studies directed at enhancing urban agriculture (Kaufman & Bailkey, 2000, 79-80).

Harper et al. (2009) suggest that FPCs are nudging local food policy into mainstream politics. “As the power of food policy councils at the local, county, and state levels builds, councils may be able to form a national coalition to take on larger national and structural issues” (p. 6). The authors write that FPCs are leading the way to a more democratized food system. The current system has failed in those neighborhoods and regions in which there is little or no political voice. FPCs have the power and influence to bring attention to these areas and ensure that these underserved people are noticed.
Therefore, the government, like consumers, is on board with supporting local food systems due to the benefits of these systems. Examples of positive outcomes are affirmative “economic development impacts, health and nutrition benefits, impacts on food security, and effects on energy use and greenhouse gas emissions (Martinez, et al., 2010, p. 42).” Also, supporting local producers is considered a means of preserving farmland since it permits communities to be formed in urbanizing areas, cultivar genetic development is preserved, and the quality of the environment is respected and sustained (Martinez, et al., 2010).

Because the primary function of food policy councils is to promote local food systems, many of the components that these councils deem as integral to local food systems has been touched upon in this discussion. While an actual council need not be present in order for a regional or community food system to be considered “local” or “healthy,” this is an option that many are choosing as a way to advance these food systems.

**Theoretical Background**

From this discussion on the development of food systems and some of the recognized components of such systems, two theories will now be examined to help with the understanding of the research question. Social capital and structural functionalism will provide the lens through which the components of a ‘healthy, local food system’ are assessed.

*Social Capital*

While the theory of social capital has gained much attention in the latter half of the twentieth century, this concept has existed for much longer. Popularized by such
social scientists as Putnam, Coleman, and Bourdieu and cited in countless studies, social capital can be applied in a number of ways. The concept is dependent on context. For example, Putnam’s focus is on the benefit to community, while Coleman and Bourdieu concentrate more on the individual level (Narayan & Cassidy, 2001). However, Putnam’s definition is widely accepted by academia: “Social capital refers to connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (Putman, 2000, p. 9). A central tenet of the theory is that social relationships are valuable. These connections, which exist between individuals and groups, contribute to productivity. Flora & Flora (2008) developed the *Community Capitals Framework* to depict how communities work, including social capital as a vital component of a sustainable community. Social capital is at least as important as the other types of capital essential for a viable community: financial, political, human, cultural, natural, and built. The differing feature of social capital is that the more it is used, the more it generates. More specifically, social capital is only present when it is shared.

Social capital can be categorized as either bridging or bonding connections. Bridging connections refer to the weak ties that unite individuals, organizations, groups, and even communities. Bonding social capital, on the other hand, involves the strong relationships that individuals share. Examples of bonding include sharing food and drink, story-telling, festivals, celebrations, games, and public art (Hustedde, 2009, p. 23). The relationships developed between individuals result in mutual benefits that may play a factor in social, physical, emotional, financial, and a number of other forms of well-being.
There are generally five facets that make up social capital. First, networking describes the various connections that are formed by the bonding and bridging relationships. Networks can be formed purposefully, yet sometimes connections are developed unintentionally. They also may be formal or informal. Regardless, this web of relationships constitutes community life. Secondly, trust is an aspect of social capital. This factor includes trust in political figures, the government, family, neighbors, businesses, and all others members of communities. Thirdly, reciprocity refers to the belief that others will respond to and/or return favors. Fourth, efficacy, both at the personal and group levels, implies the willingness to participate in community activities. Finally, social norms refer to the mutual understanding, unwritten instructions and shared values for interacting with others. These five components of social capital work collectively to enhance community life. This study focuses specifically on the aspects of networking (including both bridging and bonding), efficacy, and social norms.

In his book *Bowling Alone* (2000), Putnam explains why social capital is important:

First, social capital allows citizens to resolve collective problems more easily… People often might all be better off if they cooperate, with each doing her share… Second, social capital greases the wheels that allow communities to advance smoothly. Where people are trusting and trustworthy, and they are subject to repeated interactions with fellow citizens, everyday business and social transactions are less costly… A third way in which social capital improves our lot is by widening our awareness of the many ways in which our fates are linked. People who have active and trusting
connections to others… develop or maintain character traits that are good for the rest of society… When people lack connections to others, they are unable to test the veracity of their own views, whether in the give-and-take of casual conversation or in more formal deliberation. Without such an opportunity, people are more likely to be swayed by their worst impulses… The networks that constitute social capital also serve as conduits for the flow of helpful information that facilitates achieving our goals… Social capital also operates through psychological and biological processes to improve individuals’ lives… In measurable and well-documented ways, social capital makes an enormous difference in our lives (Putnam, 2000, p. 288-300).

Quite obviously, social capital must exist for a local food system to operate effectively. Because a food system is built on relationships between the producers, marketers, grocers, transporters, and consumers, clearly, the ideal local food system would contain a high level of social capital. As previously mentioned, the more that social capital is used, the more it generates. It can be assumed that the more social capital is present in a system, the more efficiently that system will work. Fortunately, the degree of social capital can be increased in a community. Once individuals recognize and embrace the importance of networking, efficacy, and the role of this principle as a social norm, a local food system has great potential for enhancement.

*Structural Functionalism*

The second theory to be considered is that of structural functionalism. In this study, the ingredients of a healthy local food system are examined. When exploring *how*
groups organize and function around food systems, the theory of structural functionalism is relevant. This theoretical framework posits that independent structures of society, each of which plays a specific function in societal maintenance, work together to promote solidarity and stability. Structures can refer to organizations and institutions such as health care, educational entities, businesses and nonprofits, or informal groups. Functions refer to their purposes, missions, and what they do in society. These structures form the basis of a social system. According to Merton (1957), social systems have manifest and latent functions, which are consequences of social pattern. Manifest functions are “intentional and recognized by participants in the system.” In contrast, latent functions are “neither intended nor recognized” (p. 51).

Hustedde (2009) provides a fine example of this theory in a case of an inner city neighborhood struggling to create a micro-enterprise business that will benefit local people. If one applied structural functionalism to community development practice, one would help the community analyze which organizations are committed to training, nurturing, and financing micro-enterprise development and what their latent functions might be. A functionalist-oriented practitioner is more likely to notice dysfunctions in organizations… A functionalist would also want to build links with broader social systems, such as external organizations, that could help the community’s micro-entrepreneurs to flourish. In essence, a functionalist would see structures as important components of capacity-building (p. 24).

A structural functionalist would see society as a complex system, whose parts work together. Considering Owensboro through this lens, the structures that make up the
local food system may include the farmers’ market, the farms themselves, groceries that market local products, any restaurants/schools/institutions that feature local foods, any nonprofits that promote the local food system, the media, health care and concerns, recreation, religion, and so on. The functions of these structures were determined from the interviews with people of Owensboro and will be discussed in detail later.

**Current Efforts to Describe the Local Food “Movement”**

With the growing support of local food and local producers, many efforts are being made to develop models for those communities wishing to join the movement. People at the national, regional, and state levels are producing manuals and models explaining the components of healthy food systems. The literature review began by searching Google images for “healthy food systems.” The purpose of utilizing the Google search engine was to pull models from across the nation, as well as to elicit models that are available to the public. Rather than use complicated models that only food systems specialists have access to or would understand, this study sought those that could be applied by the average American. For a model to be considered for the study, it had to, first and foremost, fulfill the search terms. In other words, models simply of “food systems” were not selected. Only those which specifically depicted a “healthy” food system were considered. Many models were encountered that portrayed similar ideas such as “fair food,” “food initiatives,” or “real food.” However, the focus remained on “healthy food systems.”

Secondly, the models had to be supported by a reputable association, one demonstrating academic and/or scientific integrity. For example, some of the models
selected for this study come from universities, extension agencies, and the American Dietetic Association. Obviously, all of these sources gain generally widespread acceptance and are backed by academic rigor.

Finally, models that were aesthetically pleasing, well-constructed, and easy to understand were chosen. Models with language unfamiliar to average people were rejected. The first five models matching the criteria that appeared in the results were selected. While the list used in this study is not an exhaustive inventory, it does represent models used by national, regional, and state-level organizations.

This line of research did not, however, reveal any models used by the state of Kentucky. Because nothing emerged from this approach, experts in the food policy realm were sought out.

Once the models were selected, information was obtained on each regarding how the models were developed and who was involved in these processes. Assessing the players in the creation of the models gives us a glimpse into the levels of expertise that went into forming each. Learning who contributed and which institutions were involved gives credibility to these models. The components included in these food system representations provide a clear understanding of what is meant by a “healthy local food system” from the around the US. The purposes for creating the models were documented, as well the challenges that emerged during their development.

While a conceptual model is helpful to allow visualization of the various components of a healthy local food system, it is not always necessary. These systems can certainly exist without such identifying schematics. However, for the purposes of this
study, models are examined to understand the descriptions of healthy local food systems around the nation.

The discussion of the selected models begins with Washington State University and the Whatcom County Food Network. With the initial goal of creating collaboration among the many organizations, agencies, and institutions that make up the Network, the model was developed by a committee of stakeholders in the local food system. Included on this committee were representatives from Extension, the food bank, the county health department, county planning, a farm-to-school program, and nonprofit organization. Twelve goals for improving the local food system are presented around the diagram, while the components of a food system are shown around the outer edge of the circle.

Figure 2.1: “Whatcom Food Network”
The Cooperative Development Institute (CDI) of the Northeast’s Center for Cooperative Business has published a 2010 poster entitled “It Takes Cooperatives to Build a Regional Food System.” The organization’s mission focuses on building a cooperative economy. CDI’s director, Noemi Giszpenc, indicated that the purpose of creating the model was to reveal the countless possibilities for cooperatives in the food system and to highlight the importance of structure and values being included in the businesses of the food system. She also explained the motivation behind developing the model. “Local is great, but we should be thinking on a regional level. In order to create a healthy food system, we must consider values and structure.”

She described our current food system as “messed up” due to the disconnect that has come between people and their food sources. Also, disengagement has been fashioned because a lot of people tend to be seeking financial gains rather than being concerned for the environment or community well-being. Ms. Giszpenc concluded by stressing the need to recognize the many different parts of the food system besides just farmers and consumers. The model was solely developed by the CDI. Condensing the information enough so that it would not seem too text heavy, while still being attention grabbing, was the greatest challenge to the developers
Next, Dr. Grace Peterson, an Extension agent from Louisiana State University AgCenter, developed a healthy local food system model from the knowledge she accumulated from years of working in this field. The model is currently used to educate a range of people, including those with low incomes, people in the medical field, and community members in general. Making the model “real and relevant” for people has been challenging to Dr. Peterson, and inspiring people to change what they eat is a mammoth task. However, going into communities and schools to create gardens and to set them up in such a way as to give people an entire food system experience is an approach that Dr. Peterson has found effective. The model has been used as a teaching instrument when coaching people to grow their own food and ultimately bring it to their own tables.
Figure 2.3: “Healthy Local Food System”

The American Dietetic Association (ADA) provided the next model. According to its 2007 Sustainable Food System Task Force Final Report, the ADA House of Delegates agreed that ADA members needed to be made more aware of sustainable food systems and encouraged to assume leadership roles in this field. A task force of eight members of the ADA was formed, and the model was developed within the document Healthy Land, Healthy People: Building a Better Understanding of Sustainable Food Systems for Food and Nutrition Professionals. This representation provided a couple of extra concepts not present on the other models. First, “social trends” are depicted as influencing the circular system of main elements. Trends are an outcome of social capital; without relationships and networks, trends would not form. The inclusion of this aspect further validates the belief that social capital is a factor of healthy local food system. Secondly, “research and
technology” appear on this model alone. While some of the others do include “education,” the structures of research and technology are exclusive to the ADA model.

Figure 2.4: The ADA Model of a Healthy Local Food System

The final selected model was published by the Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund (VSJF), an organization created by the Vermont legislature to accelerate the development of the state’s green economy. According to Erica Campbell, the director for the VSJF Farm to Plate program, a food system diagram was developed with input from over 1200 stakeholders around Vermont (personal communication, January 2013). More specifically, input for the models came from general and statewide forums, which were open to the public, focus groups and interviews with farmers and food business owners and workers, as well as interviews with nonprofit and government staff from a variety of sectors including health, education, economic development, hunger/food security, environment, and agriculture. While contributions came from a large range of participants, the actual conceptualization of the model was achieved by Extension staff,
professors, and others from VSJF. The purpose of creating such a model was to increase coordination and collaboration across the many sectors of a food system and to ultimately create a healthy food system in the region.

The primary challenge that the VSJF faced with this task was directly engaging low-income residents. The overarching theme of ‘soil-to-soil’ is expressed by the circular system, rather than a linear one. The core of the food system is depicted as mainly farms and food business systems, while many cross-cutting issues slice through these chief elements. According to Ms. Campbell, “what makes up a healthy, local food system is lots of involvement across many sectors and areas – public health, economic development, business, agriculture, tourism, technology, policy, etc. – and for ultimately these sectors to come together to coordinate and collaborate.” These different entities just listed refer to the various structures that constitute a food system. People involved in the organizations and institutions of these structures must work together to foster a truly healthy local food system. The cooperation between and among the sectors builds social capital. Most of the connections made likely represent the bridging form of social capital, as relationships are formed that tie individuals, organizations, and groups. Networking across the divisions also yields social capital, as people, businesses, and institutions associate together (personal communication, January 2013).
This model from the VSJF represents a complete picture of what is meant by a healthy local food system. This visual depiction tends to include the main components from the rest of the models. This illustration is presented in an attractive manner. In addition, the appealing format is easily understandable by people without expertise of the language of local food systems. For these reasons, this “loaf-of-bread” model was used during interviews with people in Owensboro and at the KY state level to compare the city and the state to what is recognized across the nation as a “healthy local food system.”

The Kentucky Food Movement

Whether or not the state of Kentucky displays widespread support of the local food movement, there are certainly several strong initiatives that have become quite popular. The Kentucky Proud program is the state’s official marketing and promotional plan that helps producers sell and market agricultural products that are “grown, raised,
processed, packaged, or manufactured in Kentucky.” The program’s goal is to boost net farm income for Kentucky farm families and agribusinesses. Governor Steve Beshear stated that “Kentucky Proud is not only important to agriculture, but it is also valuable to our citizens that who seek local products and strive to support the local economy” (“Kentucky Proud Program…”).

In addition, Louisville, Kentucky is a prime example of a city focused on promoting and selling local foods. A 2010 report from the Food in Neighborhoods (FiN) committee, a group of nonprofit organizations, public health advocates, local government officials, and concerned citizens, highlights the initiatives that are in operation around the city. In the report, this committee, formed by the Mayor’s Healthy Hometown Movement (MHHM), details the achievements and current efforts of combating public health problems, overcoming food access barriers, meeting the needs for emergency supplies of food, and providing for the demands for local food products (Geronemus, 2010).

The following is a list of just some of the innovative ways Louisville is addressing calls for local food. As of 2009, 27 farmers’ markets existed throughout the city. Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) supplied over 500 shares of produce weekly to consumers in Louisville. The Louisville Farm to Table Project works to connect farmers with consumers (including individuals, groups, and institutions) in ways that meet the farmers’ preferred methods of production and selling. In addition, the Jefferson County Cooperative Extension is working to unite people over food in community gardens and currently manages ten gardens in the city. Stone Soup Community Kitchen educates community members while cooking dinners using locally grown food for those who attend and help cook. The Food Literacy Project is a nonprofit which provides farm-
based experiential learning education and entrepreneurial youth development programs. Finally, the Community Farm Alliance is working toward a county-wide “Buy Local Ordinance” that “would require all Jefferson County public agencies to dedicate at least 10% of all food purchases throughout the fiscal year to Kentucky-grown agricultural products” (Geronemus, 2010).

While this is certainly not an exhaustive list of the initiatives involved in and supporting the local food movement around the Commonwealth, it provides an idea of some of the more popular and successful enterprises.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Why Owensboro?

This research examines Owensboro, Kentucky as a case study. This city, situated on the Ohio River in the western part of the state, has a population of just over 57,000 people. There is one farmers’ market in operation, but no formal food policy council is present in this city. According to the president of the Chamber of Commerce, there has been little to no discussion of implementing one. Several farmers’ stands exist around the city, and many festivals now take place celebrating food. The Reid’s Orchard Apple Fest, the Owensboro Pumpkinfest, and the Ole Cider Festival are a few of the happenings that have become annual events for the residents of the city. City officials are publicizing efforts to overhaul the downtown district and to revamp the local economy, yet despite the increasing appreciation of food, there appears to be limited dialogue regarding the active support of the local food system.

As a native of Owensboro, I am concerned that the city’s food system is simply not operating at its peak potential. Living in Lexington, KY for the past two years has opened my eyes to a food system very oriented on locally-grown products. The magnitude of support for local producers in this community is overwhelming. The opportunities that people in this city have seized and the incredible focus on community health and well-being is refreshing. On the contrary, an outsider may declare that Owensboro as a whole, compared to other major cities, seems to be in a stagnant rut. This outsider may assume that those that are involved with producing and marketing and those who support this lifestyle appear to function within their own circle. Outside of this group, support seems limited. With a plethora of surrounding farmland, Owensboro
should be able to market an excessive amount of fresh products to the city. Rather than relying on imported food, the city should be working to connect growers with local grocers, schools, and institutions. The possibilities are truly endless, yet there seems to be little in supporting local foods. The mayor has been making great attempts to renew the local economy, yet there appears to be a lack of focus on the key issue of food. With a great amount of citizens involved in agriculture, it only makes sense to integrate the local food system into the revitalization plan.

Awareness Study

Perhaps the reason for the seeming lack of support of Owensboro’s local food system is the shortage of awareness. If information detailing the importance and the benefits of supporting local food is not presented in the community, the likelihood of people contributing support to the local food system would seem low. In order to create anything valuable, an awareness or concern must first be present to generate a desire from the people to make a change. This section details a study of the awareness that residents of Owensboro have of topics related to the local food system. An earlier study during the fall of 2012 which considered food policy councils was designed to analyze the local newspaper of the city and a national newspaper for the occurrence of the subject of food policy councils. The hypotheses of this study were that a negligible amount of information concerning food policy councils was presented in the local newspaper, leading to a deficit in residents’ knowledge and understanding of the concept.

The study on prevalence of news stories on food policy councils was rooted in the phenomenon known as “framing effects,” which occurs when (often small) changes in the presentation of an issue or an event produce (sometimes large) changes of opinion
“Frames delivered by credible sources are more likely to shift opinions” (Chong & Druckman, 2007, p. 112). According to Nah (2010), “local news media function as one of the most important news and information sources in a local community” (p. 4). For this reason, strong frames presented by local news sources, such as hometown newspapers, are very likely to sway readers to their portrayal of issues, whether they are in a positive or negative light.

A content analysis of Owensboro’s local newspaper and the USA Today was carried out to compare the levels of news coverage given to food policy councils by each. The USA Today is a very reputable newspaper in the US and, its newspaper sales average nearly 900,000 copies each day (“2011 Franchising Today Rate Card”). Because of its large circulation, wide range of coverage of social issues, and nationwide audience, the USA Today was selected as the national newspaper for analysis in this study. The Messenger-Inquirer was selected as the local newspaper to be analyzed since it is the only paper printed in the city. While this examination did utilize a small sample, important conclusions can be drawn from it.

Data from both USA Today and the Messenger-Inquirer were gathered from electronic indexes from the Access World News database. For both papers, the terms “food policy” and “food council” were searched in the lead paragraph or headline. The Messenger-Inquirer searches produced 101 total articles. Of those, only 10 were found to be relevant to the research topic. Of the 298 articles from the USA Today that met these research terms, 21 articles were relevant and thus selected for comparison.

The chosen articles were read and coded. The coding system used was very simple. The title of the article, the order in which it was listed in the results and the date
of publication were all recorded. The topics of each article were then coded. Topics included issues that food policy councils are concerned with: healthy eating, farmers markets and community gardens, the local food movement and small farmers, community-building, promoting the economy, nutritional education, improving food access, farm policy, and food policy. Finally, the tone (negative, neutral, or positive) of each article was noted.

Articles from the local newspaper showed a pattern: 8 of the 10 centered on healthy eating and/or nutritional education. Most of these were concerned with the health of children and focused on implementing healthier food options and food education programs in the schools. Only two articles were concerned with promoting the economy, and just one discussed the ways that food can build community. There was also only one article focused on developing the local food movement. No discussion was presented about farm policy, food policy, farmers’ markets and community gardens, or improving food access. Owensboro evidently is concentrating on the physical health of its inhabitants, with hardly a mention of the economic health of the city. There is a push to educate the citizens on good health and nutrition, but there is really no discourse on the importance of local food to people’s diets, lifestyles, or the local economy.

Another trend discovered by the coding is the overall positive tone of the Messenger-Inquirer articles regarding food policy. The talk about implementing nutrition programs in the schools and combating obesity were all optimistic and encouraging. The articles discussed the pro-active nature that the schools and the city are taking with nutritional education and were very upbeat about the expected outcomes.
When the articles from the \textit{USA Today} were coded and reviewed, it was discovered that the majority of these dealt with policy. 17 of the 21 (81\%) discussed farm and/or food policy. The next highest category in this newspaper was promoting the economy. Unlike the majority of \textit{Messenger-Inquirer} articles, only 6 of the 21 in the \textit{USA Today} mentioned healthy eating, and only 5 focused on nutritional information.

These articles also revealed a trend in tone. Contrary to that of the local newspaper, the \textit{USA Today} presented an overall negative attitude. Articles discussing the farm bill and the nation’s food supply, for instance, seemed to present the reality of these difficulties, rather than “sugar-coating” the issues. By explaining the actuality of the issues, the articles did seem to harbor a degree of negativity. The topics presented by the \textit{Messenger-Inquirer} were much lighter than the \textit{USA Today}’s heavy issues dealing with the slump in the economy and the hardships that small farmers are facing. The difference in tone is understandable based on the matters covered by each.

The findings revealed by this research are that newspapers in Owensboro, and likely those in other rural areas, are prompting discussion on the factors that food policy councils address. While the specific concept of a “food policy council” has yet to enter into the dialogue of its people, the city obviously has an interest in the issues that FPCs deal with. It is probable that Owensboro has not begun discussion on the topic because the newspapers have failed to present the idea. As stated previously, inhabitants of rural areas gain most of their information from the local newspaper media. Without the appearance of this entity in the newspapers, people are unlikely to learn about the FPCs. Therefore, the absence of a food policy council may be due to the lack of coverage by the
local newspaper. Whether Owensboro needs or wants a food policy council is not the question. The opportunity of debate has not even presented itself.

The newspaper media of the *Messenger-Inquirer* has spun material concerning food policy councils in a positive light, yet it has also focused mainly on the lighter issues of school programs. This media has selected these lighter topics to present to the public, but has failed to introduce information detailing the reality of the grim situations of the economy and the plight of farmers. The *USA Today*, on the other hand, has framed grave issues in a more negative and serious tone. By exuding this negativity, readers can identify a significant problem with the US food system. People are led to develop this belief that America’s food system is in need of a crucial overhaul, and perhaps readers from the metropolitan areas are more likely to seek the creation of a food policy system. On the other hand, the small-town residents who rely primarily on their local newspapers for information have not developed these somber attitudes of the food system and therefore have not sought out solutions with food policy councils. With no presumed need to seek out a solution, of course they are not investigating the councils.

Reflecting on this study, it is evident that while analyzing the newspapers did yield results, a better approach may have been to interview people involved in Owensboro’s food system to gain insight as to the degree of recognition of food policy councils and their functions. What’s more, rather than searching for the terms “food policy” and “food councils,” examining the occurrence of related words (terms that describe operations of FPCs, such as farmers’ markets, farming, agriculture, etc.) would have provided a better picture of what kind of information is being presented by the local
newspaper and discussed around the community. “Food policy” and “food councils” are, in retrospect, too specific.

Despite the shortcomings of this prior study, it is important to note the realizations it brought to the researcher. The need to actually talk to stakeholders in Owensboro’s food system was recognized because the newspaper analysis did not reveal the dialogue of community members. It did provide an understanding of some of the structures that are deficient in the city, such as farmers’ markets, community gardens, farm policy, food policy, and support for local food. This, of course, leads to the conclusion that without these structures, a support system for the local food system will be difficult to encourage. Without these entities, other structures cannot exist. For example, businesses and nonprofits centered on promoting production, processing, or distribution of local food will be absent. Formal and informal community groups that concentrate on local food will also be nonexistent without the previously mentioned structures.

Not only did the study uncover some telling signs about Owensboro’s structure, it also provided insight into the city’s social capital. Networks may exist between individuals and groups based on various matters such as sports, music, or health, yet, without the structures centered on the city’s food system in place, much social capital that could be present in the city is missing. With a focus on local food, more festivals could occur which promote involvement and interaction of citizens within the community. Relationships among residents are developed and nurtured as people work and socialize together over food. Networks between citizens and city leaders are also created and maintained. Both bridging and bonding links are formed when people come together to promote local food systems. Efforts to enhance the city’s economy, to advocate for local
producers, and to ensure that citizens have healthy food options unite people anchored around common goals. Trust is built as connections grow, and people develop buy-in into the city, its residents, and its goals. Social capital is a major outcome of community involvement around local food efforts; to be without this focus, the city certainly will be below its potential capacity of this aspect.

In conclusion, this study did reveal some significant indicators about Owensboro. While the newspaper analysis did not provide sufficient evidence about the true degree of discourse present in the city on this topic, it did offer insight into the structures, and therefore, the social capital of Owensboro. It also revealed the efforts (or lack thereof) of the local newspaper media to bring the topic of food into the community dialogue.

**Methods**

From the background study previously discussed emerged important information pertaining to the level of awareness and the attitudes of citizens concerning the food system of Owensboro. This newly found knowledge contributed to the set up of the current study of analyzing the ingredients of a healthy, local food system.

The design of this analysis is similar to that of a study by Glowacki-Dudka, Murray, & Isaacs (2013) concerning social capital within a local food system. The local food system of Owensboro was explored through interviews with key players in the city’s food system. Interviews were also conducted with experts in the food system at the state level to ascertain where the Commonwealth as whole stands in terms of the local food movement. The primary research question guiding the interviews was “What are the ingredients of a healthy, local food system?”
The theories of structural functionalism and social capital guided the interview questions as an understanding of what constitutes healthy food systems at the local level was sought. The interview questions can be found in Appendix A. A qualitative content analysis of the interviews was then conducted.

Key players who are active within and knowledgeable about the local food systems at the state level and in Owensboro were interviewed. The informants were purposively selected and invited to participate in this study because of their experience and knowledge of the local food system. Interviewees were selected from a variety of areas within the local food system to ensure a thorough representation of this sector. Included were local producers, distributors, activists, and educators. The interviews were designed to provide enough data to explain the current environment and describe the trends in the local food system. Interviewees were asked specific questions about their backgrounds, their allies in their endeavors, their support systems and networks, the barriers and challenges that they face, and how they envision the future of this movement. In addition, the “loaf-of-bread” model, created by the Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund, was used as a discussion piece of which to compare the city of Owensboro and the state of Kentucky. Interviewees were questioned as to which components present on the model exist in the city or the state, and if there are elements they believe are crucial to a healthy, local food system that are not portrayed on the model but that are visible in Owensboro or the state.

**Procedures**

Interview participants in Owensboro and at the state-level were selected in a manner similar to a study by Glowacki-Dudka, Murray, & Isaacs (2013) which examined
social capital within a local food system. Their informants were selected because of their experience, connection to, and knowledge of the local food system. Identified by these authors were local producers, distributors, activists, and educators. My study also involves people in these positions.

Prior to the study, I was unaware of who held such positions, so I searched city websites to identify these key informants. The first interviewees selected were based on their involvement and knowledge of the food systems of Owensboro or the state of Kentucky. Each of the individuals were asked for referrals of others they believed played a role in the city’s or the state’s local food systems. Many of the most referenced individuals were contacted for interviews. Because of time constraints, not all of the suggested interviewees were approached. Recruitment of interviewees was accomplished with an email invitation. The anticipated interview time for each was one half hour. Interviews were audio recorded. The following section will provide a brief description of the interviewees to reveal why they were appropriate for the study.

The recorded interviews were transcribed by the researcher. A content analysis was conducted with the data obtained from the interview transcripts. Through the lens of the theories of social capital and structural functionalism, several themes were coded for: bridging and bonding networks, efficacy, social norms, the food culture of Owensboro and the state of Kentucky, who (both individually and organizationally) are involved in the food systems of the city and the state, the manifest and latent functions of these organizations, the presence or absence in Owensboro and the state of those items shown on the loaf of bread model of a “healthy, local food system,” and finally, what barriers or challenges are hindering the local food system.
Next, conclusions regarding the local food system of Owensboro were drawn. Studying the food system of this city and considering initiatives and successes in other areas of the state allowed recommendations to be made to Owensboro on how to further enhance its food system into one of even greater vibrancy and overall health. The barriers identified by the interviewees, as well the recommendations for Owensboro can be found in the discussion section.

The analysis began by separating the interviewees into three groups: producers, those people who are non-producers yet are active in the local food system, and the individuals from the state level. The themes will be addressed one-by-one from these three perspectives, first from the social capital theme, then from structural functionalism.

**Description of Interviewees**

Interviews began with some of the obvious players in the local food system of Owensboro: the city’s farmers’ market and Cooperative Extension. A vendor at the farmers’ market continues to be involved this year even after a few seasons of turmoil within the organization. While the number of vendors has dropped slightly in recent years, she declared optimism and fresh energy are present there now. Her family started a CSA in the region a couple of years ago, serving the Owensboro area. This venture has been met with great and growing success.

At the University of Kentucky’s Cooperative Extension Office of Daviess County, two agents were interviewed. Both are highly involved with the area’s producers of fruits and vegetables, commodities, and livestock. Also, interviewed was an agent with a state health and nutrition program. She partners with the local health department in
assisting low-income individuals and families gain access to fresh foods, and she provides education for healthy lifestyles.

A staff member of the district health department was interviewed. She partners with the Owensboro farmers’ market to provide vouchers for low-income people to purchase fresh, quality food items at discounted prices. She also promotes local food for its health benefits in a variety of community events, such as Farm-to-Table Tuesdays, in which restaurants feature products from the farmers’ market every Tuesday.

A member of a local environmental group also participated. As a life-long environmentalist, she has held a role in community organizations promoting ecological stewardship for many years. She has even started a conference based on local and healthy foods and has continued to grow that convention since its inception several years ago.

A member of the Greater Owensboro Chamber of Commerce served as an interviewee. She provided a perspective of how local food fits into the community from an economic standpoint.

An owner of one of the five or so locally-owned restaurants that regularly feature locally-grown products was interviewed. A native of western Kentucky, he attended culinary school on the east coast, but according to his restaurant’s website, he attributes much of his passion for “hand-crafted” food to his mother’s cooking. This chef is well-known around the foodie circles of Owensboro for his dedication to local foods, including locally-raised meats.

The owner of a local meat market was also interviewed. As a producer of the beef that he sells, he advertises the beef and pork as antibiotic-free and grain-fed. He provides
locally-raised chickens and fresh fish, too. He sells to many of the locally-owned restaurants that value those fresh, local meats.

The owners of a popular farm and orchard served as interviewees. The couple’s family has been producing fruits and vegetables for the Owensboro area for well over 100 years. With a couple of their own fresh markets around the city and products for sale in some of the hometown grocers, the orchard is quite a booming business. They sell produce to the local school systems and host an annual fall festival drawing thousands out to their farm.

A local media personality was interviewed. Featuring local chefs, producers, gardeners, or anyone involved with food, her show seeks to “bring people back to the table.” She focuses on the community-building aspects of food, striving to bring families and friends together around food.

In addition to gathering perspectives of the local food system of Owensboro, insights of the entire state’s food system were sought out. With a primary focus on Owensboro, only a few interviews were conducted with experts of Kentucky’s food system. First, an officer of a state-wide farm advocacy organization which works to be the voice for farmers to policy makers agreed to an interview. As a member of this organization for many years, he spoke on the state’s grassroots efforts to create good public policy and gave his perspective of where he sees Kentucky’s food system in the future.

A food systems organizer that currently works with the previously mentioned organization also was interviewed. She has experience going into communities across the state to assess current food systems while assisting people to develop their leadership
abilities so they can create better farm policies. Through her work, she hopes to see a state-wide food policy network developed soon.

Finally a representative from the Kentucky Department of Agriculture was interviewed. He spoke on the Kentucky Proud brand and the degree of demand for these products, as well as the affect that this marketing avenue has for those farmers who were influenced by the tobacco buy-out several years ago. He also had the knowledge to speak on the variety of agricultural production across the state.

Clearly, these individuals were all suited for discussing the local food systems of Owensboro or the state. Their experiences and positions enabled them to respond with first-hand knowledge of current affairs. The following section discusses the questions that these interviewees were asked.

**Interview Questions**

The interview protocol was developed to tap into the theories guiding this research. Social capital and structural functionalism helped to shape the questions in order to discover what the ingredients of a healthy, local food system are. The actual interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

*Social Capital*

Interviewees were questioned about the degree of networking in Owensboro. Bridging social capital was discovered by inquiring about the perceived connections among players of the local food system (i.e. relationships among producers, grocers, consumers, distributors). The level of bonding was determined by asking about the presence of other local or state-level groups or institutions that the organization in question collaborates with and the degree of the relationship. In addition, who an
organization’s allies are or who is involved in its support system revealed bonding relationships.

The extent of efficacy was discussed through questioning how the organizations in question have been involved in the local food movement. Also, asking if residents of Owensboro seem to act with desire to support the economy and enhance a sense of community, as well as how open the people are to new ideas will gave insight into how likely they will support the local food movement.

Social norms were determined through examinations of challenges that interviewees are aware of in the local food system. Similarly, questioning the presence or amount of discussion about the local food system and if there is an awareness of the initiatives in local food movements elsewhere reflected what the city’s social norms are. Finally, asking how people in the area prioritize food choices, whether they be based on price, locally-grown, or organic, revealed the general attitude of citizens regarding support of local food.

*Structural Functionalism*

When considering *how* groups organize and function around food systems and *who* is involved, the question was asked, “Who is involved, either individually or organizationally, in the local food system in Owensboro?” Also, asking interviewees how aware their organizations are of other programs, initiatives, associations, etc. around the city, state, or even at the national level that are engaged in the local food movement revealed structures performing manifest functions. These represent intentional functions that are recognized by community members. Asking if there tend to be any missing elements from the city’s food system revealed latent functions, or those roles that are
neither intended nor recognized. While some people or organizations may believe and even be working toward achieving a particular end, latent functions may still be present.

*Local Food Systems Model*

Finally, the “loaf-of-bread” model from the Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund was initially emailed to the interviewees and later presented during the actual interviews as a good example of what is generally accepted as a “healthy local food system.” They were asked if there are any components on the model that Owensboro does not have or does not emphasize. Conversely, they were asked if there are any elements that the city currently demonstrates that are lacking on the model. This, again, was a tactic meant to reveal manifest and latent functions in the community. This model, along with the interview questions, can be found in Appendix A.
CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

This section will focus on the content analysis of the interview transcripts. As formerly mentioned, the interviewees were classified into three groups: producers, those people who are non-producers yet are active in the local food system, and the individuals from the state level. The themes are each addressed from these three angles, first from the social capital theme, then from structural functionalism.

Social Capital

Social capital, as discussed earlier, “refers to the connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (Putnam, 2000, p.9). The theory is largely based on the premises that social relationships are valuable and that these connections contribute to productivity. The interview questions based on this theory were designed to elicit evidence of the degree of social capital.

Bridging / Bonding

Bridging, as discussed previously, refers to the weak ties that unite individuals, organizations, groups, or even whole communities. According to the producers, there is a significant amount of bridging that is happening in and around Owensboro’s local food system. The farmers’ market seems to be a central source of these relationships. All three of the producers (the farmers’ market vendor and CSA provider, the farm and orchard owners, and the meat producer) expressed the sentiment that once most consumers try the fresh, local foods, they become regular customers. The meat producer said, “Usually if I get him (the consumer) to come in once, I’ve got him hooked.” The couple at the orchard remarked, “People pretty much come to us when they want to purchase something.”
While they all seem to retain customers once the consumers have tried their fresh products, reeling them in is a challenge that they all agreed upon. The man producing and selling meats declared that his biggest challenge is just getting known. He said that he was paying hundreds of dollars for radio commercials, when a customer offered to set up a Facebook account for the business. During a sale soon after that, 8 of the first 10 customers into the store that day had learned of the sale via Facebook.

Likewise, the farm and orchard owners saw the value of social media amidst the challenge of communicating with the consumers. They stated that because some produce items are only in season for very short amounts of time, they struggle to relay that information to the public. How to network with the consumers is changing, they explained. “For years we did the newspaper. Well, a lot of people don’t look at the newspaper anymore. So there’s Facebook and webpages and emails… We’ve got to do more of that because that’s where everybody is.” The farmers’ market vendor and CSA provider also has joined the world of social media to promote her business. She said that when she posts on Facebook, for instance, about the apples that her family’s farm sells to the local school systems, she receives positive feedback from excited parents.

Those interviewees who are not necessarily producers but are involved in the food system of Owensboro also identified a good amount of bridging. The chef and owner of a local restaurant emphasized his desire for products raised locally and sustainably, without the chemicals or antibiotics. He discussed his collaboration with vendors at the farmers’ market as well as his relationship with individual farmers, such as the operator of the CSA. Several of the interviewees brought up the “Farm-to-Table, Vine-to-Glass” event hosted by the city for several years and the current “Farm-to-Table Tuesdays” project.
Both of these are efforts to connect the farmers, restaurants, and the citizens over local food. Everyone that spoke about these expressed the success of the endeavors and the importance of creating these links. The interviewee from the health department said the “Tuesdays” project “encourages and empowers farmers to market their own produce in that way, instead of relying on that matchmaking between someone like myself pairing a restaurant with potential farmers.”

The success of the farmers’ market was discussed with mixed reviews. Said the member of the environmental group, “The farmers’ market, particularly on a Saturday, is just full of people.” She expressed the camaraderie she experiences there and how she likes to visit with the vendors and other shoppers. On the other hand, the media personality connected the lack of a permanent location for the market with a shortage of respect or value for the organization, which in turn hurts attendance. Most of the interviewees, when discussing the farmers’ market, explained that, to many living in Owensboro, attending it is “just something to do.” The chef remarked, “Just the experience of going to the farmers’ market as a form of entertainment… It’s something to do, and people feel like it’s kinda cool.” A Cooperative Extension agent also expressed this opinion, and the health and nutrition agent noted that going to the farmers’ market “is really the in thing.”

The folks of Owensboro are making efforts to promote the local food and to bring people together. A “Food Day” is scheduled for the fall, and according to the media personality, is designed to “have all those involved in local food come together for a day or two event that will open more community experience, more community awareness of local foods.” The Chamber member described a community health committee that largely focuses on utilizing local food for community health. She also discussed events such as
the farm city breakfast and agriculture tours that occur in Owensboro. It is evident that more initiatives are kicking off as citizens become more connected over local food.

While the Owensboro interviewees all agreed that bridging networking does take place, several, but not all, mentioned instances of bonding. This, as discussed earlier, refers to strong relationships that are shared by individuals (not organizations, groups or communities). The restaurateur described bonding when he reported on a local producer that brings a van of fresh produce to his back door. He reminisced on this “old” form of food networking.

Also, one of the Cooperative Extension agents indicated bonding when she told about an Owensboro nun that started a raised-bed garden in the parking lot behind the Cathedral. It has allowed people of that parish to raise their own vegetables there. In addition, several of the interviewees noted the growing Burmese refugee population of Owensboro and how these people are participating in some of the community gardens around town. The representative from the environmental group said, “It is mainly the Burmese people who have things growing in that garden. It’s helping them to adapt. They’re growing some of the foods that they’re used to from their homes.” The health department interviewee also spoke on this issue. “They (First Christian Church) were working with them to grow some of their native foods and educate them on what grows well regionally and locally.”

The health and nutrition agent and the Chamber member commented on the sense of community shared by the vendors at the farmers’ market. Bonding also occurs between the CSA provider and her clients as she personally delivers each weekly box to each customer. The orchard owner and the meat producer both expressed bonding with their
regular customers. Returning patrons and the producers develop relationships deeper than just surface-level as they interact on a regular basis.

Bonding was discussed even more deeply by the media personality. She emphasizes bringing people back to the table together and the importance of local food.

When you sit down and you’re talking to somebody, you’re eating slower. You’re recognizing your food a little bit more, the taste.” Sitting down and eating with your family, “that grows your family more than anything.” Likewise, the president of the Sierra Club said, “Eating is communion… To me, sharing a meal… It is anytime two or more people are coming together sharing a meal. That’s communion with God in my estimation. You’re enjoying the food, if you’re thinking about the food. You’re, it’s about as close to the beginning of creation as you’re going to get.

After analyzing the interviews with the people from the state level, it was clear that bridging certainly exists across the state. None of them mentioned instances of bonding, though. The Department of Agriculture has divisions that operate largely to build connections between producers and processors of Kentucky products with markets. Also, the statewide farm advocacy group that focuses on creating good public policy obviously functions to develop healthy relationships between farmers, public officials, policy makers, and consumers. The officer of that organization discussed its efforts to bring a farmers’ market to the low-income areas of Louisville, to develop leadership among Kentucky’s agricultural entrepreneurs, and to ripen the food systems around the state. Currently the food systems organizer for the association is conducting community-led assessments in several areas around Kentucky, while also working toward a state-wide
food policy network. She spoke specifically about the types of connections that she observes in the state’s food systems:

You know, I think there are connections. I think some of those are in silos and some are in like, little bubbles, and I think they would all benefit, we would all benefit from a little solidarity. You know, learning from each and other and building off of each others’ strengths and weaknesses.

This idea of a lack of good communication ran throughout her interview, and the officer of the organization also voiced a need to “bring all those different folks to the table.”

Efficacy

Efficacy simply implies the willingness to participate. The producers all responded that once people realize the quality of local foods, they are generally very supportive. They agreed that citizens are overall very receptive to the concept of local foods, and that the interest is growing.

“I think more and more people are wanting local food. I think more and more people like my daughter’s age (young adults) are looking for more homegrown food instead of buying it in a can and wanting to know where their food is coming from,” said the wife of the orchard owner.

The meat producer described the large quantities of food that he sold when he was a farmers’ market vendor and now that he has his own store. However, he noted that there are some individuals who are critical of his local meats. “The only people who are opposed to this are those who have done too much reading on the internet and thinking there’s something really wrong with grain-fed beef.” He also remarked that the increased
price of fresh meats keeps some people away. Similarly, the orchard owners commented on this as they described organic and local products. “They don’t want to pay that extra for it. Our food is so cheap in this country. 15% of our income goes to food. But Europe, Japan: 60% of your income is for food.”

Those interviewees that are non-producers also expressed positive efficacy by the citizens of Owensboro. Most of them mentioned the willingness of the restaurants to become involved. Again, the Farm-to-Table Tuesdays and the “Farm-to-Table, Vine-to-Glass” initiatives were discussed. The chef, when asked about how receptive consumers are, responded, “They love it… Locavore is a really hot buzzword, and people like to think that they’re these big locavores, and it’s just getting started.” (This term refers to a person who eats foods that are all or nearly all locally-grown or produced.)

The health and nutrition agent mentioned that even the caterers are getting on board, providing, for example, healthier, local products for breakfasts opposed to the traditional donuts. The interviewee from the health department stated, “I have seen a growing awareness on the part of many supermarkets to begin purchasing more locally.” The local IGA groceries buy a variety of products from farmers in the area. Some of the Kroger and Wal-Mart chains feature smaller amounts of local products, but several of the interviewees declared that these grocery chains do not have the autonomy to purchase locally or regionally, and that for producers in this area to contract with them requires too many hoops to jump through.

While there was an overall agreement that people are accepting of this movement, there was plenty of negative efficacy expressed. The hesitation to local and/or organic products due to higher prices was brought up in several of the conversations. The
environmental group member declared that the people of Owensboro “won’t pay for the quality product.” She explained that people in other cities such as Nashville, Louisville, and Lexington pay much more for pasture-raised, grass-fed meat and organic produce. “People in Owensboro go cheap.” She explained that this unwillingness to support local food can also be attributed to people believing “they’re so busy.” Many people, she said, think that to buy locally and prepare those products at home takes just too long, and that buying prepared meals or fast food is more convenient.

This convenience factor was brought up also by one the Cooperative Extension agents. He explained that “it used to be that it was a unique opportunity, maybe once a week or once a month for a family to eat restaurant food. Well, now, the paradigm is it’s unique if they cook a meal at home and sit down and eat it as a family!” He said, “It all comes down to convenience. If you can pick up your medicine and your nails and your tomatoes all in the same place, it’s what you’re gonna do.” In other words, people do not want to make the effort of making multiple stops to purchase the various local items.

A final matter of negative efficacy is the sense of elitism that sometimes accompanies local food supporters. Because local items generally are priced higher than regular products, some people believe that only the upper class can afford such products. According to the media personality, “There’s already a community of people that are aware of the benefits of eating locally… and people look at them like a community. They don’t always look at them as something they can join… There’s almost a clique attitude about it…” The Chamber member also discussed this issue. “It’s a definite perception… that only the more wealthy can afford locally-grown food or know how to prepare locally-grown foods, and find the prestige of going out on a Saturday morning and they’re
shopping with their cloth bags.” There seemed to be a general consensus that the awareness of local food was shared by the same circle of people. Outside of this group, the awareness of the farmers’ market and other sources of local products seem somewhat lacking. The chef summed this up well. “At the farmers’ market, sure (people are talking about food), but that’s because everyone there is being all local.”

The interviewees at the state level also expressed both positive and negative efficacies. The officer of the food advocacy organization explained that the First Lady of Kentucky, as well as many of the state legislators, backs the local food movement. He also mentioned the fact that a lot of people are recognizing the boost to local economies that results from supporting local farmers. With farmers’ markets becoming more popular, Farm-to-School programs doing well, and the state park system buying hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of local food, “right now the demand for local food in Kentucky is outpacing production.” The interviewee from the Kentucky Department of Agriculture described the local food system as “a statewide notion… It is without question becoming something that consumers are demanding. It is one of the few issues that you don’t see a lot of debate.”

Like many of the interviewees in Owensboro, though, the food systems organizer also mentioned the tendency for folks to believe that only the upper class can participate in the local food movement. She tied in the concept of food justice, however, and the idea that some people do not have access to fresh, local products.

I think the people who are receptive to it are receptive to it, because the people who are going to have that access to local food are the people who are going to have access to the movement and be excited about it. But those who feel excluded
and are not making the connection and don’t feel like the conversation is about them are not being receptive. It’s not that they’re *not receptive*; it’s that they’re not able to participate in the conversation.

She identified the problem as one of inequitable access to the products as well as to the opportunities around local food. The officer of that organization also noted, “There’s definitely this attitude of elitism… It has kind of drawn this kind of socioeconomic barrier for a lot of folks.”

Social Norms

Examining the social norms of Owensboro and the state gave an insight into the awareness that citizens have of local foods and the initiatives around this issue. It also revealed the food culture and what people value, whether it is organic food, local food, cheap food, or some other type. This, in turn, is a way to analyze the degree of support that can be expected for the local food system.

Questioning the social norms was also designed to examine, of those people that do choose locally-grown or raised products, their reasons for these preferences. Some popular motives for supporting local food include backing the producers and therefore boosting the local economy, purchasing items produced nearby to reduce the amount of energy used for transportation thereby saving the environment and increasing the freshness and quality of the items, or choosing local products for the health benefits of avoiding preservatives and chemicals that are usually injected or sprayed onto items that are shipped long distances. A final reason that consumers may purchase the local products is to build up the sense of community by sharing in meal preparation or consumption of
the foods with friends or family. Even choosing to participate in festivals that celebrate foods grown locally is a way to build relationships around food.

An overall theme revealed by the producers that were interviewed is that Owensboro still has that “small-town” ambiance. As the farm and orchard owner concisely put it, “We’re still a rural area here in Owensboro.” The farmers’ market vendor and CSA provider said, “If you look at Owensboro and Lexington for example, there is a big difference. Lexington is more liberal, way more, um, open to these ideas of this type of food.”

In all three producers’ interviews, the degree that people in this area demand organic products was discussed. The orchard owner explained that when they tried to sell some organic items in their store, “they didn’t sell… people don’t want to pay that extra for it… I know you’re going to see it more in Louisville and Lexington, Cincinnati. Owensboro’s just not into that yet.”

This interviewee also declared that people are often very misinformed about organics. “They don’t really understand what organic is, because they think organic is safe… People think that if it says ‘organic chemical’ that it’s good for you.” Similarly, the meat producer said that consumers are misinformed about meats, particularly about grain-fed versus grass-fed beef. He explained that some people are opposed to meat that has been finished on grain, believing that this causes negative health effects and that grass-fed animals taste better. “There’s a lot of people looking for grass-fed. But, to me, it’s not good. It’s not tender. It’s not good.”

He went on to say that some stores are falsely advertising how their animals are fed, proclaiming in the stores and on packaging that the animals were grass-fed. However,
the websites of these stores reveal that the animals were finished on grain or vegetable products. This leads to misinformed consumers, which unfortunately creates ignorance of the truth about locally-raised products. He, too, agreed that people in this area have different attitudes about the acceptable price for local food compared to other cities. “They might in Nashville (pay $20/chicken), but not around here.”

Looking specifically at the food culture of Owensboro, the farmers’ market vendor admitted, “I think it’s a mix of all of it. I just see definitely a push for local.” The farm and orchard owner asserted that “the American problem is we think it’s supposed to be big and beautiful and we don’t care about the taste.” He explained that people gravitate toward big, red apples, for instance, because, “yeah, red sells.” While these may be prettier than others, he maintained that those red apples that are shipped from Washington State into our groceries and into our schools cannot compare to the delicious apples raised here in Kentucky. This stems back to a lack of awareness about vegetables and fruits. Obviously, all produce doesn’t look perfect, yet many consumers only want the perfect-looking items, regardless of the taste.

The meat producer was even more specific about the food culture, breaking it down socioeconomically.

The upper class, for lack of a better word, seems to be much more concerned about their health, and not concerned about price as much. Now the medium class people, they’re interested in it, but it’s gotta fit their pocket book.

When the rest of the interviewees of Owensboro were questioned about social norms, that theme of living in a small, rural area still was present. The Chamber member articulated it well. “We are still a pretty agrarian society… We’re still connected to rural
life ourselves.” The interviewee from the health department said, “It’s an agricultural community, part of an agricultural region. Surrounding counties have agriculture as their base.”

Another major issue mentioned by most of those interviewed is that of unhealthy eating, based around convenience foods. The chef and restaurant owner said about the food culture, “Historically, it’s been cheap food. Owensboro had the highest percentage of franchised restaurants per capita of anywhere in the country.” The health and nutrition agent also stressed this norm, saying that the area’s food culture “is based around convenient, cheap, fast food.” The member of the environmental group said, “So many people eat prepared and processed foods that we have a real crisis on our hands… It’s just not healthy the way people in Daviess County eat.” In addition, she declared that, “I think in Kentucky we eat too much meat.”

Other interviewees harped on the role of meat in Owensboro’s food culture. As the member of the Chamber of Commerce mentioned, “We’re still a culture around here that eats in bulk. We have Moonlite, you know?” (This restaurant is a regional attraction, featuring a variety of BBQ meats, and is well-known for its large portions.) The media personality explained,

If you’re going to talk about the masses of Owensboro, you’re talking about comfort food. It’s very much comfort food; it’s what they were brought up on… going to wonderful BBQ joints, things like that. Things that make the community unique.” She went on to say that in this area, “you’re going to eat a lot of white food. Those are very filling, and they’re very cheap. So, that’s not just Owensboro.
That’s going to be in a lot of the US right now… Fast food can be very cheap and incredibly empty on calories.

The representative from the environmental group discussed perhaps a reason that people focus more on fast food opposed to locally-raised items. “These are things a lot of people don’t know how to cook (Brussel sprouts, eggplant). It’s not that they don’t like them; they may think they don’t, but they just haven’t eaten them.” The health department supervisor made another good point about why people avoid local foods. “We have become so out of touch for what the growing season is… that we become almost numb to accessibility and… begin to lose touch with shopping related to value and what’s in season.” She continued to say that people have, to a degree, lost appreciation for good, healthy, local food: “There’s just a growing disconnect from where we procure our foods.” Despite all of the focus on fast, convenience foods, most of the interviewees agreed that there is definitely a growing awareness for the importance of local foods.

At the state level, the interviewees spoke about the social norms and food culture they see across Kentucky. The interviewee from the Department of Agriculture explained that people support local food because it makes them feel good. It makes them feel good that they are purchasing something that’s locally-grown or locally-made and they are keeping their dollars in the state of Kentucky… The consumer makes a discretionary choice to buy one product over (another). They’re willing to pay more for one just because it has that Kentucky Proud label on it because the bulk of them know that that’s a Kentucky Product and they are supporting Kentucky.
He definitely saw more of an emphasis on the economic reasons for supporting local than the interviewees in Owensboro mentioned. He also spoke about the demographic differences of attitudes held by those in the larger cities of Kentucky versus those out in the rural areas. The people in the cities tend to purchase locally for the health benefits and to be environmentally-friendly in lessening the miles their products are shipped.

The closer you get back to the farm generations, the more rural-minded you get, the closer you get to the farms… means that people really start to identify with their heritage, and helping the community, purchasing local and understanding that kind of as a tradition.

The food systems organizer also mentioned this traditional focal point on local food.

I think people value history and heritage. That’s one of the hardest things to change is the culture. And I think there is a lot of culture connected to the experience of eating food… Everyone has a story about food. Everyone is connected to food in some way so it’s a great vehicle to which people can find common ground.

The officer of the farm advocacy organization identified with some of the sentiments expressed back in Owensboro relating to the misconceptions of who can afford local products.

I think there’s a general attitude that fresh costs more… At farmers’ markets, things are expensive, or they come across as expensive, so it’s only the middle
class or the rich people who can eat local, who can (eat) organic... There’s definitely elitism that’s associated with it.

He also agreed that people gravitate toward the cheaper foods. “We don’t put that much value on food... As a society, we under-value food, but at the same time, we have a strong culture of food in this country.” Finally, he noted that while food is cheap in the US and that it is relatively easy to get enough to eat, hunger still exists. “It doesn’t cost a lot of money” to purchase prepackaged or fast food. “It fills your stomach, but it doesn’t fulfill your needs really.” He spoke on the need for nutritious foods in areas of Kentucky that people lack access to quality, fresh foods.

Structural Functionalism

The framework for this theory, as detailed previously, is that independent structures of society, each of which plays a specific function in societal maintenance, work together to promote solidarity and stability. Structures can refer to organizations and institutions, while functions refer to their purposes, missions, and what they do in society. Understanding who is identified as the key players in the local food system and the roles they carry in the community provides great insight into the operation of the system.

Structures of the Local Food System: Who is Involved?

Across the board, interviewees in Owensboro mentioned many of the same people and organizations involved in the local food system. Of course, the farmers’ market was referred to numerous times, as well as the locally-owned restaurants that feature local products (for example, The Bistro, Miller House, Bill’s Restaurant, Colby’s, The Campbell House). Also, most brought up the IGA grocery chain as one that purchases lots of locally-grown products. In addition, some of the larger farms that raise products to sell
locally were discussed, including Cecil Farms, Trunnell Farms, Reid’s, and White House Farms. The UK Cooperative Extension office, the health department, the hospital and Health Park, county government officials, and the school systems were all brought up multiple times during the interviews. Churches were remarked upon several times, too. While this is certainly not an exhaustive list of those named as involved in the food system of Owensboro, it does comprise those that were commented on frequently.

At the state level, interviewees also mentioned many of the same people and organizations involved in Kentucky’s local food system. The vibrant farmers’ markets of Louisville were discussed, as well as the Kentucky Department of Agriculture and Commissioner James Comer, Kentucky Proud, Community Farm Alliance, public health officials, Farm-to-School programs, Farm-to-Table programs, Kentucky Cooperative Extension, the University of Kentucky and other colleges and universities across the state, Kentucky Area Development Districts, state government, the Kentucky Ag Development Board, and the various commodity associations. As before, this is not an all-inclusive list, but it does exhibit the most commented on sources.

**Manifest and Latent Functions**

Functions refer to the purposes and missions of structures and what they do in society. These structures, meaning organizations, institutions, or formal or informal groups, shape the basis of a social system. The manifest functions (those consequences of the structures that are intentional and recognized) show that the people and organizations involved in the local food system are performing the duties that they generally set out to accomplish. For instance, the chef is partnering with local producers to, in fact, feature products raised locally; the extension agents are collaborating with the University of
Kentucky to provide helpful resources to the area’s farmers; the farm advocacy group continues to push for policy that promotes Kentucky agriculture and provides aid to its producers. In all, the manifest functions were quite in line with the missions of each organization.

Latent functions refer to the results of the structures that are neither intentional nor recognized. Only a few of these were revealed during the interviews. None of the producers mentioned any of these. Of the non-producers, though, the member of the environmental group declared that a “side effect” of being involved in the local food system is that,

Too often do I see us having turf battles and this group over here is working on something; we’re working on it. It turns out, we’re all working on the same big issue and if we would all communicate and coordinate, we would make a difference.

Obviously, these battles are not intentional, but unfortunately are cropping up amidst the various players in the food systems.

Another latent function, this time spurring from the unsuccessful Coop in Owensboro, was brought up by one of the extension agents.

The unique thing the Coop did, one, is it educated farmers on how to work more collectively, cooperatively than they had done in the past. And the other thing was it took good producers and made them even better because it taught them a lot about quality.

This interviewee also mentioned a latent function of the commodity producers in the area. While they are not typically considered contributors to the local food system,
they in fact are quite involved. He emphasized that much of the corn produced in Western Kentucky is fed to the chickens raised in the area, which are in turn sold to chicken processing plants. These chicken products are then sold at grocery stores and to the larger institutions, such as the hospital. Many people do not make this connection, yet countless consumers unknowingly purchase these products daily.

Another by-product stems from the various activities around the city focused on local food. While the intent is usually to complete a project (such as, to plant or harvest a community garden, or to provide culinary education to low-income individuals), the interviewee from the health department cited a latent function.

The only way you really find out (what is happening around town) is if you end up at a meeting (or) working at a gardening project together, you happen to know a member or an employee in a location, or just through conversation or a pass by, you find out about the good work that’s being done.

These projects usually do not have the intention of raising awareness about other endeavors taking place around the city, yet because people that are involved in this circle are all interacting, information is shared about other projects. The Chamber member also mentioned this networking that occurs unintentionally. “I know them (the producers) just because of other relationships: church relationships, friend relationships…”

*Dialogue on Loaf-of-Bread Model*

Interviewees were asked to examine the loaf-of-bread model, which depicts a healthy, local food system from the Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund. They were asked which components from the diagram are present in Owensboro and which are lacking, as well as whether there are any aspects of a healthy, local food system that Owensboro
exhibits that are not shown on the model. Some of the participants brought up concepts that, perhaps while not being present in Owensboro or Kentucky, should be part of a theoretical healthy, local food system. These will be discussed shortly.

*Which factors are present in Owensboro or in the state of Kentucky?*

All of the Owensboro interviewees (not surprisingly) admitted that **production** is absolutely in the city. From the farmers’ market to individual farms across the area raising vegetables, fruits, commodities and livestock, production is widespread. **Wholesale and retail distributions** were named across the board, as well. Wholesale distribution occurs at the farmers’ market, at roadside stands, and on-site at some of the farms. Retail distribution of products takes place at the largest scale in the local IGA grocery stores, but also to a lesser extent in the chain groceries, such as Kroger and Wal-Mart. All three of the producers and several of the non-producers noted that **consumer demand** is present and growing. These declared that interest in local foods is certainly growing, and the fact that demands for such enterprises as the CSA and the fresh meats are intensifying indicates this trend.

The four previously mentioned components were the most frequently referenced parts of the model, yet several of the other areas were named as well. **Education** was discussed by several, citing that educating the farmers and the public is a role that many of the organizations play. For example, Cooperative Extension, the Chamber, and the environmental group act as educators, providing resources and community education classes. **Farm inputs** were mentioned a few times, as interviewees talked about the farm machinery, seed, fertilizer, and other factors of production. The health department
representative alluded to this by noting that “It’s an agricultural community, part of an agricultural region.”

**Leadership, communication, and coordination** were commented on by a few individuals. The vendor at the farmers’ market said that at the market there are a lot of “meetings and just sharing information, making sure everything’s communicated with the members. Everyone’s coordinating so that we can schedule the market.” Also the chef explained, “Community leadership groups… are trying to bring up those larger conversations” (about local food and its impact on the community). Plus, Cooperative Extension’s work in bringing resources from the University of Kentucky and “making them available at the local level” indicates communication and coordination.

**Financing** was only mentioned twice, as interviewees named the vouchers made available to low-income families to redeem food at the farmers’ market, and the grant funding made available through the CDC to promote healthy eating in the school systems. **Processing** was mentioned also only twice, both in reference to the restaurants that feature local products. **Technical assistance** was brought up by two of the interviewees to indicate the credit card machines used at the farmers’ market and the health needs assessment conducted by the health department. **Regulation** came up once during a discussion about the guidelines from OSHA and the FDA for vendors at the farmers’ market. GAP (Good Agricultural Practices) training was also cited by a couple of interviewees. The media personality discussed the importance of **food security**, explaining, “Eating locally gives you a little more security in your food. You don’t see a lot of problems out there from the farmers’ market.”
When the model was presented to the interviewees at the state level, they agreed that production, wholesale and retail distribution and consumer demand were all definite components of Kentucky’s local food system. In fact, the interviewee from the Kentucky Department of Ag said, “It (local food) is without question becoming something that consumers are demanding.” The member of the farm advocacy group declared, “Right now, the demand for local food in Kentucky is outpacing production.”

Only one mentioned processing by citing the Kentucky Proud program. Two of them brought up the element of leadership, communication, and coordination, one of which stated, “It’s something that affects everybody, and so there’s a tremendous response across the public as far as this notion.” There was one mention of technical assistance (alluding to a UK research study), and one reference to food security as he emphasized the importance of a healthy local food system. “One of the biggest threats to our national security is going to be what? A vibrant, consistent food system.”

Which factors are not present in Owensboro or in the state of Kentucky?

The follow-up question of which factors from the model are missing in the Owensboro or Kentucky local food systems elicited an array of responses. Two of the Owensboro producers noted the lack of a means of processing. The orchard owner also wanted to see more consumer education as he explained the common mix-up of local and organic foods. The farmers’ market vendor said that regulations were in place, but that there needed to be more. This tied into her opinion that food security needed to receive more emphasis. “It’s not enforced. It’s not understood that… I don’t think they (producers and consumers) understand the seriousness of that.”
The non-producers of Owensboro also noted several of these points. Several of them indicated that education could be stronger. The health department interviewee affirmed that students in Kindergarten through college should be receiving education about foods and health. She said,

The challenge we face and one of the biggest barriers, obstacles, is people have become removed from how food’s prepared, how it’s prepared from scratch, where it’s procured, whether it’s at a grocery or a restaurant, where do we get our foods?

Food security was also largely discussed as lacking in Owensboro. One of the Cooperative Extension agents said, “Food safety is going to become more and more important… (It’s) a big deal.” The member of the environmental group stated, “Food security is a biggie. That is not one that people in Daviess County think about.” The chef also talked about food security, but from a different perspective. He described the hybridization that so many types of fruits and vegetables and even breeds of animals are undergoing. Because their gene pools are being reduced too much, they are being put at risk of extinction. He advocates raising more heirloom and heritage lines.

Financing was also brought up by several of the individuals. The Chamber member said that one of their biggest obstacles is having the funds to publicize their efforts of promoting local food. The interviewee from the health department explained that her organization, as well as others, is limited by a budget.

Workforce development was identified as lacking, too. A Cooperative Extension agent explained, “Man labor is a large component of vegetable production, and it is not present on the model.” Another agent related to this topic by saying that the younger
generations do not understand the work involved with production. She declared that migrant workers are often the ones that hold the majority of the farm labor jobs.

**Leadership, communication, and coordination** are missing in Owensboro, according to the Chamber member.

Really telling the story, telling it well, and telling it often about the value of local foods… If they start telling the story of what local food does for the local economy, it might change the thought process for some of the community leaders that would allow them then to say, “Ok, how do I insert this into the culture of my employees? How do I incorporate that?”

The member of the environmental group recognized the need for Owensboro to focus on **energy issues**.

This is a huge one. The sun is free, and we are using way too much energies, oil, and coal that are running out… What we need to do is use some of our farmland for putting windmills… certainly for solar collectors. Capturing methane… Let’s capture some of that methane and use that for energy, because it takes a lot of energy in those animal operations. But the sun is free. Let’s use it… Using the natural energy.

Finally, the chef reported that there is somewhat of a shortage of **consumer demand** in Owensboro. He said that while interest is growing and those people who have gotten on board the local movement love it, there are still many people that haven’t. “It’s not until enough people do it (support local food) that you get enough critical mass that it really shouldn’t be such a novelty. It should be more expected. (Local food) is more expensive; it should be.”
Addressing this issue with the interviewees at the state level resulted differently. 

**Consumer demand** was mentioned. “We often focus more on wealthier consumers and focus too much on demand rather than need, which is connected to food security.” The individuals from the farm policy group both cited **financing** as largely lacking in the food system of Kentucky. “There’s a lot of money that goes into supporting the conventional system, and there’s not money that goes to support the local system.” Also, “We spend more money on marketing rather than infrastructure or distribution logistics.”

The marketing concept was brought up by another of the interviewees. “We don’t have a good marketing program. We don’t have enough people who know how to do that.” This statement ties in **education** and **workforce development**.

We don’t have people who have those skills and we’re not creating them. There is no course at any college or university that teach people how to do that. There are marketing courses. There are agricultural marketing courses, but largely that’s geared toward commodity sales… There’s no training for those folks who want to help or manage the farmers’ market.

Also referring to workforce development, one explained, “We don’t have enough farmers. We don’t have a kind of holistic system in place in this state to create the next generation of farmers. We need new farmers desperately.”

*What factors are missing from the model of a healthy, local food system?*

Finally, a few of the interviewees brought up issues that they believe must be part of a healthy, local food system, yet are not shown on the loaf-of-bread model. One of the Cooperative Extension agents pointed out that labor in general is not presented on the model. Labor, in his opinion, does not fall under workforce development; there must be
workers available before development can occur. He said that immigration labor is largely used in the Owensboro area. “Labor is a serious problem… and it’s just going to continue to be a problem, and it’s tough.”

This agent also declared that there is a need for recognition of local products. “I wish there was a way to identify and give more identity to those products so that people realize that those are local-made.”

The food systems organizer with the farm advocacy group affirmed that labor rights issues should be listed as part of a healthy, local food system.

Labor rights issues are definitely missing, and I do not think that fits under workforce development. Also I don’t really see much about environmental issues. Energy could get at that, but environmental impacts of agriculture should not be ignored in addition to health.
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

Much can be gathered about Owensboro’s local food system and that of the state of Kentucky from the interviews. This section will discuss the conclusions drawn by the researcher, based on the interviews, of Owensboro’s food system. Also, the barriers that the interviewees expressed as obstacles to fully promoting local food will be addressed. This discussion will mainly regard Owensboro. The interviews from the state level serve as a comparison point; the food system of the Commonwealth will not be evaluated.

Social Capital

*Bridging / Bonding*

Analyzing the responses to the questions developed around social capital, it is clear that bridging and bonding networks are certainly present in Owensboro. The consensus appears to be that those involved in and supportive of local foods are well-connected. However, outside this community of like-minded individuals, awareness seems to be deficient. As the vendor at the famers’ market explained, she still regularly talks to people that claim not to have known about the market. Likewise, at the fresh meat market, the owner also stated that he frequently encounters people that have not heard of his store.

The farmers’ market vendor and CSA provider, the owners of the farm and orchard, and the meat producer and marketer all seem to have found their own niches in the food system of Owensboro and have established reputations for themselves and the quality of their products. The individuals that patronize these producers return recurrently to obtain fresh goods. As the orchard owners said, people often call their farm asking about the availability of products. Again, though, apart from these regular customers that
are familiar with these markets, the larger consumer base looks to be by and large still unacquainted with the local producers.

Bonding is evident among the community of producers and local food supporters. At least a couple of the interviewees stated that the vendors at the farmers’ market do have their own strong sense of community. During the interviewing process, when asked who else is involved or who interviewees recommended that I speak with, the camaraderie felt by those in this circle was unmistakable. Individuals spoke highly of others in this realm, and I repeatedly received encouraging feedback about the various players in Owensboro’s local food system.

Additionally, I attended a meeting with a local environmental group during my project. The agenda of that seminar revolved around the city’s local food movement with a lecture given by a chef and owner of one of the locally-owned restaurants that features products from regional farmers. The solidarity of the group members was instantly recognizable. Not only were these producers, marketers, and consumers linked because of their professional relationships, but they genuinely bonded over their common passion of local food. Stories about families and friends, experiences on the farms and in the gardens, and anticipated tasks in those fields and gardens were discussed amicably as they shared snacks that were raised by them.

As laid out in the ‘Findings’ section, the media personality remarked that, There’s already a community of people that are aware of the benefits of eating locally… and people look at them like a community. They don’t always look at them as something they can join… There’s almost a clique attitude about it…
The individuals of this group have, in fact, formed their own community. However, the negativity that is generally associated with cliques is not present in this case. The members at the club meeting spent a good deal of the meeting discussing how to involve more of Owensboro’s citizens in this ‘movement.’ For instance, plans to partake in a “Food Day” were confirmed, which is intended to link farmers and consumers, and proposals to be present over the upcoming months at community festivals and events with an informational booth were verified.

At the state level, interviewees referred to social justice as they explained a lack of good communication and their attempts to get all parties “to the table.” (In this case, social justice refers to the equality that people of all races and classes should share in society. Tying this term to the previous discussions on elitism, for instance, social justice discourages the notion of elitism and favors equal and fair treatment for all.) The food systems organizer said that while there are connections in the state’s food system, many of them seem to be “in silos and little bubbles” and that “we would all benefit from a little solidarity.” While proponents across the state may be grappling with how to all be on the same page, those in Owensboro appear to be headed in the same direction. Perhaps at the community level, less politics and bureaucracy is involved, allowing the people of Owensboro to focus on the food system itself.

**Efficacy**

The findings on efficacy revealed mixed results. Within that circle of citizens that are aware of the benefits of eating locally and supporting these producers, of course the levels of efficacy are very high. These individuals are excited about growing their own foods, purchasing locally-raised products, boosting the area’s economy, reaping the health
benefits of eating these foods, along with the rest of the reasons that people support local. Outside of this sphere of locally-minded individuals, though, the efficacy is obviously lacking, as people are unaware of either the presence of local items in the community or the advantages that come with supporting local producers and their food items. If people are oblivious to the farmers’ market, for instance, or the numerous opportunities to be involved in local food, they clearly cannot express efficacy for this cause.

Social Norms

The reports on social norms by the Owensboro interviewees revealed similar views. Several referred to the “small-town” feel that Owensboro exudes. While it is one of the larger cities in the state, it still remains a rural area. That rural attitude is very much present throughout the city. The Chamber member summed it up quite succinctly: “We are still a pretty agrarian society… We’re still connected to rural life ourselves.” With such a prevalence of mind-sets grounded in agricultural living, many people in the area either still raise their own gardens or have connections with other community members that raise their own produce.

Perhaps a contributing factor as to why there is lacking awareness of locally-raised food sources in Owensboro is because people are not searching for them. If individuals are growing their own products or have access to a neighbor’s farm or garden, there is no need to seek outside sources. Larger urban centers, such as Louisville, Lexington, and Nashville, are more densely populated, and the intense demand for local and regional products is understandable. Considering the inability for the majority of the city-dwellers to even have backyard gardens and the inaccessibility to near-by farms or gardens provides a reasonable grasp of why farmers’ markets, CSAs, and other sources of local
items are flourishing. The simple logic of supply and demand leads to the conclusion that without a high demand in Owensboro for locally-raised products, there obviously will not be an extensive market.

Following with this theory that Owensboro’s “agrarian lifestyle” is largely attributable to the state of its local food system, we can analyze some of the statements made by interviewees about the purchasing habits of its citizens. The member of the environmental group quoted, “Now, Owensboro’s a funny town. People go cheap in Owensboro, and it’s not just about poor people.” The meat producer, the farm and orchard owner, and others mentioned that local and/or organic foods do not sell at the higher prices that these products bring in other, larger cities. Rather than accuse the people of Owensboro of being “cheap,” I believe that frugality often accompanies rural mind-sets. A trait often found in farmers and others in agrarian societies is that of prudence. Those that rely on the land for their livings know that good crops are not guaranteed, and that earnings from previous years sometimes have to carry families through hard times. Thus, an attitude of thrift is developed and this mentality is passed along to younger generations. To sum up this issue, the “cheapness” that citizens of Owensboro may be charged with by outsiders could in fact be a sense of frugality ingrained by generations of agrarians.

The city of Owensboro itself varies from other larger cities with thriving farmers’ markets simply because of the different population concentrations. Because Owensboro is spread out without a dense population center, nearly all attendees must drive to the market. As the Chamber member pointed out, she has to drive 25 miles into town on a Saturday to shop at the farmers’ market. The location, while positioned centrally in the downtown area, does not draw the foot traffic that those markets situated in densely-
populated areas attract. Simply because Owensboro is not a metropolitan city is a reason for the smaller crowds that the market draws.

Another social norm that was discussed by many of the interviewees is that citizens largely rely on convenient, pre-packaged, or fast food. As the chef mentioned, Owensboro has a staggering number of fast food chains, indicating the popularity of food on-the-go. However, while this is a trait of the city, it does not appear to be exclusive to Owensboro. The nation as a whole is experiencing an obesity epidemic, largely due to the recurrent meals eaten at fast food joints.

Also, the media personality made a good point with her comment that Owensboro’s food culture has a large basis in comfort food. Known as the “BBQ Capital of the World,” there is definitely a tendency to relish home-style, Southern food. With such a love for this type of food, which can oftentimes be heavily calorie-laden, convincing people to limit such foods in replacement of healthier versions is certainly a challenge. The health and nutrition agent expressed the difficulty of this as she seeks to encourage healthy eating among low-income individuals. Cooking the traditional staples of beans and potatoes or picking up fast food burgers is cheaper and quicker than purchasing and preparing fresh meat and asparagus, for instance.

An additional note about Owensboro is that it is very focused on youth sports. In 2004, Owensboro was nationally recognized as the #1 sports town in Kentucky (owensboroparks.org). Two of the interviewees mentioned that many parents take advantage of fast food restaurants and drive-thrus during busy sports seasons. The focus on athletics, while good in some ways for a child’s development, is in part contributing to
their failure to eat healthy foods and learn about the importance of farms and food production.

The media personality explained that, “We eat in our car. We don’t even enjoy each other’s company.” The health and nutrition agent also commented on this habit of families eating in their vehicles. She stressed the importance of sitting down as a family at least five times a week to talk and share a meal. During her advocacy for this family time, she has been asked if eating together in the car on the way to ball practice can count as quality together time. Sadly, many families have resorted to this behavior several evenings each week, thus losing opportunities to bond and appreciate each other and the food.

A final observation about social norms comes from the officer of the state farm advocacy group. He talked about the hunger that some people throughout Kentucky experience, despite the availability of cheap food. Food deserts, areas in which people are unable to access fresh, healthy foods, exist around the state. Conversely, the interviewees in Owensboro didn’t focus on this topic.

**Structural Functionalism**

*Structures of the Local Food System: Who is Involved?*

Naturally, the interviewees in Owensboro cited primarily the same people and organizations as being involved in the local food system. This goes back to the discussion earlier about the relatively same circle of people as being engaged. The state interviewees independently brought up mainly the same list as well. While these results were predictable, they provided the “structures” that make up the local food system. With this foundation, the functions of each can be explored, providing insight into how the food system works.
Manifest and Latent Functions

As shown in the findings section, the manifest functions (those consequences of the structures that are intentional and recognized) indicate that the people and organizations involved in the local food system are acting according to their missions and goals. No bizarre behavior was uncovered. The work that is being done by these structures is certainly intentional and appears to be recognized by aware community members.

Latent functions refer to those results of the structures that are neither intentional nor recognized. While only a few were mentioned, the most significant concerns commodity production. The local producers of corn, soybeans, and wheat rarely are associated with the local food system, yet they actually play quite a role. Large amounts of these annual harvests are shipped to local poultry, cattle and hog farms. These animals, then, are processed, packaged, and distributed to many of the grocery stores and institutions of the area. Consumers purchasing these products without this knowledge are inadvertently supporting the local food system.


**Discussion of Loaf-of-Bread Model**

Table 5.1: Comparison of Factors Declared as Present or Absent in Owensboro

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor Shown on Model</th>
<th>Presence in Owensboro</th>
<th>Absence in Owensboro</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Farm Inputs</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processing</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wholesale Distribution</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail Distribution</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer Demand</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nutrient Management</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Security</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workforce Development</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical Assistance</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financing</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regulation</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership, Communication, Coordination</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

✓ = Mentioned by 4 or more interviewees

✓ = Mentioned by 3 or fewer interviewees
The results above show that, overall, the Owensboro interviewees agree on what is present and what is missing in the city’s local food system. Interestingly, there is no major overlap in what were declared as present and missing factors; those items most noted as present are separate from those components most cited as absent.

_BARRIERS TO DEVELOPING OWENSBORO’S LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM_

Interviewees were asked what challenges are keeping the local food movement from experiencing the rapid expansion that other major cities have seen. Many of these were exposed through the responses to other questions, such as the lack of processing facilities and the sense of elitism that unfortunately is often tied to the farmers’ market. However, many challenges were expressed that may not necessarily fall into a category on the model. A brief discussion of these follows.

The media personality conveyed concern about the lack of a permanent location for the farmers’ market.

_We’re not a parking lot. That’s not respectful in any way, shape, or form. We need a space that people can go to downtown, where the life-flow of the city is, that well then, people will say, ‘Ok, there’s this regular space, permanent space that is given respect… There is more discussion that I think needs… I think they need to recognize it a little more._

The member of the environmental group expressed an unfortunate mind-set that some people have of the agriculture community.

_You have people who think that farmers are second-class citizens. There is still that stigma about farmers, and I don’t understand it. I know it’s true, and it’s been true since the turn on the 20th century when we began to become more urban, and_
urban was ‘good’ and rural was ‘bad.’ No, that’s not true, nor is the reverse true…

I know people go to the farmers’ market and I’ve heard of cases (in which they) try to bargain! They would not go into Kroger and do that. What the price says, that’s the price. And in order for the farmers to survive, they have got to get that.

In addition to this negativity that is sometimes directed toward farmers, they also have to often deal with difficult financial situations. The environmentalist explained, “We’re not doing anything to help the small, independent, organic farmer, and that’s one of the flaws that has to be addressed.” She went on to say, “When you figure out how much money the local grower gets, it’s really sad. Really, really sad.” She pointed out that the biggest problem for young farmers is financing. Starting farming “is just so expensive… a lot young people don’t have that.” Several of the interviewees expressed this sentiment that investments need to be made in young farmers.

One of the Cooperative Extension agents expressed a need for recognition for locally-grown or locally-made products. “I wish there was a way to identify and give more identity to those products so people realize that those are local-made.” While there is the Kentucky Proud program that labels products made around the state, that brand hasn’t fully reached Owensboro yet. Few Kentucky Proud labels can be found in the groceries of Owensboro. To identify products made in western Kentucky would not only raise awareness for the local food movement, but would also foster pride in local agriculture. Rather than creating a brand specifically for this part of the state, seeking to bring Kentucky Proud’s branding to this region would likely be more successful. Competing brands would not benefit the local food cause.
Many of the interviewees stated that there still is a need for more awareness of local food and its health and economic benefits. A Cooperative Extension agent explained, People make themselves aware of what their interests are… I don’t know if it’s because we don’t do a good job educating the public. Number one, that takes marketing funds, and number two, it takes an interested audience… There is a limited interest, limited number of people that are interested (in economic development and opportunities to keep dollars in our community).

A few of the non-producers declared that the failure of the coop shouldn’t have happened, and Owensboro should attempt this again. “If we had a coop maybe in the community that could show that food bought locally is not going to cost a lot more,” said the media personality.

However, the producers had quite a different perspective. The orchard owner explained that the Coop “failed (because) this is a grain farming region… Kentucky tried to get into produce (several years ago), and just got squashed by the professionals.” He said that Kentucky just cannot compete with other states or regions that specialize in vegetable production. “I mean, you’re trying to compete with the big boys that have been in it for years, that raise 2 or 3,000 acres of vegetables, and we’re talking about a couple hundred in Daviess County.”

This producer also commented on the attempted coop in Owensboro.

An environmental group that pushed for the coop “just thought that anybody could bring in potatoes. You know, any variety, put ‘em in boxes and send ‘em out. That ain’t going to work… The farmers just kind of laughed at it. Well, we don’t have time for that. They thought, well, you know, just go grow some tomatoes.
Everybody’d grow tomatoes and bring them in. They’re all different varieties; that doesn’t work.

A final barrier pointed out by the meat producer is the lack of good consumer education. He described the belief held by many consumers that grass-fed beef is tastier and healthier. On the contrary, he said, “It’s not good. It’s not tender. It’s not good.” He detailed the stores and their products that advertise grass-fed beef, yet have opposing information on their websites. Consumers that fail to investigate thoroughly accept and believe the advertisements, leading them to be sadly misinformed.

A similar story came from the farm and orchard owner. He declared that consumers believe that organic products are healthier and that organic chemicals are safe. This is not always true, he said. He, too, encourages people to do their homework rather than relying on whatever they read or hear. This artificial advertising, in turn, hurts the local growers as they are faced with false beliefs and demands from the consumers.

Overall, the interviewees from Owensboro were quite similar with their responses concerning the city’s local food system. Social capital does exist, but definite room for growth was expressed. The structures involved in the local food system were mostly repeated by all of the interviewees. As shown in Table 5.1, there was general agreement on which factors of the food system are present and which are missing. In terms of the barriers to furthering the support of local food, major challenges include providing more financial assistance to producers, offering additional consumer education (including making consumers aware of those products that are locally-sourced), and implementing a coop or similar structure in the city.
CHAPTER VI: RECOMMENDATIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

Recommendations

Owensboro is absolutely on the right track toward a vibrant local food system. In fact, the strides that the city has taken in just the last few years are incredibly impressive. As more people understand the health, economic, and environmental impacts that promoting local foods yields, the more successful this movement will become. Growing the awareness and subsequent support for it will take time, money, and a lot of energy. However, the city has been shown to be one of strong community ties. People pull together in times of need and yet, while there is not an imminent crisis on its hands, this is an issue that needs addressing much sooner rather than later.

The member from the Chamber said that local food “is not a priority of our business members right now.” With the numerous economic benefits that supporting locally-grown foods has been shown to produce, it would make sense for the Chamber to advocate more for this cause. The greatest gain would be the fact that money would be staying in and circulating through the community rather than leaving via grocery corporations. Promoting local farms could improve the workforce, even. With many of the interviewees citing the lack of a processing facility, for instance, why not use an idea from the environmentalist and create one of these, hiring citizens of Owensboro? Endorsing local foods should furthermore increase the health of the economy, which of course makes economical sense.

Furthermore, there absolutely needs to be more financial investment in local farmers. As some of the interviewees explained, the lack of funding support for these producers is indeed hindering their efforts. The means of allocating this money can be
approached in countless ways. Grants should be sought out from public and private institutions. State and federal credit loans should be offered to small and/or first-time farmers at reasonable rates. The city of Owensboro should also encourage incubator farm programs. These programs provide new farmers with resources and access to land for a few years, during which time they develop the resources and knowledge to begin their own farm businesses on their own land.

How the city chooses to approach this issue is beside the point. The aim needs to be getting money, tax incentives, rebates, or other forms of financial assistance to those who wish to raise animals or crops for the local area. Increasing the amount and diversifying the farmers should also broaden the variety of food items made available to the Owensboro area as well, a need expressed by some of the interviewees.

Recommendations for Owensboro also include truly investing in the advertising of where to purchase fresh, local food items. This can be via traditional methods of newspapers, PSAs, or billboards, but I recommend getting creative, especially with social media. Also, it is important to identify the local products as being from the area, as one of the interviewees said. Reach out to Kentucky Proud to bring that brand to western Kentucky. It seems that once people realize the benefits of supporting local producers, most are inclined to purchase local products. However, without some way to identify these items, they will continue to be overlooked.

Advertisements should be designed with all consumers in mind and not just the upper class, as many people apparently believe that only the wealthy can participate in the local food movement. The sense that the farmers’ market is for the elite needs to be dispelled, while a welcoming message is conveyed by the market and other sources of
local foods. The health and nutrition agent as well as the interviewee from the health department remarked on the vouchers available to low-income families to purchase items from the farmers’ market. This program needs to become more visible to citizens to ensure that any who qualify are made aware of this aid.

Concerning the false advertising referred to by the meat producer, perhaps stricter marketing rules can be issued. Also, posting informational posters or flyers around vegetable stands or meat counters would be helpful in dispelling myths that float around. Ensuring that the public is correctly informed is an important step in promoting the local food markets.

Besides investing in marketing, I agree with the suggestion that a permanent location be designed for the farmers’ market. As an interviewee said, when the market moves frequently, it appears that the organization is not worthy of a stable location. Grounding the market will allow people to grow accustomed to that location and to get into the habit of visiting that place regularly, rather than questioning where it is set up on a given day.

Addressing the issue of the co-op, perhaps a meeting bringing together the producers and consumers could be held to determine the demands of the consumers as well as the abilities and realistic actions that can be taken by the producers. It seems that the call for some type of a co-op is there, yet how to go about achieving that can be challenging to the farmers. Instead of remaining separated as producers and consumers, these two parties should come together to discuss this issue.

Education should also be increased in the schools. While many other cities are getting on board with school gardens, not one of the interviewees mentioned anything
about this idea. It is important that children learn where their foods come from, and that they appreciate farmers. Field trips could be centered around agriculture. Plenty of agritourism exists around the Owensboro area that could provide fun and educational experiences for children. Home economics programs seem to have slackened in recent years, lessening their focus on healthy eating. I recommend reassessing these curriculums to consider if more lessons on food procurement and preparation can be added. As the media personality put it, “You have to put the seed in young. Literally. It’s like the growth of the whole thing.”

The interviewee from the health department explained what exactly consumers need to understand and recognize.

The key is just getting people to the point that they recognize it, they want it, and that they’re asking for it. When you order a menu item, and not that it has to be, but is it part of the decision-making process? Is it something you consider when you order a menu item? Do you care where that item has been procured? …The bottom line is the common thread we all share is we recognize the importance of the local agricultural system… we all want a healthier, safer community.

In addition to education about the health, environmental, and economical benefits of eating foods grown locally, there needs to be an emphasis on the ways that purchasing local foods or raising one’s own builds a sense of community and cultivates relationships. Working in a garden or on a farm or buying from local farmers, then preparing and eating that food with friends or family creates an appreciation for the food and the process of its procurement. As the television personality explained,
I respect the food that I put in front of me. I don’t just eat for consumption. I eat because it’s beautiful. It tastes food. It makes me feel good. It’s good for me. And, I know who grew it. You know, and also that brings in the whole world of green in… So it’s recognition of a whole world of awareness, basically.

This need to be aware of nature and the value food is recognized in other cultures, as was described by this interviewee in a story about a friend of hers that is a chef.

One of his joys when he was plating food for me… He had been a chef in a restaurant. He drizzled the food. He laid it on top of each other. He designed the plate. Who does that? But isn’t it beautiful? You go to a Japanese restaurant and if they serve you Japanese sushi, how beautiful is that? Maybe we need a little art in our food.

Simply put, she emphasized the necessity that we come together over food and truly recognize the importance of food. “Let’s take it back to the table. Let’s talk about what we’re eating, and not just eat without thought.” How this concept can really be conveyed to the people of Owensboro is a challenge, yet it needs to be met with enthusiasm. An initial step that could be taken is to gather those key players in Owensboro’s local food system together to discuss, as a group, what can be done to enhance this sense of community built around food. With many different people and organizations involved, it is crucial that all of them work in unison, rather than having several weak initiatives in action.

This ideal of gathering people together over food can be approached as the culture and heritage of Owensboro are highlighted. As mentioned earlier, this city is recognized as the “BBQ Capital of the World.” The Catholic churches in the area compete annually
for the best BBQ and burgoo at their picnics. Food is the spotlight of these picnics, as well as at many other annual events around the region. Encouraging people to participate in such events and to recognize that food is what brings communities together is a great way to further the conversation about the unifying aspect of food.

Circling back to the earlier dialogue about food policy councils, Owensboro may want to consider the development of one such entity. As noted by Lazaroff (2012), some of the functions of FPCs are pointing citizens toward local food options and creating incentives for local food businesses. They also act to educate the public and officials, shape public policy, improve collaboration between existing programs, and seek to initiate new programs (“North American Food Policy Council”).

Several of the roles that FPCs fill are the same missing factors that Owensboro interviewees listed. For example, many of them explained the need for more consumer education. A couple of them noted that the local government and the Chamber of Commerce weren’t involved in the food system. An FPC would serve as an educator to all of these parties. An interviewee brought up the “turf battles” between groups; an FPC, too, could serve as a mediator and collaborator. Finally, there was a call for more overall awareness and support of the local food system. A food policy council would work to implement new programs that could bring attention to local foods, involve more people, and grow the recognition of this movement and its benefits to the community.

The prospect of a council may be worth talking about in Owensboro. Because there is some opposition to these bodies, perhaps the city may decide not to invest in the development of a local food policy council, but may lend support to the statewide food policy network initiative, discussed by the food systems organizer. Owensboro has not
traditionally been a proponent in local food enterprises with the state, as Louisville and even Lexington usually take the lead with such programs. However, Owensboro could provide a great western Kentucky perspective of local foods that may be missing from the current efforts. Regardless of the approach taken, Owensboro would do well to bring this issue to the table.

These recommendations, all stemming from the interview analyses of this study, provide insightful advice for Owensboro. However, other major cities have programs within their local food systems that are proving to be quite beneficial to those communities. A brief look at some of the successful projects around the country supports the push for Owensboro to also embrace a healthy, local food system. This evidence shows that the recommendations made in this study are in line with the activities currently in play around the nation’s thriving healthy, local food systems.

Louisville, Kentucky was previously discussed as a city with a vibrant local food system, with many venues featuring and supporting locally-sourced products. The city’s current mayor, Greg Fischer, has made healthy eating one of the four pillars of his Healthy Hometown Community Coalition. With the goal of making Louisville one of the healthiest cities in America, the mayor is pushing to make healthy, local foods available to people of all ages and incomes (“About Mayor’s Healthy Hometown Initiatives”).

In Chicago, Mayor Rahm Emanuel is fighting to bring awareness to the vast food deserts across the city. He is voicing the need to help residents of these communities, which lack sources of healthy food products, to gain either those healthy options in their neighborhoods or to acquire transportation opportunities to those sources (“Mayor Emanuel Announces…”).
A final example of a city that is embracing local foods is Cleveland, Ohio. Mayor Frank Jackson’s Sustainable Cleveland 2019 plan focuses on a different aspect of sustainability each year (2009-2019) to help the city achieve a “green” economy in a decade. The 2012 focus was on local foods for the many health, economic, and community-building benefits (“Celebration Topics”).

With a growing number of communities truly embracing and implementing healthy, local food systems, it is evident that Owensboro, too, can reap the benefits of this initiative. The recommendations made in this study are simply starting points for the city. Countless means of growing a healthy, local food system exist, and the sky is the limit in terms of the options of how to execute this system. As the other cities have shown, investing in this movement generates tremendous payoffs to communities.

Limitations

The study obviously included a very small sample size. Should this be repeated, a more inclusive list of interviewees should be involved. While the main people and organizations involved in the local food system of Owensboro are believed to have been interviewed, those engaged in the periphery may have contributed crucial information.

Along with the number of interviewees, the type of people interviewed could have been expanded. This study analyzed responses from the organizations, producers, marketers, and administrators involved with the food system. Had consumers, those people outside of the organizational realm of the local food system, been interviewed, the results may have been different. To gain an understanding of the consumers’ perspectives in Owensboro of its local food system, along with their ideas about how it affects public health, the local economy, the environment, and the overall sense of community, would
be a substantial indication as to the future of local foods in this area. Consumer surveys or focus groups are recommended for further researchers in this area.

Finally, to compare the responses of Owensboro’s interviewees with those from a city in the midst of a vibrant local food system would provide a great contrast for evaluation. Having this data from Owensboro is intriguing, yet to have a comparison of interviews from people in similar positions as those interviewees from Owensboro could make this study’s information even more valuable. Data from another city with an even healthier local food system could provide clues as to how Owensboro may nurture its own system.

**Conclusion**

This study has provided insight into the current state of Owensboro’s local food system. The desire for products grown locally is certainly present in the area. However, the attitudes and perspectives of citizens in this rural city differ from those of larger urban vicinities in more ways than one. For instance, the monetary value that people in Owensboro place on local foods is less. Because so many in this area raise their own or have easy access to homegrown products, the demand for markets featuring these food items is lower than the call for such markets in larger cities. Additionally, the mindset that folks of Owensboro have about local foods generally varies from that of urbanites. Many in this region see gardening and preserving foods as a way of life. They may not necessarily see this as a “movement,” while city-dwellers perceive supporting local foods as an up-and-coming trend.

Returning to the original research question, the ingredients of a healthy, local food system can now be expressed. The loaf-of-bread model from the Vermont Sustainable
Jobs Fund is a great representation of most of the components that I find essential. However, a few more slices can be added to the loaf. First, labor is absolutely a key factor in any food system. Particularly, local food systems are often comprised of lots of small farmers lacking the equipment used to produce and harvest mass quantities of produce. Lots of laborers are needed in these smaller operations.

Also, a healthy, local food system must have some means of identifying local products as being produced or processed in that area. Consumers must have some way of recognizing these in order to purchase these products over conventional items. The Kentucky Proud program is an excellent branding example, but this initiative has not fully been implemented across the entire state.

Finally, environmental issues absolutely must be included in any model for a healthy, local food system. Numerous matters concerning the land, air, and water come into play throughout the entire process of getting foods from the producers to consumers. For instance, producers need to make efforts to prevent soil erosion, such as using no-till methods. They also should work to prevent water pollution, perhaps by lessening run-off. Consumers can contribute to environmental protection in numerous ways, such as by purchasing products from farmers’ markets or directly from the producers to reduce the amount of packaging. Government officials and policymakers need to push for more sustainability in all facets of our society.

Significant differences in the attitudes of urbanites and rural people concerning local foods have been discussed. Applying this knowledge to the loaf-of-bread model and the extra slices, it would be wise to depict separate loaves for food systems in cities versus rural communities. Also, a way to display perhaps an even more accurate display
of healthy, local food systems would be to vary the thicknesses of the slices. For instance, financing in the local food system of a rural area may be more substantial than that of an urban setting. Rural farmers probably require more financial assistance regarding land and equipment than those in cities demand. Therefore, the “slice” of financing for the rural healthy, local food system would appear thicker than the comparable slice of the city loaf. Another example concerns education. This slice on the urban model may necessitate a greater thickness than the rural counterpart. People living in the country often have a better understanding of foods and their sources than those who live away from farmland.

To review, the loaf-of-bread model with the addition of the three extra components provides a fine portrayal of a healthy, local food system. In order to provide an even more focused look at the differences in local food systems in rural versus urban communities, the thicknesses of the slices should be varied according to the emphasis needed on each component.

The prospect of expanding the local food movement can be approached in countless ways for a number of reasons. The interviewee from the environmental society, however, summed up quite well what needs to happen in Owensboro:

So we have to work… changing people’s attitudes towards farming, towards the food they eat, and towards supporting their local community. All three of those are very, very important. If you really don’t care how your tomato was grown, and you really don’t care how long it took to get it from there to here, and you don’t really care about how it tastes, then go ahead and buy it. But if you want something grown environmentally-friendly, and you want something that’s
healthy for you and your family, then you’re going to shop locally. It’s just pure and simple.
Appendix A: Interview Questions and “Our Food System” Model

1. What is your organization’s background in local food? (i.e. How long has your organization been in operation in this community?)

2. Who, whether individually or organizationally is involved in the local food system of Owensboro?

3. How does your organization perceive connections among the players of the local food system (i.e. relationships among producers, grocers, consumers, distributors)?

4. Are there other local or state-level organizations that your organization collaborates with regarding food distribution, food security, food as nutrition, food as economic development, etc.? Who are your allies / support system?

5. Is there discussion about supporting local food in Owensboro? Are the citizens here aware of initiatives / programs / organizations present elsewhere functioning in support of local food systems?

6. How receptive are the citizens of Owensboro to trying new ideas regarding local food?
7. Supporting local food has been shown to enhance the local economy and civic activity within communities. Have the locals expressed a desire to improve the economy and the sense of community? In other words, does your organization, as an identified key player in the local food system, believe that progress is being made toward further developing the local food system?

8. What is the food culture in Owensboro? As in, what do people’s food choices reveal about their product selections? Do people tend to value cheap food, organic food, local food…?

9. What barriers and challenges have your organization dealt with or is currently facing in the local food system? (i.e. resistance from community members? Resistance from producers or retailers?)

10. How does Owensboro’s food system compare to this model of a healthy, local food system?
   a. Are there any components on the model that the city does not emphasize?
   b. Is there anything that the model lacks that Owensboro demonstrates?

11. Is there anyone involved with the food system that you feel I should speak with?
Figure 2.5: “Our Food System”
References


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