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FARM BILL TRENDS AND FOOD INSECURITY: IMPACTS ON RURAL AND URBAN COMMUNITIES

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Abstract
With the constraints in federal budgeting requiring the shrinkage of federal programs, programs outlined in the 2014 Farm Bill are significantly impacted, showing a thirteen year trend toward funding reduction. This paper examines historical Farm Bill programs, including crop subsidies and the nutritional assistance programs and how these programs historically addressed food insecurity versus how they are impacted by today's budgetary constraints. The paper also examines new models for addressing food insecurity and how communities are pulling together resources to address food insecurity. In discussing the new models, the paper focuses on policy trends and funding structures; for example community food co-ops and their impact on farmers, rural and urban communities that are facing food insecurity. Ultimately, the paper aims to give the agriculture and law sectors tools to lessen the impact of Farm Bill changes and funding reductions in local communities.

Keywords: Farm Bill, Food Insecurity, Co-ops

Introduction
By the end of 2013, the 2013 iteration of the U.S. Farm Bill had yet to be passed. It was a dramatic moment for many in farming and agriculture as the looming December 31, 2013, deadline meant possible catastrophic impacts to farmers if yet another continuing resolution was not enacted by then. Those watching the Farm Bill with interest were somewhat used to the wait. The legislation that was last renewed in 2008 expired on September 30, 2012, and Congress had been unable to enact a new five-year bill since then. There were two very different versions of the Farm Bill from the U.S. House and the U.S. Senate as late as December 2013. Finally, in late January 2014, both houses reached consensus and the Farm Bill was passed by the U.S. House on January 29, with the U.S. Senate following just days later. The 2014 U.S. Farm Bill, called the Agricultural Act of 2014, was signed by President Obama on February 7, 2014.

The current U.S. Farm Bill's renewal occurred during a time of overall government sequestration, that is, a minimum cut required of each federal agency's budget to help reduce overall government spending. The net result of sequestration is that regardless of where Congress landed on the finer points of the legislation, significant cuts were required for every program from farm subsidies to nutritional assistance programs. These across-the-board cuts will immediately impact rural agriculture primarily in two ways, namely: (1) lower subsidies and available funding for programs; and (2) fewer consumers of farm products through cuts in nutrition programs supporting the poor. These cuts will also impact urban agriculture in two key ways, specifically: (1) reduced buying capacity for those already food insecure; and (2) higher prices for commodities that are no longer being subsidized at customary rates. While the uncertainty of the approval process for the Farm Bill left many uncomfortable, the news that cuts were coming no matter what may have left many asking, “what now?” The bad news is that significant cuts did make it into the final 2014 Farm Bill, but the good news is that there are still many opportunities to leverage resources between agricultural communities and other federal agencies to create positive outcomes for both rural and urban agriculture centers.

This paper gives a brief overview of the U.S. Farm Bill starting with some of the historical information on the legislation, followed by an overview of the outcome of the final 2014 Farm Bill. The next section focuses on what communities will have to do to cope with current and future changes as sequestration becomes the norm. The final section describes a specific solution, the community food cooperative (co-op) and illustrates places where urban and rural communities are working together to achieve mutual objectives. This section also includes selected sources of community food cooperative funding that the agricultural communities can leverage with their partners for improved outcomes in accessing quality food. Before delving into the details of this paper, it may be helpful to establish two key definitions related to food, food insecurity and food deserts. Food insecurity is defined by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) as a household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food. While the USDA notes that there are many ways to define which areas are considered “food deserts” and many ways to measure food store access for individuals and neighborhoods, a food desert is generally defined as a place with limited access to fresh and healthy food, where a large percentage of residents live more than a mile from a traditional supermarket. These terms are used throughout the paper to describe the problems of access to food, particularly unprocessed fresh food including fruits, vegetables, and minimally processed dairy products (USDA, 2014a).

Navigating the Farm Bill

The evolution of the U.S. Farm Bill, over time, has to be considered in the greater context of why the government became so involved in the growing of food. Professor William S. Eubanks described this reality best when he wrote, “[i]n the more than two centuries since U.S. independence, our nation’s deep agrarian roots have had a profound influence on our increasingly complex federal farming and food policies that have attempted to adapt over time to meet the prevailing needs of farmers, consumers, and ultimately the national economy” (Eubanks, 2013, p. 1). Indeed, the first iteration of the Farm Bill in the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933 was a response to widespread poverty, massive foreclosures and the economic downturn by which all other economic downturns would be measured, that is, the Great Depression. While it was thought that the subsidies and price controls that marked the first attempt at a national farm policy would be temporary, the inertia of pending war in the 1940s made the provisions permanent and set the course to protect food production as a means to provide for national defense. As America prepared to enter into World War II, it was evident that years of malnutrition created by the Great Depression had left the pool of men available for military service plagued with health problems. Once it was established that farm security meant national security, future iterations such as the 1948 Agricultural Act brought fundamental changes in growing technology, agricultural mechanization and increased efficiency in processing (Eubanks, 2013).

By the time the next big economic downturn of the mid-1980s came about, farmers were suffering another depression of their own. There were exceptionally high rates of foreclosures among Midwestern famers when Congress enacted the Food Security Act of 1985, which continued to secure farmers with high target prices for crops but added marketing loans, resulting in higher income subsidies for farmers (Eubanks, 2013). At the same time period, incremental improvements to the food stamp program were enacted, including the elimination of sales tax on food stamp purchases that increased the buying power of those receiving food subsidies. By the late 1980s electronic benefit transfer became part of the federal legislation, and by 1993, major changes to the food stamp program brought employment and training programs as well as increased federal oversight to increase efficiency, reduce fraud, and offset the rising costs of what had become a $15.4 billion program (USDA, 2014b; USDA, 2014c).

In 1996, Congress passed the Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act and shifted subsidies to farmers from supply-orientation to direct payments based on past program acres. Those direct payments were the subject of much farming policy debate with stories of so-called “dead farmers” receiving payments for land that used to grow crops. Through the late 1990s and into the beginning of the 21^{st} Century, U.S. farm policy continued to morph into a global economic strategy that incorporated the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and eventually involved significant input by the World Trade Organization (WTO) (Eubanks, 2013). Policies such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and an increased focus on immigration reform also impacted the farming industry. It was also during this time that the food stamp program began growing again after years of reduced or nearly flat growth. By the time the food stamp program was renamed the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) in the 2008 Farm Bill, the program had become a $37 billion program (USDA, 2014c).

The 2014 Farm Bill: What’s In, What’s Out

By late December 2013, there were two very different bills being considered in the U.S. House and the U.S. Senate. One version wanted to remove all of the nutrition programs; both versions wanted to reduce or eliminate direct payments to farmers, and there was increasing support for growing the ability of smaller family farmers to compete with the large farming conglomerates that were also getting subsidies. The following sections outline the compromise reached by Congress and the relevant changes to farm policy as reflected in the 2014 Farm Bill (U.S. Senate, 2014).

Commodities

While Congress realizes that farmers face a tremendous amount of business risk and the mitigation of that risk is imperative to keeping food prices at levels acceptable to American consumers, there was substantial pressure to remove the direct payment provisions. As a result Direct Payments, Counter-Cyclical Payments, Average Crop Revenue Election Payments, and Supplemental Revenue Assistance Payments were all repealed as of the end of the 2013 crop year. For the first time any entity or person applying for subsidy payments will have to have an adjusted gross income of less than $900,000, and payments are capped at $125,000 for each person. The cap applies even in the marketing program and requires that the USDA update its definition of a manager while, also for the first time, placing limits on the number of managers allowed on any one farm. Finally, in the area of risk management, farmers will have access to two programs to complement insurance programs. The first program is the Agricultural Risk Coverage program and it covers loss at the individual farm or county level. The second program is the Price Loss Coverage program and it provides payments when the price of a crop drops below a certain reference price. Both of these programs help shift farmers' planting decisions away from being dependent on production programs and they both require farmers to comply with conservation and wetland preservation requirements. The Marketing Loan program continues largely unchanged, except for the payment caps, with some program adjustments in response to world-trade pushback on certain crops like upland cotton.

The Sugar Program has been continued, unchanged, until 2018. The Dairy Price Support Program and Milk Income Loss Contract Program have been replaced by two programs, the Dairy Margin Insurance Program and the Dairy Product Purchasing Program. While many in Congress wanted to remove price controls on dairy altogether, the resulting Dairy Margin Insurance program helps small and medium-sized farms mitigate the margins between dairy prices and national feed costs. The Diary Product Purchasing Program allows the USDA to purchase dairy when the margins fall below $4.00 and then donate those products to food banks, soup kitchens, and homeless shelters. It is important to note that the USDA purchasing is discretionary, so while small and medium farmers can protect their margins through insurance, the overall price controls are still much more tied to market conditions than when the Dairy Product Price Support Program was in effect. Supplemental Disaster Assistance has now been extended to livestock where severe weather, disease, or other acts of nature have caused high mortality rates. This assistance is provided retroactively back to October 1, 2011, and the program is now permanent. The assistance has also been extended to livestock producers who experienced grazing loss due to drought, as well as natural disasters that impacted honey bees, farm fish, orchard trees, and nursery trees.

Conservation and Trade

While the 2014 Farm Bill cuts $6 billion in mandatory spending, much of this reduction is through the removal of duplicate programs. The new bill consolidates the former 23 programs into 13, while increasing conservation protections for land use and water management. Tying the conservation to insurance and subsidy programs requires farmers to meet conservation targets in order to receive federal funding. The conservation provisions of the new law include augmented grants and incentives in the Working Lands Program, a refocus of resources in the Conservation Reserve Program, and place a greater emphasis on regional partnerships as part of the Regional Conservation Partnership Program. Local governments relying on revenue from nontaxable federal lands may be disappointed to learn that the Payments in Lieu of Taxes Program has only been reauthorized for one year.

Because of the significant trade surplus in agriculture and the subsidies that allow American farmers to produce crops at prices well below what many other countries can produce, trade remains an important issue in the 2014 Farm Bill legislation. Congress maintained Agricultural Trade Promotion programs and augmented International Food Aid Programs like Food for Peace. This focus on trade prevents legal action and sanctions by the WTO against U.S. food producers while allowing American agricultural goods to become a stabilizing force in many war-impacted areas of the globe.

Nutrition

In perhaps the most contested portion of the 2014 Farm Bill, the changes to the nutrition programs come as a compromise to the U.S. House who wanted the nutrition section removed from the Farm Bill to be voted on as a separate piece of legislation. The U.S. Senate won in negotiations on this point and while nutrition remained in the 2014 Farm Bill, there were significant cuts to programs especially those that provide supplemental nutrition for those in poverty. Reform strategies include increased prosecution of those who sell their assistance benefits, removal of benefits for lottery winners, and changes to the college student programs that impact eligibility for food stamps, forcing many students in four-year programs out of SNAP eligibility. Removal of the so-called "heat-and-eat" provision prevents those who are eligible for very low subsidies under the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) to become automatically eligible for SNAP. Those cuts to the program and lower benefit amounts (along with others on dairy price supports and direct payments) were enough compromise to allow the nutrition section to remain in the 2014 Farm Bill. Nutrition programs protected include nutrition education programs and job training opportunities. The 2014 Farm Bill nutrition provisions also include increased requirements for retailers to offer a greater quantity and variety of staple foods, including more fruits and vegetables, which open up additional market opportunities for produce farmers who may have been rejected by SNAP retailers in the past.

Changes to the nutrition section of the legislation start with a transition of the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP). While the funding level for this program stays the same, it is being converted to a program strictly for senior citizens. This change means that no new non-seniors will be admitted to the program and those non-seniors who are currently in the program will only be allowed to remain on the program for a short period of time. The new program creates a clearer distinction between CSFP and the Women, Infant and Children Program (WIC), which is authorized under separate legislation (USDA, 2014d). The level funding reserved exclusively for use among seniors allows more low-income seniors to access fresh fruits and vegetables under the program. CSFP change goes hand-in-hand with the level funding for the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program which provides seniors with coupons that can be used at community farmer's markets. In addition to these programs for seniors, the 2014 Farm Bill provides increases for the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) which creates additional funding opportunities for food banks, shelters, and soup kitchens.

Finally, the nutritional section of the 2014 Farm Bill provides full funding for the Healthy Food Financing Initiative, Community Food Projects, and Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive Grants. These three programs mentioned later in this paper are gateways to establishing local efforts that allow rural and urban communities to work together in farm-to-table initiatives, community food programs, and food and agricultural education programs for children through service-learning opportunities funded by the USDA.

Farm Loan Programs

The 2014 Farm Bill keeps or creates the following four major loan programs for farmers. The Beginning Farmer and Rancher Individual Development Accounts give matching funds to beginning farmers for savings accounts to be used to develop farming operations. The legislation continues the Contract Land Sales Program and the Down Payment Loan program which are both designed to help the next generation of farmers by guaranteeing loans for land bought from retiring farmers or helping beginning farmers make down payments on land for farming. The legislation also expands the ability of the USDA to grant microloans and begin other experimental programs in targeted regions and sectors, and for beginning farmers. These new programs can be created while increasing the Department's ability to perform outreach for urban areas to increase partnerships between farmers and local/regional food producers. In addition to these key farm loan programs, the legislation extends the 2010 USDA-State Agricultural Mediation Program until 2018.

Rural Development Programs

In rural development, funding remains for three areas: rural business development, infrastructure improvement, and community development. Under rural business development, there are grant and loan programs to encourage development in rural areas including the Rural Business Development Grant program, Rural Cooperative Development Grant program, the Rural Microentrepreneur Assistance Program, the Value-Added Agricultural Market Development Program, and the Business and Industry Direct and Guaranteed Loan Program. These programs are designed to help invest in rural development, operate cooperative programs to increase the marketing ability of farmers, and help farming operations turn their crops into products for sale to increase farm revenue. Under the rural infrastructure improvement programs, there is funding for providing broadband internet access by the USDA, distance learning and telemedicine upgrades in rural communities, water and waste disposal systems (including $20 million for rural public waste systems), and full funding of the Rural Energy Savings Program. Finally, the 2014 Farm Bill retains its commitment to community development programs through the continuation of Rural Development Programs, the Community Facilities Loan and Grant Program, and activities for transmitting best practices to rural communities from national organizations via the Internet, known as technology transfer for rural areas.

Remaining Sections

The 2014 Farm Bill is a robust piece of legislation. There are separate sections on Research, Forestry, and Energy that contain provisions and funding in these three areas not directly addressed in this paper. The last three sections that impact food security include the Specialty Crops and Horticulture Title, the Crop Insurance Title, and the final Miscellaneous Title. Under Specialty Crops and Horticulture, the biggest impact is the quadrupling of funds available for the Farmers Market and Local Food Program. This program gives grants to rural and urban communities to increase access to farm-fresh food and help rural farmers get that food to these urban markets, particularly in the area of specialty crops, which includes non-subsidy crops like many fruits and vegetables. In this Title, there is also an adjustment of the allocation formula for Specialty Crop Block Grants which increases the availability of funds for farmers who want to grow specialty crops.

Finally, in response to significant market demand for more organics at affordable prices, the Specialty Crop and Horticulture Title includes many sections on organics with provisions for increase regulation and certification as well as supporting farmer's efforts to develop organic operations. The Crop Insurance Title helps mitigate risk for farmers by including all commodities as well as underserved crops like fruits and vegetables without making any cuts to insurance funding programs. Three key areas under this Title include a new supplemental coverage option for farmers, expanded crop insurance for fruits and vegetables, and two new stand-alone revenue protection programs for cotton and peanut growers. Lastly, in the Miscellaneous Title of the 2014 Farm Bill, only $50 million is allocated for socially disadvantaged farmers. This limited funding reduces capabilities to increase outreach, support of farm operations, and augment socially disadvantaged farmers' capacity to get their crops to market. While this brief overview leaves out a number of specifics from the 357 page legislation, the points of interest relevant to this paper are covered in the preceding paragraphs.

Coping with Funding Changes

While most of the cuts in the 2014 Farm Bill came from reconfiguration of programs, there are still significant cuts to individual SNAP benefits and the reduction of the number of people eligible for the program. A possible result of these cuts is that while funding has been increased for programs like the Farmers Market and Local Food Program, the buying capacity of those in food insecure areas will either remain flat or even slightly decrease. Couple this dynamic with the competition for grant programs increasing to make up for former direct payment programs and the net result will be more organizations competing for finite funds available from the USDA. The competition for fewer funds will require that rural and urban agriculture organizations work together to maximize impact and create programs aligned to the missions outlined in the 2014 Farm Bill. This work will require increased partnerships between urban and rural agricultural workers to both maintain markets for rural agricultural products and ensure food supply for urban consumers. Another essential element will require those inside the agriculture community to forge increased partnerships with those outside of the agricultural realm; meaning working with economic development agencies, workforce development groups, private philanthropies, and non-profits to pull resources and develop comprehensive community programs. Finally, these efforts will require leadership on the part of Cooperative Extension and University Agricultural Programs to bring people together.

Three initiatives working in various communities throughout the U.S. include mobile pantries, mobile famers markets, and other innovative solutions. Mobile pantries involve moving unsold produce from suburban areas to urban areas known as food deserts. These initiatives rely upon unsold produce being donated to food banks and other non-profit organizations and then brought into urban food deserts for distribution at an easy-to-access community location. Mobile farmers markets work along the same lines, but offer the food and products of farmers for sale at so-called mobile markets that do not rely upon a permanent building, but rather a large space like a parking lot with mobile technology available to process sales, including accepting SNAP benefit cards. Mobile farmers markets typically rely upon public-private partnerships to underwrite costs and more support from more sources (Descant, 2012). Collaborative efforts among public and private partners will strengthen grant applications and increase the chances of winning USDA grants. Innovative solutions such as urban community farming initiatives, community food cooperatives and farm-to-school initiatives are specifically named in the 2014 Farm Bill as funding initiatives. Communities will be required to demonstrate a commitment in these agricultural practice areas in order to qualify for funding.

Community Food Cooperatives: A Multi-Sector Approach

The changes in the 2014 Farm Bill focus efforts around a more multi-sector approach to increasing farmer's market share while providing access to farm products for the food insecure. In prior iterations of the bill, rural efforts such as farm development and direct payments were bifurcated from more urban programs such as SNAP and commodity distribution programs. The 2014 version of the Farm Bill shows what many communities have already learned, that there is more success in leveraging the strengths and needs of both rural and urban communities together and bridging the agricultural divide between the two. One way this is working well in urban centers throughout the country is community food cooperative, or food co-ops (Tidmarsh, 2011). The figure below illustrates how all of the elements of a community food co-op bring together a variety of elements to provide a holistic approach to food access and healthy living.

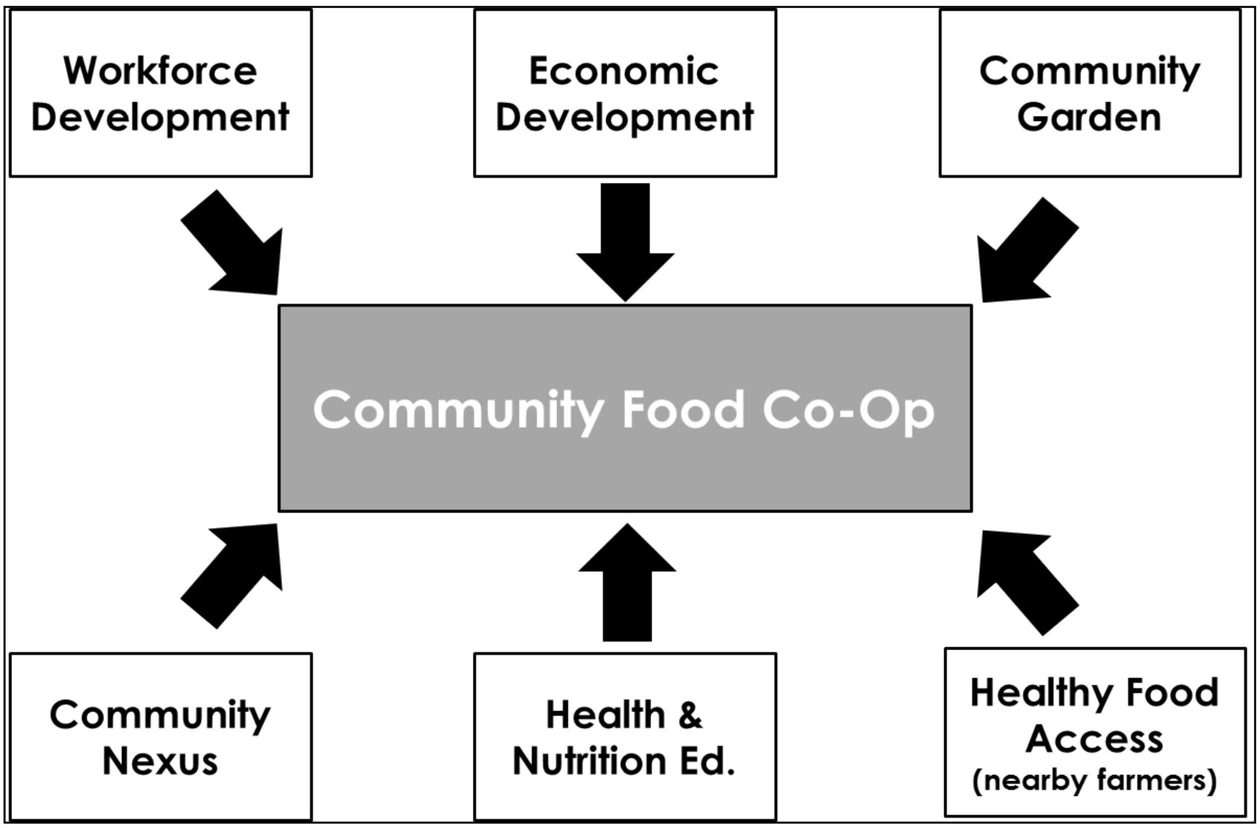

Figure 1: Community Food Co-op Model

What is a Community Food Co-op?

A community food co-op is a member-owned, member-controlled business that operates for the mutual benefit of all the members and is operated according to common principles established for cooperatives. Food co-ops are known as consumer co-ops that provide goods or services used primarily by members for personal consumption. Food co-ops adhere to internationally recognized standards for their operation and often belong to organizations of co-ops so that they may share best practices and technical assistance. Food co-ops offer consumers a retail environment free of coercive sales influences and with full disclosure of product quality and value. Food co-ops have members that direct the operations of the consumer environment through a board and democratic elections, however many co-ops allow anyone to shop in their markets, regardless of membership status. The member control aspect allows for easier introduction of local farm products, and the local control allows for a greater relationship between the food producers and the marketers of the food (CGIN, 2010).

Where Are Community Food Co-ops Working?

Community activists from Minneapolis to Philadelphia are solving local food access issues by establishing co-ops that offer healthy, local, and organic choices to local consumers. In Minneapolis, the Wirth Cooperative Grocery recruited the 400 members it needed to get financing and select a location to do business in 2012. Wirth took its cue from the nearby Eastside Food Co-op that opened in 2003 with 700 members. Both stores opened to address access to local food for residents where there was an absence of grocery stores (Brant, 2012). In St. Louis, the Old North St. Louis Restoration Group opened a food co-op in July 2010, which serves an area of only about 2,000 residents, providing them with fresh produce and tips for healthy eating (Lacapra, 2010). The concept of food co-ops solving food deserts is not limited to urban areas. In Bowden, North Dakota, the Bowdon Community Cooperative operates a local store that serves the local population with fresh produce as a result of the local grocery there closing (Tidmarsh, 2011). The demise of rural grocery stores has been noted since 2005 when due to market conditions, the population required to maintain a local grocery store rose to 3,200 from 2,800 in 2000. The Monroe Park Grocery Co-op in South Bend, Indiana, is another example where a food co-op helped a struggling neighborhood with access to healthy food while providing a nucleus for neighbors to gather (Tidmarsh, 2011).

For food co-ops to be successful, the initial membership goals should be anywhere from 400 members, as in the South Philly Co-op, PA (Vuocolo, 2013) to 800 members, as in the Richmond Food Co-op in Richmond, VA (Isaacs, 2013). The involvement of member-owners can range from volunteering at the co-op in exchange for membership benefits or special deals or simply member-owners who vote and support the decision-making operations of the store. In North Greensboro, NC, residents are in the early stages of developing a food co-op after supporters decided that they were skeptical that any private developer would follow-through on providing a stable grocery store in the area. Community support and recruitment are essential to a co-op’s success (Ginsburg, 2013).

Sources of Funds to Start a Community Food Co-op

Federal funding sources to underwrite the start-up of food co-ops comes from a variety of sources. One such source is the Healthy Food Financing Initiative (HFFI) grants available from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (USDHHS). The funding is specifically for eliminating food deserts while providing opportunities for sustainable employment and entrepreneurship geared to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipients (USDHHS, 2013). As mentioned earlier, full funding for HFFI was added to the 2014 Farm Bill. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (USDHUD) offers Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds for Entitlement Communities specifically for activities directed toward revitalizing neighborhoods, economic development, and providing improved community facilities and services. CDBG funds can be used for real-estate acquisition and other start-up operational costs that the community could use by partnering with local governmental authorities who are eligible for the funds (USHUD, 2013).

The 2008 Farm Bill established the Healthy Urban Food Enterprise Development Program, which is run by the Wallace Center at Winrock International and gives grants to organizations for enterprise development and business-based approaches to getting more healthy food into communities with traditionally limited access to food (HUFED Center, 2013). The Program works with the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture. While this program was established by name in the 2008 Farm Bill, it continues under the Community Food Projects and Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive Grants outlined in the current 2014 Farm Bill. There is also food co-op support available from private sources. The Food Co-op Initiative provides seed funding of up to $10,000 for community organizations that wish to partner with the organization to start a food co-op (Food Co-op Initiative, 2013a). The money from this grant must be matched by local funds that can be raised through membership equity. The Bowers Fund, managed by the Cooperative Development Foundation (CDF), also provides grant funding for capacity building in community food co-ops (CDF, 2013).

How to Develop a Community Food Co-Op

There are four key areas for organizing and planning a community food co-op: (1) coordination with area organizations (non-profits, government entities, and other existing stakeholders in the food access community); (2) legal organizing and compliance; (3) marketing and community engagement; and (4) technical support.

Coordination

Communities will most likely need to rely upon a coordinating council of interested organizations or have the leadership directed by one organization. This best practice relies upon creating a coordinating council of established and interested local organizations with the resources and capacity to support the start-up creation of a food co-op. The first step in coordination is to conduct a resource assessment to determine the capacity of the coordinating council's organizations to apply for federal and private funds within existing organizational structures (i.e., existing non-profit and governmental organizations that would be eligible for funds based on grant-making criteria of both local and national organizations). Once the capacity to establish resources is determined, the coordinating council can then use the guidance from the Cooperative Grocers' Information Network to determine the level of capital needed to start a local food co-op (CGIN, 2010). The coordinating council could also marshal resources and connections from the stakeholder groups to increase awareness and raise community support for the new co-op. This council, or a carefully selected working group thereof, would also be charged with using food co-op startup guidance to establish the overall working plan for moving through the steps to set up the food co-op. The organization should select a skilled project manager for the effort who can serve as a dedicated community leader to work with the stakeholder organizations, navigate the organizing and planning, and facilitate the necessary steps for opening the food co-op (CGIN, 2013).

Legal

While the coordinating commission works on aggregating stakeholder resources and establishing a working plan, legal and administration support from clinical legal education programs or public administration programs at nearby universities could be enlisted to help drive the organizing for the food co-op under state and federal guidelines. This legal organizing would require setting up the membership structure for the organization, membership by-laws, and other organizing constructs (Food Co-op Initiative, 2013b). The use of the clinical programs at the law centers would serve to provide inexpensive legal services while giving law students the opportunity to learn the legal structures for non-profits and community co-ops. The use of public administration programs would give students hands-on experience in governmental regulations while exposing them to interaction with members of the agricultural community.

Marketing

Once a clear plan of action is established by the coordinating commission and membership constructs are clearly articulated with legal support; marketing and community engagement are then executed based on timelines associated with the group's goals for opening the food co-op (CGIN, 2010). This step would include membership recruitment, which could take place at existing community events including the mobile food pantries and mobile farmers markets in the area or by canvassing neighborhoods most impacted by food insecurity. A necessary component of community engagement is education on the food co-op concept, including helping community members understand the benefit of local ownership of the food co-op (CGIN, 2013). Another necessary component is to present project milestones to the community with regular communication on their completion to maintain support for the food co-op and interest as the timeline to open the doors of the co-op can be anywhere from two to three years, based on prior community food co-op examples. Agricultural centers and local Cooperative Extension Services are uniquely positioned to lead these types of marketing efforts because the activities described above dovetail into common programs that already exist at many agricultural centers.

Technical Support

Throughout the process the coordinating organization should rely on food co-op consultants and work with the nearest community food co-op for their technical assistance in working through the start-up process. The nearest community food co-ops can be determined by visiting the Local Harvest website at http://www.localharvest.org/food-coops/ (Local Harvest, 2014). Relying upon the community organizing strengths of stakeholder organizations affiliated with the coordinating council, the project manager and leaders would help apply the successful principles from nearby successful community food co-ops while being sensitive to the unique needs of the local community. Local Cooperative Extension Services have experts who can provide technical assistance on managing a cooperative as well as to the farmers who sell through the food co-op. Local Cooperative Extension Services are also well positioned to provide technical support by bringing together existing supporters of their educational programs, as well as existing community and economic development programs.

Conclusion

While the drama around the 2014 Farm Bill has settled, the overall insecurity of federally funded programs remains a rough area for anyone relying on Congress and the federal budget. Sequestration remains a talking point among members of Congress and while certain initiatives were protected in this iteration of the Farm Bill, it does not mean that across the board cuts will not reduce these programs again before the 2014 Farm Bill ends in 2018. Those requesting funds from the federal government will be required to demonstrate two key proficiencies: (1) willingness to work with various organizations with funding streams outside of the Farm Bill; and (2) collaboratively working on holistic approaches to food insecurity and market penetration for farmers that involve economic development, job training, education, and community entrepreneurship. While a community food co-op solution is detailed in this paper, it is but one community solution to remedy food insecurity by brining rural farmers closer to urban communities.

Agricultural centers, universities, feeding organizations, and farmers themselves must work together to develop innovative and creative solutions to the food insecurity issues in their local areas, as noted in the coordinating council construct outlined above. In the end, urban food insecurity can be remedied while farmers maintain sustainable markets for their crops and products. What the community food co-op model demonstrates is that communities need not sit idly by waiting for a commercial entity to bring them access to fresh and healthy food, rather they can organize together and create their own community-owned center that goes beyond a grocery store and leads to true economic and health freedom among the community. Agricultural centers and universities are best positioned to take a leadership role in this dynamic because they can capitalize on the relationships they have already established between the farmers and those who consume their products. By leveraging these relationships to perform community outreach around the concepts outlined above, agricultural centers can empower the communities they serve in creating lasting changes tied to food insecurity.

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