

OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO FRESH PRODUCE: AN ANALYSIS OF THREE  
NEIGHBORHOODS IN SOUTHEAST GAINESVILLE

By

ANDREW PERSONS

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To my beautiful, patient, and supportive wife.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>page</u>
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	4
LIST OF TABLES .....	8
LIST OF FIGURES .....	9
ABSTRACT.....	10
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION .....	11
2 LITERATURE REVIEW .....	14
Food Insecurity .....	14
Food Deserts .....	16
Conventional Food Production Processes .....	17
Civic Agriculture .....	18
Barriers to Small Farms .....	21
Institutional Barriers .....	21
Political Barriers .....	23
Economic Barriers .....	23
Spatial Barriers .....	24
Barriers to Low-Income Households.....	25
Institutional Barriers .....	25
Political Barriers .....	27
Economic Barriers .....	27
Spatial Barriers .....	30
Direct Marketing.....	30
Community Supported Agriculture .....	31
Farmers' Markets.....	32
Federal Food Assistance Programs.....	33
Summary .....	35
3 METHODOLOGY .....	46
Recruitment of Participants .....	46
Location .....	47
Focus Group Organization.....	48
Development of Interview Protocol.....	48
Interview Format .....	48

4	FOCUS GROUP RESULTS.....	51
	Food Insecurity Characteristics in Three Southeast Gainesville Neighborhoods .....	51
	Food Deserts .....	56
	Transportation Options .....	56
	Supermarket Siting .....	58
	Major Themes.....	59
	Attitudes About Fresh Produce in Southeast Gainesville.....	59
	Impressions of Fresh Produce in Southeast Gainesville Stores.....	61
	Promotion of Healthy Food .....	65
	Underlying Factors Shaping Southeast Produce Choices.....	67
	Transportation.....	70
	Negative Perception.....	71
	Solutions .....	73
	Farmers’ Markets.....	74
	Government Interventions .....	75
	Healthy Eating Education.....	76
	Community Gardens.....	77
	Community Supported Agriculture .....	77
5	DISCUSSION.....	94
	Key Implications and Questions.....	94
	Key Implications.....	94
	Supermarket Characteristics .....	97
	Economic Barriers .....	99
	Political Barriers .....	101
	Institutional Barriers .....	102
	Spatial Barriers .....	103
	Community Supported Agriculture .....	107
	Farmers’ Markets.....	109
	Community Gardens.....	110
	Nutritional Education.....	110
	Government Intervention.....	111
	Key Questions: Evaluating Access to Fresh Produce.....	111
	Implications for Public Planning Agencies .....	112
	Comprehensive Plans .....	113
	Land Development Regulations .....	113
	Other Government Resources.....	115
	Neighborhood Planning Program.....	115
	Community Redevelopment Agency .....	115
6	CONCLUSIONS .....	117
	Limitations of the Research.....	118
	Recommendations for Future Research.....	120

APPENDIX FOCUS GROUP SCRIPT.....122  
LIST OF REFERENCES .....125  
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH .....129

## LIST OF TABLES

<u>Table</u>	<u>page</u>
2-1 Households by food security status and selected household characteristics, 2006.....	37
2-2 Households with income below 130% of the poverty line by food secure status and selected household characteristics .....	38
2-3 Characteristics of very small, small, and large-scale farms.....	39
2-4 Estimated fuel consumption, CO2 emissions, and distance traveled for conventional vs. Iowa based local and regional food systems .....	40
2-5 Weekly household food spending per person and relative to the cost of the Thrifty Food Plan .....	41
2-6 Weekly household food spending per person and relative to the cost of the Thrifty Food Plan by food security status .....	42
2-7 CSA share prices and retail values per pound for three Massachusetts farms.....	43
4-1 Southeast Gainesville urban and rural households .....	86
4-2 Southeast Gainesville household race.....	87
4-3 Southeast Gainesville household size by household type by presence of own children under 18 .....	88
4-4 Southeast Gainesville median household income in 1999 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000)...	89
4-5 2008 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services poverty thresholds.....	90
4-6 Southeast Gainesville public Assistance income in 1999 for households .....	91
4-7 Southeast Gainesville ratio of income in 1999 to poverty level .....	92
4-8 Southeast Gainesville means of transportation to work for workers 16 years and over....	93

LIST OF FIGURES

<u>Figure</u>		<u>page</u>
2-1	Agribusiness industry campaign contributions 1990-2008 (Center for Responsive Politics, 2008) .....	44
2-2	Average expenses for small farms in the United States.....	45
4-1	Neighborhood groups and associations .....	80
4-2	Lincoln Estates neighborhood map.....	81
4-3	Springhill neighborhood map .....	82
4-4	North Lincoln Heights neighborhood map .....	83
4-5	Full service supermarkets in Southeast Gainesville and the surrounding areas. ....	84
4-6	Convenience and beverage stores in southeast Gainesville .....	85

Abstract of Thesis Presented to the Graduate School  
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By

Andrew Persons

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Chair: Ruth Steiner

Cochair: Kristin Larsen

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Residents of low-income communities face a number of barriers limiting access to fresh produce. These barriers cut across a wide range of issues and are interlinked with the political, economic, spatial, and institutional inequities shaping the geographies of low-income communities across the country. Our first purpose was to determine whether these barriers were observable in three neighborhoods in Southeast Gainesville. Our second purpose was to explore the feasibility of applying direct marketing strategies to help alleviate produce access issues in Southeast Gainesville.

Through focus groups and socio demographic data, this study found that a number of fresh produce barriers exist in the three Southeast Gainesville neighborhoods along with several barriers not observed in previous research. Additionally, this study determined that several direct marketing strategies including farmers' markets and Community Supported Agriculture arrangements had potential applications in Southeast Gainesville and presented opportunities to improve access to fresh produce in underserved communities.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

On March 28, 2007, Florida Agriculture and Consumer Services Commissioner Charles H. Bronson hosted a kick-off event to unveil a new health initiative designed to get Floridians to eat more fruits and vegetables. The event, held at the Capitol Plaza, was free and open to the public. Lt. Governor Kottkamp, Commissioner Bronson and Secretary of Health Viamonte Ros touted the nationally-sponsored “Fruits and Veggies-More Matters” campaign and told those in attendance that eating Florida produce is one of the easiest ways to improve one’s health (FIFNC, 2007). “The message is very simple – most people benefit from eating a variety of fruits and vegetables,” Bronson said. “And we’re truly blessed in Florida as we grow more than 280 commercial crops that feed Floridians, consumers throughout the country and citizens around the world” (FIFNC, 2007).

With the veritable cornucopia of fruits and vegetables grown in Florida, it is difficult to imagine that access to the state’s harvest is limited for some Floridians. Yet, the most recent CDC survey of fruit and vegetables study found that 73% of Floridians surveyed ate fewer than the USDA recommended 5 servings of fruits and vegetables a day (CDC, 2005). Furthermore, when grouped by income, the number of servings of fruits and vegetables per day dropped off significantly for individuals earning between \$15,000 and \$35,000 (CDC, 2005). These statistics belie a much more complex problem of fresh produce access for lower income communities across the State.

Within the past decade, there has been increasing awareness of the importance of eating a varied diet rich in fruits and vegetables. Numerous USDA led initiatives have attempted to improve access to fresh and often locally grown produce especially for lower income

households. Despite the surge in programs and media coverage, local neighborhoods still experience persistent difficulties accessing fresh fruits and vegetables.

Alachua County, Florida is arguably the agricultural hub of Florida. The establishment in 1884 of the Florida Agricultural College at Lake City, a land grant institution under the Morrill Act, marked the beginning of what became the College of Agriculture of the University of Florida in 1906 (IFAS, 2008). Housed within the College of Agriculture, the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) is a “federal-state-county partnership dedicated to developing knowledge in agriculture, human and natural resources, and the life sciences, and enhancing and sustaining the quality of human life by making that information accessible” (IFAS, 2008).

In addition to research and education activities, agriculture is a significant economic engine in Alachua County. According to the 2002 Census of Agriculture, Alachua County has 1,493 farms whose combined lands total 222,728 acres (USDA, 2002). The total market value of production totals \$58,665,000. Yet despite, the prominence of agriculture in Alachua County and the wealth that farming generates, many in the local community have only limited access to this fresh produce.

The primary purpose of this paper is to uncover the multitude of barriers limiting access to fresh produce for low-income households, and compare the results with findings from focus groups and statistical data drawn from three neighborhoods located in Southeast Gainesville. The secondary purpose of this paper is to explore the feasibility of applying direct marketing and other alternative strategies to help alleviate produce access issues in Southeast Gainesville.

The thesis is divided into six chapters. Chapter 2 reviews a diverse array of academic papers and governmental studies focused on access to fresh produce in low-income neighborhoods. This chapter also includes a series of reports revealing the barriers small farms

experience in bringing their products to market. Chapter 3 explains why a focus group research methodology was selected for this study and how focus group participants were selected. Chapter 4 contains the results of the focus group discussions and highlights the convergent themes found in the data. Chapter 5 explores how the statistical and focus group data, drawn from this study, compares with previous research in the field. This chapter also includes a section dedicated to exploring how public planning agencies, interested in improving access to fresh produce, can use this study's findings to design more effective intervention strategies. Finally, Chapter 6 contains a summary of the major findings, an analysis of research limitations, and provides several recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Access to fresh and nutritious food is a basic human right. Yet, even in one of the most developed countries in the world, individuals and families routinely do not have enough food to sustain themselves. In the United States, a number of barriers prevent fresh, healthy products grown on small local farms from reaching those low-income households that need them most. This chapter provides a critical overview of these barriers, as well as, reviews a number of direct marketing strategies that can be employed to overcome or circumvent the barriers separating both sides of the farm-to-fork equation.

### **Food Insecurity**

A recent study of 24 cities, conducted by the United States Conference of Mayors studied the problem of hunger among low-income and homeless residents. The study found that over 40 percent of the individuals requesting emergency food assistance were employed (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2005). Perhaps even more shocking, in 87 percent of the cities surveyed, individuals and families relied on emergency food assistance as a steady source of food over long periods of time (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2005). Among the primary causes for hunger, city officials listed unemployment, high transportation costs, high housing costs, and poverty (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2005). Finally, hunger seems to be an increasing trend. Officials in the survey cities estimate that between 2004 and 2005 requests for emergency food assistance increased by an average of 12 percent, with 76 percent of the cities registering an increase (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2005). Requests for food assistance by families with children increased by an average of 7 percent (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2005). Requests for emergency food assistance by elderly persons increased by an average of 13 percent during the last year, with 76 percent of the cities reporting an increase (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2005).

Food security is defined as, “access by all people, at all times, to enough food for an active, healthy life” (Anderson, 1990). In this context then, “hunger can be seen as a severe stage or level of food insecurity characterized by recurring involuntary reductions in food intake and disruption of usual eating patterns” (Guthrie & Nord, 2002, p. 904). According to the latest USDA food security study conducted in 2006, 12.6 million households experienced some level of food insecurity in 2005 (Nord, Andrews, Carlson, 2006). Out of the 12.6 million households, 4.6 million experienced significant disruptions in their food intake and eating patterns (Nord et. al., 2006). All of the households experiencing food insecurity exhibited coping strategies ranging from, eating less varied diets, participating in Federal food and nutrition assistance programs, or obtaining emergency food from community food pantries or emergency kitchens (Nord et. al., 2006).

The data in Table 2-1 indicates that several selected household characteristics correlated with higher rates of food insecurity. Households below the official poverty line, households with children headed by a single woman or man, and Black and Hispanic households all had food insecurity rates significantly above the national average (Nord et. al., 2006). Additionally, there were several geographic and regional factors that correlated with insecurity. Households located within the principal cities of metropolitan areas had considerably higher food insecurity rates than households located in suburban areas. Regionally, the South had markedly higher rates than other regions in the country. One in three low-income households, defined as households under 130% of the poverty line, experienced food insecurity (Table 2-2). This data indicates that households above the Census Bureau poverty thresholds experience sporadic food insecurity and may experience the same challenges low and very-low income households face in meeting their nutritional demands.

While food security measurements are useful for showing the breakdown between household characteristics, they lack a key spatial and descriptive component. Incorporating a spatial analysis of why low-income households become food insecure yields a better understanding of how the built environment can exacerbate insecurity issues.

### **Food Deserts**

The term “food desert” was coined by the Low Income Project Team of the Nutrition Task Force, a team of researchers commissioned by the British Department of Health to study food availability in British cities. The project team found that, “economies of scale allow food sold in supermarkets to be cheaper and to cover a wider range than in smaller ‘high street’ stores. The increasing tendency to out of town supermarkets has led to the creation of ‘food deserts’ where cheap and varied food is only accessible to those who have private transport or are able to pay the costs of public transport if this is available. Access to a cheaper and wider range of food is most restricted for some of the groups who need it most” (Acheson, 1998, p. 65). As British geographer Neal Wrigley explains, “the term ‘food deserts’, projected into policy debate by the Low Income Project Team in 1995, was rooted in these interrelated strands of evidence and provided a metaphor for the complex nexus of interlinkages between increasing health inequalities, retail development-induced differential access to food retail provision, compromised diets, undernutrition and social exclusion” (Wrigley, 2005, p. 2032). From these descriptions, a picture begins to form of a food desert. Food deserts are areas where access to, and the price of, healthy fresh foods have been compromised by a combination of factors. Access factors include the siting of supermarkets, transportation options, poverty, and nutrition education. Price issues are interrelated with access issues in terms of the relative price for food in urban areas versus suburban areas. Price issues are also interwoven with consumer choice, especially relating to

low-income households economizing food choices. Before a discussion of food access can occur it is critical to highlight the food production process and its influence on food accessibility.

### **Conventional Food Production Processes**

Focusing on food deserts exclusively, limits our understanding of why inequities exist between different households and different geographic areas. In order to reach a clearer picture of food inequities, food production must be understood as a process. Advantages to middle and high-income households and large scale factory farms are embedded in the current food production paradigm. These advantages can also be conversely understood as barriers to low-income households and small local family-owned farms.

Thomas Lyson, in his book *Civic Agriculture: Reconnecting, Farm, Food, and Community*, describes two divergent systems of food production in the United States. The first system is the large scale, vertically oriented, factory-like farm. This system of agriculture and food production is the current paradigm in the US (Lyson, 2004). These large scale farms account for the bulk of food and fiber produced in the US today (Lyson, 2004). As Lyson explains, “the mass production of food has articulated with mass consumer markets to offer consumers, relatively inexpensive standardized products” (Lyson, 2004, p. 30). The mass production of food has also necessitated a narrowed range of agricultural products and a shift towards bulk commodities like, wheat, corn, soybeans, a few varieties of fruits and vegetables, and a handful of genetically similar breeds of livestock and poultry (Lyson, 2004). Lyson identifies four long-term trends in US food production that have shaped the current contours of modern farming. First, the number of farms has steadily declined from 6.4 million farms in 1910 to just under 2 million farms today (Lyson, 2004). Second, production has been increasingly concentrated on a number of very large farms. Most of these farms are clustered together in agricultural pockets across the country (Lyson, 2004). Third, farms across the country have

become increasingly specialized, often producing only one or two commodities. Lastly, with the exception of a few categories of commodities, the linkages between local production and local consumption have been largely broken in a majority of commodities (Lyson, 2004). These trends have corresponded with a move by large farms towards increasing vertical integration. Vertical integration of land, labor, capital by large agricultural firms has resulted in unprecedented levels of agricultural consolidation. Today, in order to ensure large quantities of standardized products, food processors enter into formal contracts with individual farms. About 85% of processed vegetable production is produced under contract farming agreements (Lyson, 2004). These contracts give significant power to processors, who can dictate the type, quantity, quality, and delivery date of agricultural products (Lyson, 2004). Economies of scale dictate that processors are more inclined to work with large farms whenever possible.

### **Civic Agriculture**

The other system of food production, Lyson coins as civic agriculture. Running concurrent with the factory farm system, civic agriculture is characterized by largely smaller-scale, locally oriented, flexibly organized farms and food producers that fill the geographic and economic spaces that have been passed over or ignored by larger-scale, industrial farms (Lyson, 2004). Civic agriculture is in step with the needs of the community. As Lyson describes, “Civic agriculture embodies a commitment 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” (Lyson, 2004, p. 63). Civic agriculture is embodied by smaller-scale agriculture and food producers that are involved in direct marketing to consumers or have integrated with local food networks.

Lyson identifies six characteristics of civic agriculture. First, civic agriculture involves farming that is oriented toward local markets that serve local consumers rather than national or

international mass markets. This focus on local markets is in contrast to the factory-farm model of bulk commodity production (Lyson, 2004). Second, agriculture is seen as an integral part of rural communities (Lyson, 2004). Again, this differs from the factory-farm model where large-scale agriculture is typically clustered in geographic pockets of high intensity farming away from rural communities. Third, civic agriculture farmers are concerned more with high quality and value-added products and less with quantity and least-cost production practices (Lyson, 2004). Because, agricultural commodities on civic agriculture farms are grown primarily for local markets, quality and variety take precedence over producing the highest yield or choosing varieties of produce based on their shipping durability and shelf-life. Instead, civic agriculture farmers can select varieties of produce based on taste or high nutrient and mineral content. Fourth, production at the civic farm level is often more labor-intensive and less capital-intensive and land-extensive (Lyson, 2004). This operational characteristic results in smaller scale farms with less mechanization of labor and less total acreage but with a greater need for labor to run the farm. Civic agriculture is a craft enterprise as opposed to an industrial enterprise. The craft enterprise nature of civic agriculture, hearkens back to early 20<sup>th</sup> century farming practices where quality labor and efficient land management were integral to the farm's survival. Fifth, civic farms rely on local, site-specific knowledge and less on a uniform set of best management practices (Lyson, 2004). By reason of civic agriculture's local focus, farming enterprises must be adaptable to local conditions. Local conditions could include, weather, crop choice, consumer preferences, and the local labor market. Being adaptable means civic agriculture farms have a greater degree of structural flexibility than their industrial counterparts. Lastly, civic farmers forge direct market links to consumers rather than indirect links through middlemen (Lyson, 2004).

Direct marketing involves farmers selling their produce directly to consumers using a variety of mediums including farmers' markets, roadside stands, internet sales, Community Supported Agriculture or CSA, and U-pick operations. The direct market forges a mutually supportive link between the farm and the local community. By not involving wholesalers, brokers, and food processors, civic farms have a greater degree of control over what and how much they produce (Lyson, 2004). Participating in direct sales means that 100% of the revenues from production go to the farm and the small farmer (Lyson, 2004). Taken together, the six characteristics of civic agriculture have the potential to nurture local economic development, maintain diversity and quality of products, and provide forums where farms and consumers can come together to strengthen the bonds of community (Lyson, 2004).

How can civic agriculture then be tied to the communities who need fresh healthy foods the most? What barriers exist between small-scale farms and low-income households, and what strategies exist for overcoming or circumventing these barriers? For the purposes of this study, small-scale farms and low-income households face, four types of barriers: institutional, political, socioeconomic, and spatial barriers. Both low-income households and small-scale farms experience these barriers albeit in different ways and to different degrees.

In addition, the goals of small-scale farms and low-income households are sympathetic. A recent study in the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* found that low-income women who had been provided economic supplement for fresh fruit and vegetable purchases had a 90% voucher redemption rate and purchased a wide variety of produce for their families (Herman, Harrison, and Jenks, 2006). The study clearly shows that desire for fresh healthy produce is relatively income-indifferent. Low-income households want access to relatively inexpensive healthy produce. The USDA's Economic Research Service defines small farms as those

operations with less than \$250,000 in gross receipts (USDA ERS, 1998). Because of their size, small-scale farms interested in local linkages are looking for a direct connection to consumers. This connection provides a stream of revenue to keep small farms economically viable while at the same time enhancing the health and nutrition in the surrounding community. While the goals of low-income households and small-scale farms might be sympathetic connecting the two sides is not guaranteed. The following sections explore how these institutional, economic, political, and spatial barriers impact small farms.

## **Barriers to Small Farms**

### **Institutional Barriers**

Small-scale farms experience institutional barriers in the form of federal farm policies that provide competitive advantages to large-scale farms. In order to understand the nature of federal farm policy and its bias towards large farms, a brief history of recent events in US agriculture and the federal response to them will be helpful. During the late 1980s, domestic grain surpluses soared due to low acreage set-asides and export markets dampened by high exchange rates the costs of federal farm subsidies. “American agriculture experienced the worst economic crisis in farming since the Great Depression due to record crop production, falling export demand, and the Federal Reserve’s anti-inflationary measures of high interest rates and high exchange rates. Many farmers faced a credit crisis, having borrowed on rising land values in the 1970s to expand operations, resulting in high numbers of bankruptcies and foreclosures among farms of all sizes, bank closings, and agriculture-related business failures. The economic stress took its toll on farm families, sometimes resulting in suicide and divorce, and tore at the fabric of rural community life” (USDA, 1998, p. 10). The Reagan administration, committed to reducing government spending in agriculture, proposed major cuts in farm price support levels (USDA, 1998). At the same time, economic emergency loans were made to highly leveraged large farms. Many of

these substantial loans would go uncollected by the federal government (USDA, 1998). The 1985 farm bill began to put downward pressure on farm prices by freezing target prices, lowering loan rates and subsidizing exports (USDA, 1998). In 1987, the Reagan administration took its proposals for cutting agriculture spending to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and eventually succeeded in winning reductions in agricultural subsidies worldwide (USDA, 1998). Following record spending on farm subsidies, the 1990 farm bill attempted to reduce government payments to farmers by reducing the amount of acreage eligible for payments (USDA, 1998). The 1996 Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act (FAIR) decoupled planting decisions from payments and instead provided “transition” payments (USDA, 1998). Farm payments are calculated on the basis of volume of production, thus giving a greater share of payments to large farms (USDA, 1998). “Even though only about one-third of U.S. farmers have participated in Federal farm programs, these programs have historically been structurally biased toward benefiting the largest farms” (USDA, 1998, p. 10). The payments enable the larger farms to further capitalize and expand their operations (USDA, 1998).

The USDA National Commission on Small Farms also found that:

Attempts to place caps on the amount of payments per farm have not resulted in their intended effects. The present system of “transition” payments perpetuates the large-farm bias because the amount of payment is based on historical payment levels. A new risk management tool, “revenue insurance,” also perpetuates a large-farm bias through its provisions of coverage for the few major program commodities with no limit on the amount of coverage provided. Additionally, recent changes in Federal tax policy provide disproportionate benefits to large farms through tax incentives for capital purchases to expand operations. Large-scale farms that depend on hired farm workers for labor receive exemptions from Federal labor law afforded workers in every other industry, allowing them the advantage of low-wage labor costs (USDA, 1998, p.11)

Finally, the Commission found that, “conclusions and policies which focus on the large and super-large farms as an inevitable result of economic progress may be ignoring the small farm as the most vital component of all food production” (USDA, 1998, p.11). Federal farm policies that

advantage large-scale farms represent a significant institutional barrier to the small community scaled farmer.

### **Political Barriers**

Small-scale farms face significant political barriers. The agribusiness industry has donated \$415,347,982 in local, state, and federal campaign contributions between 1990-2008. Thirty one percent of contributions went to Democrats while the remaining 69% went to Republican candidates (Figure 2-1). These percentages probably reflect the decade of Republican control of the United States Congress. For the purposes of tabulation, the agribusiness sector, includes crop producers, livestock ranchers and meat processors, the poultry and egg industry, dairy farmers, timber companies, tobacco companies, food products manufacturers, food stores and veterinarians. Agricultural services and products, tobacco companies and food processing and sales were the biggest spenders within the sector (Center for Responsive Politics, 2008). Soft money contributions to the national parties were not publicly disclosed until the 1991-92 election cycle, and were banned by the Bipartisan Campaign Finance Reform Act following the 2002 elections (Center for Responsive Politics, 2008).

Small-scale farms do not possess the financial resources nor the political sophistication to compete with the Agribusiness lobby. Political action committees and agricultural lobbyists work for the largest farms and food processors (Center for Responsible Politics, 2008). Not surprisingly, federal farm policies have disproportionately benefited large farms and food processors.

### **Economic Barriers**

Small farms also face a number of economic barriers. The USDA's Economic Research Service defines small farms as those operations with less than \$250,000 in gross receipts (USDA ERS, 1998). Table 2-3 provides a breakdown of small farm revenues. The data indicates that

small farms greatly outnumber farms with sales over \$250,000. Additionally, government payments are significantly higher for farms with sales over \$250,000. Finally, small farms struggle to generate returns equal to the average U.S. household income.

The USDA further refines the small farm definition by separating small farms \$50,000-\$250,000 in gross receipts and very small farms, \$50,000 and below. While these seem like large numbers, after production costs, the average net income from small farms is only \$23,159 (USDA ERS, 1998). Very small farms have a net loss of \$1,702 (USDA ERS, 1998). The ERS report found that, in order to generate a cash income close to that of the average U.S. household income, farms need to generate sales in the upper end of the small farm category (USDA ERS, 1998). The largest expenditure for small farms were fixed cost items (Figure 2-2).

Fixed cost items include real estate and property taxes, interest expenses, insurance premiums, and rent or lease payments. Fuel costs, especially for very small farms, constituted the next highest expense. The cost of fuel directly impacts a small farm's ability to transport produce to market. The study concluded that while the makeup of vulnerable operations (high debt and negative income) varies by economic size and economic conditions during the year, vulnerability is concentrated among the small farms (USDA ERS, 1998).

### **Spatial Barriers**

A number of spatial barriers prevent small-scale farmers from more efficiently reaching consumers. The fuel costs associated with transporting agricultural products to market are harder to absorb for small farms with limited resources. A study of food miles in Iowa provides a sobering comparison of the distance traveled and fuel costs associated with industrial farming compared to local Iowa food systems (Table 2-4).

Small farms cannot compete with larger farms on a national scale due to the extremely high transportation costs. While, conventional food systems use more fuel and travel greater

distances, small local farms typically do not have access to larger trucks and must make additional trips to bring their products to market. The conventional food system's semitrailers used significantly more fuel compared with the fuel used to transport produce to the local food system's institutional markets and CSA and farmers' markets. Further, the conventional system's semitrailer emitted almost six times the CO<sub>2</sub>, but only traveled 1.9 times as far as the light trucks used in the local systems (Table 2-4). However, the light trucks were forced to make more trips to deliver the same amount of produce as a semitrailer (Pirog, Van Pelt, Enshayan, Cook, 2001). The research shows that locally based production networks spend significantly less on fuel costs.

The location of terminal markets also presents a significant spatial barrier to small farms. A terminal market is, "a central site, often in a metropolitan area, that serves as an assembly and trading place for agricultural commodities. Terminal markets are usually at or near major transportation hubs" (U.S. House Committee on Agriculture, 2007, np.). Due to the spatial arrangement of terminal markets in metropolitan areas, small farms located farther from a terminal market must ship their products a greater distance at a higher cost. Meeting these additional costs is difficult for farms with limited resources. Subsequent section will focus on how institutional, economic, political, and spatial barriers impact low-income households.

## **Barriers to Low-Income Households**

### **Institutional Barriers**

Low-income households have faced significant institutional barriers. Exclusionary federal housing policies together with housing financing discrimination by banks and other lending institutions have significantly influenced the shape, location, and economic vitality of low-income neighborhoods. The Federal Urban Renewal program was also responsible for citywide destruction of viable low-income neighborhoods in the name of blight removal. Poor access to healthy foods is one result of systematic disinvestment in poor neighborhoods. A brief discussion

of Federal Housing Administration (FHA) redlining and the Federal Urban Renewal program will prove helpful to better understand the institutional barriers faced by low-income households.

The FHA was established in 1934 by the National Housing Act, in response to staggering foreclosure and eviction rates during the Great Depression (Hays, 1995). The 1934 act sought to bolster the housing credit system through the establishment of FHA mortgage insurance (Hays, 1995). Mortgage insurance would fundamentally change the way people borrowed money for home purchases. “By introducing the long-term, low-down-payment, fully amortized, level-payment mortgage, in place of the short-term, high-down-payment, balloon notes of earlier years, the FHA greatly broadened the segment of the US population who could afford a home” (Hays, 1995, p. 85). However, the FHA program did not address those who could not afford to purchase a home. Indeed, as the program matured through WWII, it increasingly served middle-class whites. “To control for the risk of insuring mortgages that end up exceeding the value of the property they finance, the FHA specified criteria for assessing the value of the individual properties and the likelihood that the property would maintain its value over time. The criteria for making these decisions rested in large part on the racial characteristics of the neighborhood and the surrounding area” (Schwartz, 2006, p. 51). The term redlining refers to the line on a map that delineated where the FHA would not insure home mortgages. The FHA did not invent redlining, which was part of the normal operational policies of the majority of realtor associations and lending institutions during this period (Schwartz, 2006). The results of redlining can be seen throughout low-income urban communities, where a history of disinvestment has isolated poor communities from basic services and retail including supermarkets and other mainstream food outlets.

## **Political Barriers**

Low-income households have experienced barriers to political involvement and have historically been underrepresented in planning decision-making processes. Referring to the history of low-income and minority exclusion from past planning decisions, Paul Davidoff (2003) exhorts, “the just demand for political and social equity on the part of the African-American and the impoverished requires the public to establish the bases for a society affording equal opportunity for all citizens” (p. 210). Exclusion of low-income households from decision-making processes follows with larger patterns of minority under-representation in the political arena. “In most cities land use decisions, the local decisions that most affect the spatial environment of the city and its economic life, are a semiprivate process involving a triangle of capitalist developers, city bureaucrats, and elected city officials. The empirical record shows, however, that land use decision-making biased in these ways contributes to increasing inequalities” (Elkin as quoted in Young, 2003, p. 351). Preclusion from the political process has significantly impaired the ability of low-income and minority households to promote the health and economic vitality of their community.

## **Economic Barriers**

Low-income households encounter multiple socioeconomic barriers. Low-income households respond to these barriers by adopting a number of strategies to economize food choice. The Thrifty Food Plan (TFP) serves as a national standard for a nutritious diet at a minimal cost and is used as the basis for maximum food stamp allotments. The TFP market baskets specify the types and quantities of foods that people could purchase to be consumed at home to obtain a nutritious diet at a minimal cost (Carlson, Lino, Juan, Hanson, Basiotis, 2006). Weekly spending relative to the TFP and food security status, confirms earlier findings of food insecurity among low-income households (Table 2-5). On average, households headed by single

women with children spend less on food than married couples and single men with children (Nord et. al., 2006). The data also confirms that Black and Hispanic households spend significantly less than white households (Nord et. al., 2006). Households with lower income to poverty ratios spend substantially less than those with higher ratios (Nord et. al., 2006). The data shows that households located within the metropolitan area spend more on food than households located in suburban areas outside of the metropolitan area (Nord et. al., 2006). The difference in expenditure is likely due in part to higher food costs within urban areas. Households experiencing some degree of food insecurity spend between \$13-\$14 fewer dollars per week on household members than households listed as food secure (Table 2-6).

With less money to spend on food, low-income households must adopt a number of strategies to economize food choices. Ephraim S. Leibtag and Phil R. Kaufman (2003) found that “food purchase decisions by the poor often entail tradeoffs among taste, preference, and quality factors – either real or perceived – to meet spending restraints” (pg. 1). The survey measured how households with different income levels vary in their food expenditure patterns. By using actual transaction data from check-out scanners, the researchers were able to determine the price, product description, quantity, and brand name as well information about the purchase condition, (e.g. sale, coupon, promotion) (Leibtag and Kaufman, 2003).

Low-income households economize food choices using four main strategies.

First, they may purchase a greater proportion of discounted products. Second, they may purchase more private-label products (generic or store brand) versus brand products than higher income shoppers. Third, they may take advantage of volume discounts by purchasing larger package sizes. Fourth, they may purchase a less expensive food product within a product class. Although quality differences such as freshness, convenience, and taste often contribute to price differences, differences in nutritional quality such as fat content are also evident (Leibtag and Kaufman, 2003, pg. 1).

Further, for random-weight cheese, fruit, vegetables, and meat, low income-households spent a greater share of expenditures on items on promotion than middle and high-income

households (Leibtag and Kaufman, 2003). Low-income households also purchased more private label cereals and packaged cheese products than did middle and high-income households (Leibtag and Kaufman, 2003). Choice of package size also allowed low-income households to economize purchases by buying larger package sizes, which typically have lower per-unit costs than smaller packages. Yet, low-income households had the lowest purchase rates of large sized packages of any of the income groups (Leibtag and Kaufman, 2003).

The researchers found three possible explanations for this discrepancy. First, low-income shoppers face transportation constraints that limit or prevent household access to stores that sell large packages (Leibtag and Kaufman, 2003). Transportation constraints could also include diminished capacity to carry larger packages especially for those households who do not own a car and must use mass transit.

Second, budget constraints mean that households generally cannot afford to stock up on staple products in bulk (Leibtag and Kaufman, 2003). Third, low-income households perceive that the cost of storing large packages is higher than the volume savings (Leibtag and Kaufman, 2003).

Finally, low-income households may substitute lower priced items in purchasing decisions. An example of this would be choosing a lower grade or less expensive cut of meat. The researchers found that low-income households purchased greater quantities of meat but paid less per pound on average than middle or high-income households. Leibtag and Kaufman (2003) rationalize this to mean that low-income households are purchasing lower quality meats than the other income groups. The data also shows that low-income households purchased 3.3% fewer fruits and vegetables than other groups, and they paid 13% less. This disparity demonstrates that low-income households are purchasing lower quality produce (Leibtag and Kaufman, 2003).

Thus, low-income households may sacrifice freshness and nutritional quality in stretching their food dollar.

### **Spatial Barriers**

Low-income households must overcome a variety of spatial barriers to fresh food. These barriers are closely linked with the concentration of low-income households in inner-city areas. The spatial barriers experienced by low-income households include fewer chain supermarkets being sited in low-income neighborhoods, lower rates of personal automobile ownership, and poor mass transit connections to suburban supermarkets.

In order to assess, Ronald Cotterill and Andrew Franklin (1995) surveyed 21 metropolitan cities focusing on a number of factors including the average number and size of supermarkets per capita by per capita income and percentage of households with more than one car and by households receiving public assistance. On average, they found typically three times as many supermarkets per capita in middle and high-income neighborhoods than in low-income neighborhoods (Cotterill and Franklin, 1995). Further, 26% of low-income households do not own a car (Murakami and Young, 1997). Despite this statistic, low-income households still make a majority of their trips by car, relying on rides from friends and family (Murakami and Young, 1997). Sporadic or no access to a personal vehicle makes low-income households more dependent on mass transit and walking. This dependency simultaneously forces consumers to shop more frequently and purchase smaller quantities of goods in order to conform to their mobility restraints (Clifton, 2004). In many cases, this dependency also reduces the ability of low-income households to transport purchases home.

### **Direct Marketing**

Direct Marketing has the potential to unite small-scale farms and low-income households and create a mutually beneficial arrangement for both parties. Direct marketing involves two-

way communication between producers and consumers. Farms sell their agricultural products directly to consumers rather than selling their yields to brokers, food processors, or wholesalers for the national market. Because of this direct connection between consumers and farmers, direct marketing functions primarily on a local scale. The exception to this model is internet sales where farms sell their products directly to internet customers who may or may not live close to the farm. “The underlying concept [behind direct marketing] is that there is a difference between marketing and selling. It's possible to add value to products by direct marketing when producers assume the marketing functions traditionally done by others. By doing this, producers become price makers in their market, not price takers” (Ellerman, McFeeters, Fox, 2001, para. 5).

Direct marketing takes several forms. Farmers’ markets, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms, U-pick operations, roadside stands, and institutional sales to restaurants and schools comprise the majority of direct marketing operations. This thesis focuses exclusively on farmers’ markets and CSAs, in part because these institutions represent two of the oldest forms of direct farm marketing operations. Further, while little comprehensive sales data for any of the direct marketing forms exists, the dedicated revenues earned from CSAs and the agglomeration of marketing power from farmers’ markets likely mean that these operations are the most lucrative for small farms. Additionally, CSAs and farmers’ markets have a greater potential for integration with low-income neighborhoods. Due to both the greater flexibility in siting for farmers’ markets locations and CSAs food share drop off points. Low-income households also have increased opportunities for to apply federal food assistance vouchers at both places.

### **Community Supported Agriculture**

CSA operations have been steadily growing throughout the U.S. CSAs typically consist of a group of individuals or families who commit resources (money and/or labor) to a farmer. In

return for their investment, the group receives a share of what the farm produces that season (Lyson, 2004). Shareholders provide a steady stream of capital to the farm before the start of the growing season. By doing so, shareholders help farmers shoulder the risks associated with crop failure and reap the benefits of a good harvest. The typical CSA farm provides shareholders with a combination of farm products. These vary with the type of farm and the variety of farming operations present. On a weekly basis, shareholders receive a box of fruits, vegetables, dairy and eggs, herbs, flowers, etc. and pay on average between \$10-\$35 dollars per week with the total yearly share cost around \$346 (Lyson, 2004). CSAs vary mostly in the level of consumer involvement with the farm. In farmer directed CSAs, shareholders are seen as subscribers who have little involvement in farm decisions or operations. Subscribers pay a yearly fee to the farm in exchange for weekly food bundles. Other forms of CSAs merge the resources of two or more farming operations to reduce risk and offer consumers a greater variety of product options.

Community supported agriculture arrangements have the potential to provide farm fresh produce to low-income households less expensively than retail stores (Table 2-7). Because of their flexibility, CSA farms can distribute shares from conveniently located community-meeting spaces, easily accessible by walking or transit. Low-income households have a greater say in where they want to pick-up products than in a typical consumer-supermarket arrangement. These farms benefit from steady revenue streams and garner good media press by linking their fortunes with underserved residents.

### **Farmers' Markets**

Farmers' markets are the most venerable direct marketing arrangements. Once a vital marketplace between farmers and consumers, farmers' markets could be found in virtually every town. However, between the 1920s and 1970s the number of farmers' markets was in steady decline (Lyson, 2004). Since the 1970s, farmers' markets have been again increasing in numbers.

A study by the USDA in 2002 found over 4,385 farmers' markets in operation across the country (USDA-AMS, 2007). The USDA has identified small farmers (under 250,000 in gross receipts), consumers, and the community, especially urban neighborhoods underserved by retail food outlets, as the primary beneficiaries of a farmers' market (USDA-AMS, 2007). Small farms benefit from a direct market for their goods with no intermediaries. Farms receive 100% of the revenue from product sales. Farmers' markets also provide small farms a means to agglomerate products offered (Swisher and Sterns, 2003). By having multiple farms in one location, farmers' markets can offer consumers a greater mix of product choices than any single farm could provide.

Farmers' markets benefit low-income households in several ways. They can be located in or near low-income urban neighborhoods where access to fresh inexpensive produce is limited, saving households time and money in transportation costs. Farmers' markets can also function as community gathering places where neighborhood residents can network and build organizational resources.

### **Federal Food Assistance Programs**

In addition to the Federal Food Stamp program, two other federal food assistance programs are linked with direct marketing operations. The Women, Infant, and Children's Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) and the Seniors Farmers Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP) both focus on expanding access to fresh nutritional local foods for at-risk households. The FMNP targets low-income pregnant, breastfeeding and non-breastfeeding post-partum women and infants and children up to 5 years of age who are found to be at nutritional risk (USDA-FNS, 2007). The SFMNP targets low-income seniors, generally defined as individuals who are at least 60 years old and who have household incomes of not more than 185% of the federal poverty income guidelines (USDA-FNS, 2007).

In fiscal year 2005, the FMNP provided over 2.6 million WIC participants with farmers' market coupons for fresh, locally grown produce (USDA-FNS, 2007). The FMNP provides cash grants to state agencies who then administer the program and distribute FMNP coupons to WIC participants. Farmers, farmers' markets, and roadside stands that have been approved by the administering state agency can accept the coupons. Federal funds support 100 percent of the food costs of the program and 70 percent of the administrative costs. Participating states match the federal administrative costs by contributing at least 30 percent of the total administrative costs of the program (USDA-FNS, 2007). In fiscal year 2006, Congress appropriated 19.8 million dollars for the FMNP (USDA-FNS, 2007).

The SFMNP provides federal grants to state agencies to provide low-income seniors with coupons redeemable for eligible foods at farmers' markets, roadside stands, and community supported agriculture operations (USDA-FNS, 2007). The SFMNP has three stated purposes. First, "provide resources in the form of fresh, nutritious, unprepared, locally grown fruits, vegetables, and herbs from farmers' markets, roadside stands and community supported agriculture programs to low-income seniors" (USDA-FNS, 2007, para. 1). Second, "to increase the domestic consumption of agricultural commodities by expanding or aiding in the expansion of domestic farmers' markets, roadside stands, and community support agriculture programs" (USDA-FNS, 2007, para. 1). Finally, "to develop or aid in the development of new and additional farmers' markets, roadside stands, and community support agriculture programs" (USDA-FNS, 2007, para. 1). This program for seniors only runs concurrent with the growing season. Participants living in regions with longer growing seasons have a greater time window in which to use their coupons. Congress has authorized \$15 million dollars for the SFMNP through 2007 (USDA-FNS, 2007).

These programs help to connect small farmers and low-income households by integrating opportunities for economic development and assistance with access to healthy food options. Small farms benefit with increased revenue from voucher sales. By becoming a participating farm, farmers can position themselves to take advantage of nutrition program voucher revenues, giving them an advantage over other operations. Low-income households benefit from vouchers by increasing their access to fresh healthy foods and effectively lowering the price of goods. According to the USDA, 58% of farmers' markets accept WIC coupons, food stamps, and local and state nutrition programs benefits (USDA-FNS, 2007).

### **Summary**

Thus, despite these economic, spatial, institutional and political challenges facing low-income households and small farms, direct marketing strategies can connect these stakeholders and foster mutually beneficial relationships that will improve the social and economic vitality of both partners. These strategies come at a critical juncture in food production in the United States with small farms struggling to survive and low-income households struggling to access healthy produce.

In light of increasing concerns over globalization of food production and the potential vulnerabilities to international food supply lines due to political instability and terrorism, food security has garnered a great deal of attention from Congress and the press in recent years. Hunger and food insecurity impacts the urban poor to a much greater degree than other income and spatial groups. Food insecurity stems from inequalities in access to fresh foods and the high premiums incurred for fresh produce. These spatial and economic inequalities can best be understood with the food desert metaphor.

At the other end of the farm to fork connection, small farms have struggled in an industrial agricultural system that advantages large vertically integrated commodity farms. Small farms

must adopt new strategies by tying their fates with new partners and new markets in order to remain viable operations. Lyson's (2004) idea of a civic agricultural system privileges small farms, proposing a system where farms are connected with the local community for mutual gain.

However, before Lyson's dream can be realized, both small farms and low-income households must overcome a number of institutional, political, socioeconomic, and spatial barriers blocking their success. These barriers take the form of specific public policies; larger social, political, and economic trends; market driven forces; and institutionalized racism and exclusionary practices. While some barriers have weakened over time, others have strengthened, and new innovative solutions must be sought to connect farms and deserving households.

Direct marketing has the potential to circumvent several of the critical barriers separating these groups. Direct connections between farms and consumers results in a greater portion of the production revenues going to farms and fresher less expensive produce being enjoyed by low-income households. Federal and state agencies have the potential to foster these connections with federal nutrition programs like the FMNP and the SFMNP. These programs facilitate partnerships between farms and communities.

The literature reveals that the United States has reached a critical juncture in the farm-to-fork equation. One path primarily benefits large industrial farming operations and the middle and upper income groups, while the other benefits smaller farms focused on strengthening links between farm and community. This path benefits all income groups, however, it is primarily concerned with increasing access to healthy food to historically underserved groups. The research methodology in the subsequent chapter drew on the results from the literature and attempts to formulate a methodology to study the institutional, economic, political, and spatial barriers to fresh produce access in a local context.

Table 2-1. Households by food security status and selected household characteristics, 2006 (Nord et. al., 2006, p. 10)

Category	Total <sup>1</sup> 1,000	Food secure		Food insecure					
				All		With low food security		With very low food security	
				1,000	Percent	1,000	Percent	1,000	Percent
All households	115,609	102,961	89.1	12,648	10.9	8,031	6.9	4,617	4.0
Household composition:									
With children < 18	39,436	33,278	84.4	6,158	15.6	4,481	11.4	1,677	4.3
With children < 6	17,161	14,295	83.3	2,866	16.7	2,141	12.5	725	4.2
Married-couple families	26,614	23,916	89.9	2,698	10.1	2,140	8.0	558	2.1
Female head, no spouse	9,572	6,665	69.6	2,907	30.4	1,925	20.1	982	10.3
Male head, no spouse	2,618	2,174	83.0	444	17.0	333	12.7	111	4.2
Other household with child <sup>2</sup>	633	522	82.5	111	17.5	84	13.3	27	4.3
With no children < 18	76,173	69,683	91.5	6,490	8.5	3,550	4.7	2,940	3.9
More than one adult	44,742	41,822	93.5	2,920	6.5	1,769	4.0	1,151	2.6
Women living alone	17,587	15,600	88.7	1,987	11.3	971	5.5	1,016	5.8
Men living alone	13,844	12,261	88.6	1,583	11.4	810	5.9	773	5.6
With elderly	26,840	25,242	94.0	1,598	6.0	1,108	4.1	490	1.8
Elderly living alone	10,499	9,880	94.1	619	5.9	394	3.8	225	2.1
Race/ethnicity of households:									
White non-Hispanic	82,268	75,810	92.2	6,458	7.8	3,937	4.8	2,521	3.1
Black non-Hispanic	14,054	10,991	78.2	3,063	21.8	1,944	13.8	1,119	8.0
Hispanic <sup>3</sup>	12,879	10,367	80.5	2,512	19.5	1,780	13.8	732	5.7
Other	6,409	5,793	90.4	616	9.6	370	5.8	246	3.8
Household income-to-poverty ratio:									
Under 1.00	11,829	7,533	63.7	4,296	36.3	2,540	21.5	1,756	14.8
Under 1.30	16,830	11,265	66.9	5,565	33.1	3,363	20.0	2,202	13.1
Under 1.85	27,613	20,075	72.7	7,538	27.3	4,593	16.6	2,945	10.7
1.85 and over	64,495	61,059	94.7	3,436	5.3	2,364	3.7	1,072	1.7
Income unknown	23,500	21,826	92.9	1,674	7.1	1,074	4.6	600	2.6
Area of residence: <sup>4</sup>									
Inside metropolitan area	96,192	85,870	89.3	10,322	10.7	6,557	6.8	3,765	3.9
In principal cities <sup>5</sup>	32,054	27,832	86.8	4,222	13.2	2,622	8.2	1,600	5.0
Not in principal cities	47,541	43,243	91.0	4,298	9.0	2,793	5.9	1,505	3.2
Outside metropolitan area	19,417	17,091	88.0	2,326	12.0	1,474	7.6	852	4.4
Census geographic region:									
Northeast	21,302	19,343	90.8	1,959	9.2	1,195	5.6	764	3.6
Midwest	26,560	23,717	89.3	2,843	10.7	1,804	6.8	1,039	3.9
South	42,283	37,099	87.7	5,184	12.3	3,361	7.9	1,823	4.3
West	25,464	22,802	89.5	2,662	10.5	1,671	6.6	991	3.9

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Table 2-2. Households with income below 130% of the poverty line by food secure status and selected household characteristics (Nord et. al., 2006, p. 16)

Category	Total <sup>1</sup> 1,000	Food secure		Food insecure					
				All		With low food security		With very low food security	
				1,000	Percent	1,000	Percent	1,000	Percent
All low-income households	16,830	11,265	66.9	5,565	33.1	3,363	20.0	2,202	13.1
Household composition:									
With children < 18	7,146	4,206	58.9	2,940	41.1	2,083	29.1	857	12.0
With children < 6	3,783	2,319	61.3	1,464	38.7	1,056	27.9	408	10.8
Married-couple families	2,820	1,811	64.2	1,009	35.8	778	27.6	231	8.2
Female head, no spouse	3,661	1,976	54.0	1,685	46.0	1,130	30.9	555	15.2
Male head, no spouse	517	316	61.1	201	38.9	142	27.5	59	11.4
Other household with child <sup>2</sup>	147	103	70.1	44	29.9	33	22.4	11	7.5
With no children < 18	9,684	7,058	72.9	2,626	27.1	1,281	13.2	1,345	13.9
More than one adult	3,975	2,927	73.6	1,048	26.4	600	15.1	448	11.3
Women living alone	3,415	2,545	74.5	870	25.5	378	11.1	492	14.4
Men living alone	2,294	1,585	69.1	709	30.9	303	13.2	406	17.7
With elderly	3,938	3,244	82.4	694	17.6	471	12.0	223	5.7
Elderly living alone	2,335	2,050	87.8	285	12.2	175	7.5	110	4.7
Race/ethnicity of households:									
White non-Hispanic	8,685	6,240	71.8	2,445	28.2	1,352	15.6	1,093	12.6
Black non-Hispanic	3,679	2,117	57.5	1,562	42.5	964	26.2	598	16.3
Hispanic <sup>3</sup>	3,456	2,177	63.0	1,279	37.0	888	25.7	391	11.3
Other	1,010	731	72.4	279	27.6	159	15.7	120	11.9
Area of residence: <sup>4</sup>									
Inside metropolitan area	12,873	8,464	65.8	4,409	34.2	2,671	20.7	1,738	13.5
In principal cities <sup>5</sup>	5,659	3,721	65.8	1,938	34.2	1,172	20.7	766	13.5
Not in principal cities	4,607	2,977	64.6	1,630	35.4	1,011	21.9	619	13.4
Outside metropolitan area	3,957	2,801	70.8	1,156	29.2	692	17.5	464	11.7
Census geographic region:									
Northeast	2,506	1,754	70.0	752	30.0	421	16.8	331	13.2
Midwest	3,648	2,451	67.2	1,197	32.8	697	19.1	500	13.7
South	7,111	4,655	65.5	2,456	34.5	1,558	21.9	898	12.6
West	3,565	2,406	67.5	1,159	32.5	687	19.3	472	13.2
Individuals in low-income households (by food security status of household):									
All individuals in low-income households	44,437	28,342	63.8	16,095	36.2	10,777	24.3	5,318	12.0
Adults in low-income households	28,971	19,329	66.7	9,642	33.3	6,197	21.4	3,445	11.9
Children in low-income households	15,466	9,013	58.3	6,453	41.7	4,580	29.6	1,873	12.1

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Table 2-3. Characteristics of very small, small, and large-scale farms (USDA, 1998)

<b>Characteristics of U.S. Small Farms Differ Markedly from Large Farms</b>					
	Small farms (sales less than \$250,000)			Farms with sales of \$250,000 or more	All farms
	Less than \$50,000	\$50,000-\$249,999	All small farms		
Number of farms	1,531,760	413,431	1,945,190	122,810	2,068,000
Share of all farms (percent)	74.1	20.0	94.1	5.9	100.0
Value of production (percent)	9.5	31.3	40.8	59.2	100.0
	<i>Dollars</i>				
Average gross cash farm income	12,482	117,320	34,764	686,606	73,474
Livestock sales	4,671	45,910	13,436	272,625	28,828
Crop sales	3,662	52,117	13,960	331,236	32,802
Government payments	1,067	5,343	1,976	14,427	2,715
Other farm income	3,082	13,948	5,392	68,318	9,129
Average net cash farm income	-1,702	23,159	3,582	152,724	12,439
Average asset value	264,784	569,295	329,505	1,618,751	406,068
	<i>Percent</i>				
Commodity speciality					
Cash grain	12.6	38.4	18.1	30.4	18.8
Other field crops	19.3	7.7	16.8	10.7	16.4
High-value crops	6.0	8.7	6.6	13.4	7.0
Beef	40.4	14.0	34.8	11.1	33.4
Hogs	3.7	4.2	3.8	6.5	4.0
Dairy	1.1	17.5	4.6	14.6	5.2
Other livestock	16.8	9.6	15.3	13.3	15.2
Farms able to generate returns equivalent to average U.S. household income	7.6	38.8	14.2	70.5	17.6

Source: 1995 Agricultural Resources Management Survey.  
Economic Research Service, USDA

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Table 2-4. Estimated fuel consumption, CO2 emissions, and distance traveled for conventional vs. Iowa based local and regional food systems (Pirog, Van Pelt, Enshayan, Cook, 2001)

Food system and type of truck	Fuel Consumption (gal/year)	\$ value of fuel (current 2001 prices*)	CO2 emissions (lbs. / year)	Distance traveled (miles)
Conventional semitrailer	368,102	\$581,601	8,392,727	2,245,423
Iowa regional semitrailer	22,005	\$35,208	501,714	134,230
Iowa regional midsize truck	43,564	\$69,702	993,243	370,289
Iowa local-CSA farmers' market small truck (gas)	49,359	\$78,974	967,436	848,981
Iowa local institutional small truck (gas)	88,265	\$141,224	1,729,994	1,518,155

Reprinted with permission from Pirog, Rich; Van Pelt, Timothy; Enshayan, Kamyar; Cook, Ellen. (2001). Food, Fuel, and Freeways: An Iowa perspective on how far food travels, fuel usage, and greenhouse gas emissions. Retrieved on December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2007 from <http://www.leopold.iastate.edu/pubs/staff/papers.htm>

Table 2-5. Weekly household food spending per person and relative to the cost of the Thrifty Food Plan (Nord et. al., 2006, p.24)

Category	Number of households <sup>1</sup>	Median weekly food spending	
		Per person	Relative to cost of TFP
	1,000	Dollars	Ratio
All households	107,520	41.67	1.28
Household composition:			
With children < 18	37,352	33.33	1.13
At least one child < 6	16,308	30.00	1.13
Married-couple families	25,256	33.75	1.17
Female head, no spouse	9,106	30.00	1.03
Male head, no spouse	2,415	33.33	1.10
Other household with child <sup>2</sup>	576	33.33	1.02
With no children < 18	70,168	50.00	1.36
More than one adult	41,261	46.67	1.33
Women living alone	16,030	50.00	1.36
Men living alone	12,876	60.00	1.59
With elderly	23,860	40.00	1.17
Elderly living alone	9,276	45.00	1.22
Race/ethnicity of households:			
White non-Hispanic	76,987	45.00	1.34
Black non-Hispanic	12,689	35.00	1.08
Hispanic <sup>3</sup>	12,028	35.00	1.11
Other	5,816	40.00	1.19
Household income-to-poverty ratio:			
Under 1.00	11,195	30.00	.95
Under 1.30	15,968	30.00	.95
Under 1.85	26,257	32.00	.99
1.85 and over	61,996	50.00	1.41
Income unknown	19,267	40.00	1.24
Area of residence. <sup>4</sup>			
Inside metropolitan area	89,470	44.00	1.32
In principal cities <sup>5</sup>	29,511	45.00	1.32
Not in principal cities	44,291	45.00	1.35
Outside metropolitan area	18,050	37.50	1.10
Census geographic region:			
Northeast	19,483	43.75	1.32
Midwest	24,674	40.00	1.18
South	39,633	41.67	1.28
West	23,730	45.00	1.36

Reprinted with permission from Nord, Mark; Andrews, Margaret; Carlson, Steven. (2007). *Household Food Security in the United States, 2006*. USDA Economic Research Service. Washington, D.C. (Source: Calculated by ERS using data from the December 2006 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement)

Table 2-6. Weekly household food spending per person and relative to the cost of the Thrifty Food Plan by food security status (Nord et. al., 2006, p. 24)

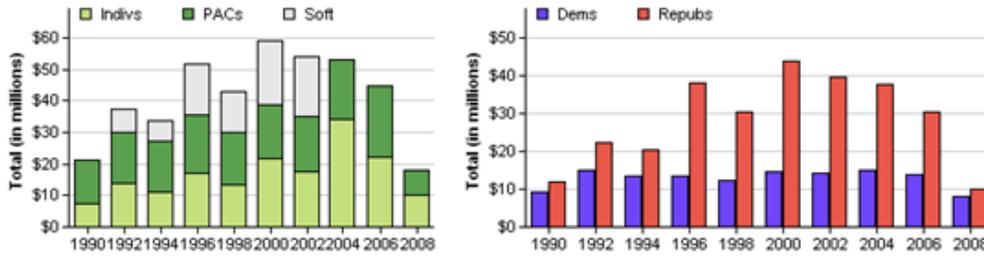
Category	Number of households <sup>1</sup>	Median weekly food spending	
		Per person	Relative to cost of TFP
		Dollars	Ratio
All households	107,520	41.67	1.28
Food security status:			
Food-secure households	95,300	45.00	1.32
Food-insecure households	12,017	32.00	1.01
Households with low food security	7,629	32.00	1.02
Households with very low food security	4,388	31.50	.96

Reprinted with permission from Nord, Mark; Andrews, Margaret; Carlson, Steven. (2007). *Household Food Security in the United States, 2006*. USDA Economic Research Service. Washington, D.C. (Source: Calculated by ERS using data from the December 2006 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement)

Table 2-7. CSA share prices and retail values per pound for three Massachusetts farms (Cooley and Lass, 1998, p. 234)

CSA Farms	Share Price (\$ / lb)	Retail Values of CSA Shares (\$ / lb)			
		Organic Produce Regional Store	Conventional Produce		
		Regional Store	Regional Store	National Chain	Local Store
Farm 1	\$0.70	\$1.55	\$1.14	\$1.05	\$0.92
Farm 2	\$1.17	\$1.87	\$1.46	\$1.38	\$1.25
Farm 3	\$0.64	\$1.62	\$1.19	\$1.12	\$1.04

Reprinted with permission from Cooley, Jack; Lass, Daniel. (1998). Consumer Benefits from Community Supported Agriculture Membership. *Review of Agricultural Economics*, Vol. 20, No. 1. (Spring - Summer, 1998), pp. 227-237. Retrieved December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2007 from <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=10587195%28199821%2F22%2920%3A1%3227%3ACBFCSA%3E2.0.CO%3B2-U>



Election Cycle	Total Contributions	Contributions from Individuals	Contributions from PACs	Soft Money Contributions	Donations to Democrats	Donations to Republicans	% to Dems	% to Repubs
2008*	\$17,927,016	\$10,022,006	\$7,887,610	N/A	\$8,101,349	\$9,821,007	45%	55%
2006*	\$44,702,079	\$22,282,664	\$22,332,465	N/A	\$13,966,926	\$30,515,314	31%	68%
2004*	\$53,086,357	\$34,051,855	\$19,034,502	N/A	\$15,179,835	\$37,816,583	29%	71%
2002	\$53,815,706	\$17,372,046	\$17,542,705	\$18,900,955	\$14,253,890	\$39,512,589	26%	73%
2000	\$58,951,189	\$21,585,852	\$17,255,438	\$20,109,899	\$14,596,868	\$44,002,427	25%	75%
1998	\$42,817,208	\$13,260,118	\$16,600,878	\$12,956,212	\$12,274,179	\$30,492,903	29%	71%
1996	\$51,659,391	\$17,014,207	\$18,660,368	\$15,984,816	\$13,344,989	\$38,196,491	26%	74%
1994	\$33,822,670	\$11,277,698	\$16,072,455	\$6,472,517	\$13,546,496	\$20,233,857	40%	60%
1992	\$37,399,356	\$13,863,226	\$16,252,072	\$7,284,058	\$14,917,465	\$22,386,512	40%	60%
1990	\$21,167,010	\$7,185,105	\$13,981,905	N/A	\$9,163,143	\$11,997,567	43%	57%
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$415,347,982</b>	<b>\$167,914,777</b>	<b>\$165,620,398</b>	<b>\$81,812,807</b>	<b>\$129,345,140</b>	<b>\$284,975,250</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>69%</b>

Figure 2-1. Agribusiness industry campaign contributions 1990-2008 (Center for Responsive Politics, 2008) Reprinted with permission from Center for Responsive Politics. (2007). Agribusiness: Long term contribution trends. Washington, DC. Retrieved on December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2007 from <http://www.opensecrets.org/industries/indus.asp?Ind=A>

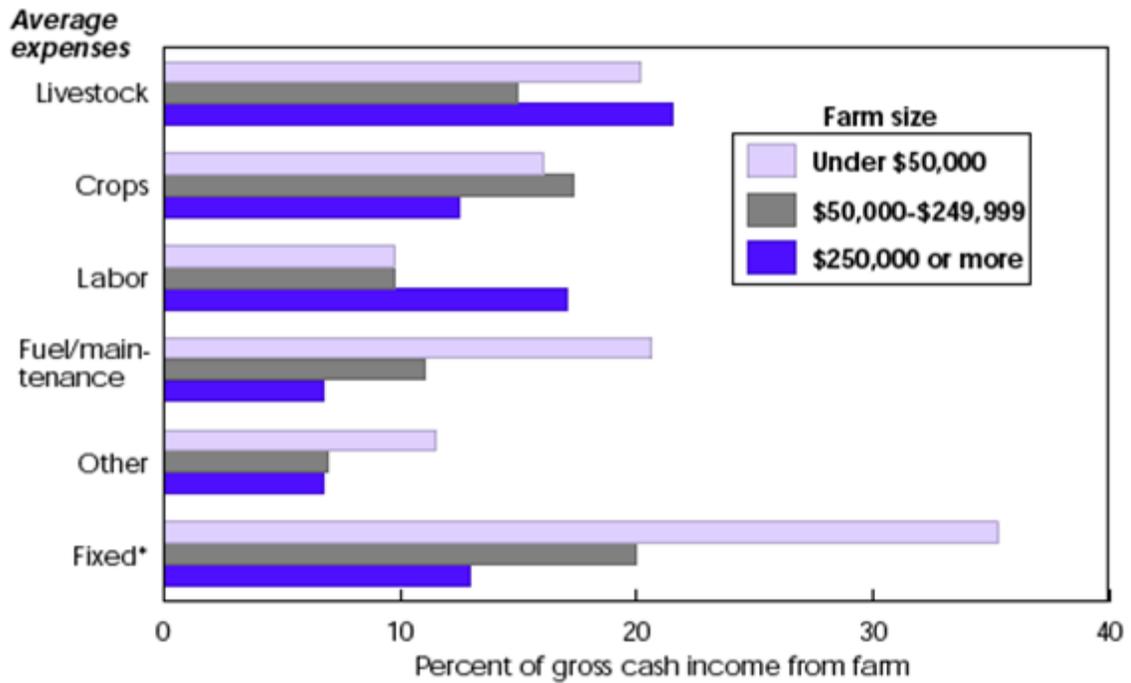


Figure 2-2. Average expenses for small farms in the United States. A) Fixed costs include real estate and property taxes. Interest expenses, insurance premiums, and rent or lease payments (ERS, 1995) Reprinted with permission from United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service. (1998). *Status Report: Small Farms in the US*. USDA Agricultural Outlook. May, 1998. Washington, D.C.

## CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

In order to observe the institutional, economic, political, and spatial barriers to fresh produce on a local scale, a series of focus groups were conducted with individuals living in Southeast Gainesville neighborhoods. “In a focus group interview, the researcher explores the perceptions, experiences, and understandings of a group of people who have some experience in common with regard to a situation or event” (Kumar, 2005, p. 124). The focus group interview method is a qualitative research tool where a moderator leads a discussion with the interview group. The intent is to provoke open-ended dialogue, supported by group interaction, where respondents address a series of questions based on their associations and experiences (Airhihenbuwa, Kumanyika, Agurs, Lowe, Saunders, Morssink, 1996). By analyzing the responses, the researcher can identify common themes in the response data. The common themes in responses can then be used to derive insights into the perceptions and attitudes of the focus group respondents within a group dynamic. “Qualitative research approaches are used for both exploration and confirmation of naturalistic data and have been used effectively to inform the design or interpretation of quantitative research” (Airhihenbuwa et al., 1996, p. 2). Additionally, qualitative research “has been particularly valuable in exploring and understanding latent or unique cross-cultural issues related to health care or health behaviors, including dietary practices” (Airhihenbuwa et al., 1996, p. 2).

### **Recruitment of Participants**

Volunteers were recruited from three neighborhoods located in Southeast Gainesville. The neighborhoods, Lincoln Estates, North Lincoln Heights, and Springhill are located within Southeast quadrant of the City of Gainesville’s city limits. Initial interest in the study was fomented through a series of discussions with neighborhood association presidents. The

researcher was familiar with these neighborhoods through an internship with the Neighborhood Planning division at the City of Gainesville. Additionally, the City's Neighborhood Planning Coordinator was involved in forging the initial contacts between the researcher and the neighborhood association presidents. Presentations were given at each of the neighborhood association meetings outlining the focus and process of the research. Through close collaboration with the association presidents, sign-up sheets were distributed at community events. All respondents were over the age of 18. The study's time constraints presented an ongoing challenge despite interest from the three association presidents. Further, the researcher could dedicate only limited resources for participation incentives. A ten-dollar gift certificate from Ward's Supermarket was given to each participant. The researcher approached Ward's ownership about the possibility of donating the gift certificates. However, as a matter of policy, Ward's could not accommodate the request. Additionally, aligning the schedules of the residents, the moderator, and the researcher to conduct the focus group interviews proved a significant challenge.

### **Location**

Location can play a critical role in focus group interviews. Due to its proximity to the three Southeast Gainesville neighborhoods involved in the study, the T.B. McPherson Community Center located on Southeast 15<sup>th</sup> Street was selected for the focus group location. The Lincoln Estates Neighborhood Association holds neighborhood meetings at the T. B. McPherson Community Center. The researcher wanted the volunteers to be familiar and comfortable with the focus group location. The City of Gainesville made the center available for the focus group sessions.

### **Focus Group Organization**

A total of 3 focus groups were conducted between April 19<sup>th</sup> and April 20<sup>th</sup>. Each group consisted of between 5-12 participants, one moderator, one researcher, and one assistant. The focus groups lasted approximately one hour. Participants were seated around a circular table. A tape recorder was placed at the center of the group. The moderator led the discussion using the prepared focus group script.

### **Development of Interview Protocol**

A number of cohesive strategies were devised in developing the interview questions. An extensive literature review was conducted with an emphasis in exploring barriers faced by local producers and low-income communities in accessing fresh produce. In addition to the literature review, several discussions with experts from the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences at the University of Florida as well as advice and guidance from the research supervisor proved invaluable in shaping the focus group questions. The expert counsel was then balanced with information gathered from several conversations with neighborhood organizers in Southeast Gainesville. An informal pre-test of the interview protocol was conducted with a group of the researcher's associates several weeks before the real focus group interviews. A few minor adjustments were made to the interview process based on feedback from the test group. The focus groups were recorded by a combination of handwritten notes produced by the researcher and the assistant as well as audio recordings of the interviews. The handwritten notes were given preference with the audiotapes providing back-up when key phrases needed confirmation.

### **Interview Format**

The interviews began with the moderator reading an introductory statement outlining the objectives for the focus group. A disclosure statement was read and the volunteers were reminded of their rights as outlined in the Institutional Review Board documentation and the

consent form each volunteer had signed. Permission was obtained to audiotape the discussions. The focus group questions were designed to elicit in depth discussions about access to fresh produce choices in Southeast Gainesville.

A semi-structured interview format accommodated three primary lines of questioning. The first line of questioning involved gauging the volunteers' attitudes about the fresh produce choices found in Southeast Gainesville food stores. This line of inquiry begins with broad open-ended questions designed to stimulate general discussion of produce purchasing patterns and to gather information about where volunteers primarily shop for fresh produce. As the discussion progressed, the moderator narrowed the focus of the questions to further probe attitudes about fresh produce choices based on a number of factors including, price, freshness, availability, variety, packaging, taste, and quantity. As the participants considered these factors, additional questions were posed concerning Southeast Gainesville food stores. Participants discussed whether fresh produce is actively promoted in Southeast food stores and explained their answers in depth. These questions were designed to shift the focus of the interview from a discussion of what the fresh produce choices are in Southeast Gainesville to a deeper exploration of how choices have developed, what can account for their development, and why volunteers believe choices have developed differently in Southeast Gainesville than in other quadrants of the city.

The second line of questioning asked participants to rank the quadrants of Gainesville by the quality of produce found in food stores. Assuming Southeast Gainesville is not ranked first, the moderator proceeded to an open discussion format for a mini-brainstorming session where volunteers were encouraged to expound on the reasons they believe Southeast Gainesville has a lower quality of produce than other quadrants of Gainesville. If discussion stalled, the moderator posed a number of questions to stimulate new dialogue. However, this portion of the interview is

designed to be open with a minimal amount of input from the moderator. The interview questions prior to this section were designed to develop the dialogue towards an analysis of the underlying barriers for fresh produce access identified in the literature review chapter.

The final line of questioning solicited input from the participants with regard to addressing some of the fresh produce access inequities exposed in the previous portion of the discussion. The moderator began with a short statement designed to shift focus and center discussion on proposing ideas to improve fresh produce access and availability in Southeast Gainesville. The interview questions are open-ended to promote brainstorming and highlight different strategies proposed by participants. Discussion also focused on weighing the pros and cons of a number of direct marketing strategies including, farmers' markets and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms. In conversations with several Southeast Gainesville residents during the interview development phase, the researcher noted differences in attitudes between Southeast Gainesville residents concerning the most effective solutions to increasing fresh produce access in their neighborhoods. The interview questions were adjusted to include a few closed-ended questions to highlight differences in opinions.

The focus group interview concluded with an opportunity for the participants to add any additional comments to the record or explore any topics not included in the discussion. Finally, the moderator issued a brief statement thanking the volunteers for their participation and the assistant distributed the gift-certificates to the participants.

The following chapter analyzes Census data on specific household characteristics linked with food insecurity. This data was used in selecting Southeast Gainesville and the three case study neighborhoods as this thesis' study areas. Further, the chapter also explores the results from the focus group data.

## CHAPTER 4 FOCUS GROUP RESULTS

The results taken from the focus groups reveal a number of significant correlations with the literature as well as several new revelations not found in the background research. Analysis and discussion of the results is organized into three sections. The first section compares key food insecurity characteristics with demographic data drawn from three Southeast Gainesville neighborhoods. Focus group participants were drawn exclusively from these three neighborhoods. The second section combines this demographic data with key spatial characteristics associated with the food desert analogy to determine the suitability of Southeast Gainesville and North Lincoln Heights, Lincoln Estates, and Springhill neighborhoods for inclusion in this study. The third section reviews the major themes that emerged from the focus group results.

### **Food Insecurity Characteristics in Three Southeast Gainesville Neighborhoods**

Focus group participants were drawn from three neighborhoods located within the Southeast quadrant of Gainesville. The neighborhoods, Lincoln Estates, North Lincoln Heights, and Springhill are the three largest neighborhood associations by area, in Southeast Gainesville. Figure 4-1 shows the location of the three neighborhoods in relation to the City of Gainesville's city limits.

The maps, shown in Figure 4-2, Figure 4-3, and Figure 4-4, display the parcel, street, and neighborhood association boundaries for the Lincoln Estates, Springhill, and North Lincoln Heights neighborhoods, respectively.

According to the 2000 United States Census, the North Lincoln Heights neighborhood comprises a significant portion of Census Tract 7, Block Group 1. A majority of the Springhill

neighborhood is contained in Census Tract 7, Block Group 2. The Lincoln Estates neighborhood is contained within Census Tract 7, Block Group 3.

A 2006 USDA sponsored study found a positive correlation between specific household characteristics and higher instances of food insecurity (Nord et. al., 2006). Food security is defined as access by all people at all times to enough food for a healthy active lifestyle (Anderson, 1990). In this context, food insecurity is characterized by recurring involuntary reductions in food intake and disruption of usual eating patterns (Guthrie and Nord, 2002).

Research has shown there are a number of conditions that increase the likelihood of a household to experience food insecurity. These conditions include households below the national poverty line, households with children under 18 headed by a single man or woman, and Black and Hispanic households. Additionally, several geographic and regional characteristics correlate with higher rates of food insecurity.

Households located in the principal cities of metropolitan areas and households in the southern region of the United States have significantly higher rates of food insecurity than households located in suburban areas or in other regions of the country.

The following tables display block group level census data for the three neighborhoods and surrounding areas. The tables, drawn from the 1999 U.S. Census study, include household demographic, economic, spatial, and transportation data that corresponds with the household characteristics identified by the researchers.

All of the households in the Lincoln Estates, Springhill, and North Lincoln Heights neighborhoods are within urbanized areas (Table 4-1). The census defines an urbanized area as a densely settled territory that consists of core census block groups or blocks that have a population density of at least 1,000 people per square mile and surrounding census blocks that

have an overall density of at least 500 people per square mile. Additionally, the North Lincoln Heights and Springhill neighborhoods lie between the original city boundaries from 1869 and a subsequent annexation in 1905. The Lincoln Estates neighborhood lies within an annexation from 1961. Thus, the three neighborhoods are within the metropolitan area and within the principal city core, a characteristic researchers associate with higher rates of food insecurity.

Regarding race, the data indicates that each Southeast Gainesville neighborhood has significantly higher concentrations of African-American households than the rest of the city (Table 4-2). The households surveyed in Block Group 1 were 96% African-American. Block Group 2 was 87% and Block Group 3 was 86% African-American. However, citywide only 23% of households are African-American. Research found a positive correlation between high concentrations of African-American households and higher rates of food insecurity. Previous research has found higher rates of food insecurity in homes with a single male or female householder where children are present.

Both Block Group 1 and Block Group 3 had significantly greater percentages of 2-or-more-person households than 1-person households (Table 4-3). Out of these 2-or-more-person households, 72% of Block Group 1 and 67% of Block Group 3 were categorized under the Other Family census category. This category is reserved for family households with either a husband with no wife present or a wife with no husband present. In both groups 1 and 3, single female householders outnumbered single male householders. In Block Group 1, 27% of male householders with no wife present had children under 18 living in the house. In female householders with no husband present, 41% had children under 18 living in the house. In Block Group 3, 57% of male householders with no wife present had children under 18 living in the

home. In female householders with no husband present, 68% had children under 18 living in the house.

Block Group 2 had a majority of single person households. Out of 2-or-more-person households, only 43% were categorized as Other Family. In the other family category, 46% of female householders with no husband present had children under 18 living in the home. There were no households headed by single men with children under 18 living in the home in this block group.

With the exception of Block Group 3, the amount of single parent households with children was consistent with the City of Gainesville. Block Group 3 however, had higher percentages of single parent families with children than the city average, indicating that Block Group 3 may have a higher risk of food insecurity than the other study areas.

In each of the three block group study areas, the median household income is below the median income for the City of Gainesville (Table 4-4). In Block Group 2 and Block Group 3, the median income is significantly lower than citywide median income. Additionally, according to the 2008 United States Department of Health and Human Services poverty guidelines, both Block Group 2 and Block Group 3 are below the poverty threshold for a family of four (Table 4-5).

A study, funded by the USDA Economic Research Service Division, discovered that households with children receiving public assistance income in the form of food stamps had higher rates of food insecurity than eligible nonparticipating households (Gundersen, Craig, and Kreider, 2006). A higher percentage of households in Block Group 1 and Block Group 3 received public assistance income than the rest of the city (Table 4-6). In Block Group 2, no households received public assistance. Despite receiving public assistance, these households had

higher rates of food insecurity than households not receiving assistance. The researchers attributed the positive association with several factors including, self-selection, the timing of food insecurity versus food stamp receipt, misreporting of food insecurity status, and misreporting of food stamp receipt (Gundersen, Craig, and Kreider, 2006). Therefore, the higher rates of public assistance income receipt in Block Group 1 and Block Group 2 may not be an accurate indicator of food insecurity. Households receiving assistance cannot be assumed to be food secure.

The Census Bureau determines a household's poverty status by dividing the total family income by national poverty thresholds. Poverty thresholds are expressed in dollar amounts and vary according to the size of the family and the ages of its members. The same poverty thresholds are used across the lower 48 states. A household is considered in poverty if their ratio of income to poverty is below 1.00. Households with ratios below 1.00 have an income deficit. Block Group 1, Block Group 2 and Block Group 3 have higher percentages of households in poverty than the national average (Table 4-7). Additionally, each block group has a significantly higher percentage of households in the 1.00-1.24 range than the national average. However, when compared to the City of Gainesville averages, the data is less clear. Households with ratios of income to poverty of .50 or below were higher in the city than in the block groups. Block Group 1 had higher percentages of households with ratios between .50 - 1.00 than the rest of the city. Block Group 3 had a higher percentage of households with ratios between .75 - .99 than the city. Block Group 2 had a lower percentage of households in poverty than the rest of the City which may reflect the presence of several higher income areas included in the block group boundaries.

Three study areas have greater percentages of households in poverty than the national poverty rate. Researchers identified this household characteristic with higher rates of food insecurity. Therefore, 34% of households in Block Group 1, 10% of households in Block Group 2, and 26% of households in Block Group 3 are more likely to experience varying degrees of food insecurity.

Additionally, the City of Gainesville had greater percentages of households in poverty than the national average. This fact could potentially be ascribed to regional differences. USDA research found a positive correlation between food insecurity and the southern region of the United States. Households located in the South were more likely to experience food insecurity than in other more affluent regions of the country.

### **Food Deserts**

The term food desert is a metaphor for “the complex nexus of interlinkages between increasing health inequities, retail development-induced differential access to food retail provision, compromised diets, undernutrition and social exclusion.” (Wrigley, 2005, p.2032). In food deserts access to fresh produce has been compromised by a combination of factors. These factors include, the siting of supermarkets, transportation options, poverty levels, and nutrition education. Drawing on the poverty data from the previous section, this portion will focus primarily on supermarket siting and transportation statistics. In addition, each of these factors is addressed in the focus group data and will be discussed in depth in a subsequent section.

### **Transportation Options**

Reliable transportation is a critical component of food access. Unreliable or non-existent public or private transportation severely restricts access to fresh produce. While the data in Table 4-8 contains travel information for work related trips, it is reasonable to assume a connection between means of transportation used in work trips and trips used for personal shopping.

Personal vehicle use for Block Group 1, Block Group 2, and Block Group 3 is roughly comparable with the rest of the city (Table 4-8). In Block Group 1 and Block Group 2, the percentage of respondents who drove alone to work was also comparable with the rest of the city. However, this was not the case in Block Group 1 where only 52% of respondents drove to work alone. Out of the households surveyed, 48% of respondents carpooled to work. This may indicate that households in Block Group 1 own fewer personal vehicles than the other block groups or the rest of the city. Block Group 3 has a significantly higher rate of public transportation usage for work trips compared to the city average. Out of the various public transportation options, bus use constituted 88% of work trips and taxi use 12%. Other forms of transportation included bicycling and walking. The percentages for these forms of transportation were roughly equal or below the average for the entire City of Gainesville.

It is difficult to draw any clear conclusions from this data. The conflicting data corresponds with what Federal Highway Administration researchers Murakami and Young uncovered. Their research found that 26% of low-income households do not own a car. Despite this statistic, low-income households still make a majority of their trips by car, often relying on rides from friends and family (Murakami and Young, 1997). The high percentage of carpooling in Block Group 1 seems to corroborate what the researchers found. However, carpooling rates for Block Group 2 and Block Group 3 are only moderately higher than the rest of the city. Sporadic or no access to a personal vehicle forces low-income households to be more dependent on public transportation and walking.

Block Group 3 has a higher rate of public transportation use than the rest of the city. While bus usage rates in Block Group 3 are lower than the city average, this is likely due to the large amount of student ridership skewing the data. Clearly, bus transportation is an important travel

means in this block group, however, in the other block groups public transportation use is below the city average. Additional focus group data in subsequent sections will help further explain these statistics.

### **Supermarket Siting**

Typically three times as many supermarkets per capita are found in middle and high-income neighborhoods than are found in low-income neighborhoods (Cotterill and Franklin, 1995). This fact, coupled with other difficulties faced by low-income households, including lower rates of personal vehicle ownership and poor public transportation connections to suburban supermarkets, represents a significant inequity in access to fresh produce between wealthier suburban households and less affluent households in the central city area.

Mapping supermarkets in Southeast Gainesville and the surrounding area reveals only one full service supermarket located in this part of town (Figure 4-5). Winn-Dixie and the AK Food Mart are located on South Main Street outside of the Southeast Gainesville quadrant. The other supermarket mentioned in the focus group, the Publix at North Main Street is located outside of Southeast Gainesville.

Several convenience and beverage stores are located in Southeast Gainesville (Figure 4-6). Convenience stores often do not carry fresh produce and instead stock more shelf-stable, processed foods that are higher in calories and fat.<sup>1</sup> With convenience stores outnumbering supermarkets 13 to 1, inequities clearly exist with regard to supermarket siting in Southeast Gainesville. A subsequent section will draw on focus group responses to further corroborate this analysis.

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<sup>1</sup> According to a Google business search of the Yellow pages, there are 13 establishments listed as convenience stores located in the Southeast Gainesville quadrant.

## **Major Themes**

This section explores the range of themes and statements presented by the focus group data. The responses are organized within three major themes. These themes correspond with the overall organization of the focus group script.

The three major themes are:

1. Attitudes and beliefs concerning the quality of fresh produce choices offered by retail establishments located in Southeast Gainesville;
2. Attitudes and beliefs concerning the influence of spatial, political, institutional, and economic factors on the fresh produce choices offered in Southeast Gainesville; and
3. Suggestions for interventions designed to increase the availability of fresh produce in Southeast Gainesville

Throughout this chapter, the three focus groups are identified as Focus Group A, Focus Group B, and Focus Group C.

### **Attitudes About Fresh Produce in Southeast Gainesville**

To examine the theme of choice, participants were asked a series of questions gauging their general shopping preferences when selecting fresh produce. The participants were asked to describe the qualities they look for when they buy fresh produce, including, freshness, taste, variety, packaging, quantity, price, and visual appeal.

Overwhelmingly, focus group members cited visual appeal as a critical factor in selecting produce. As one respondent explained, “How it’s displayed is important, it should be attractive and don’t have the bugs flying around it. It (produce) can look good but if there’s something rotten next to it, it can get tiny bugs. So the display should be attractive, but I also want to know that the surrounding is clean too.” Several participants said that the arrangement of the produce

displays influenced their shopping decisions. For one participant, visual appeal meant that the produce had “good color and a natural look.”

Roughly half of the members of each group noted the importance of produce freshness. While freshness has different connotations, it generally referred to produce that was free of blemishes, crisp, and had a shelf life of at least a few days. Several respondents recounted their experiences buying produce. One woman summarized these experiences in describing a recent trip to purchase potatoes, “I’m looking for freshness. You know a lot of times you might pick them up when your in a hurry and then you get home there’s a brown spot on it or when you cut it, the middle is brown, and you want to use it and you get upset, then you got to go back or either go to another store to get it.”

A minority in each group stated that price played a significant factor in their produce choices. In each focus group, produce prices in Southeast Gainesville markets were generally seen as being comparable with produce prices in other markets in Gainesville. Produce size, quantity, variety, packaging, and relative quality all factor into the price of produce. Price discussions in each group quickly involved these determining factors. One woman explained, “I shop around, I look for the best price and quality. Publix fruits are always the best quality, but you might have to pay a little more. I don’t shop at Publix all the time cause you can get the same things at Wards for cheaper.” Another respondent stressed her purchases were influenced by multiple factors including being a single woman. Shopping for one person meant for her, quantity and packaging was a critical factor. She preferred to purchase smaller packages of produce. However, she explained that smaller packages were harder to come by and often excess produce from the larger packages goes bad before she can use it.

In each group, at least one participant stated that they look for produce that is grown locally. Produce origin was not a theme listed for discussion in the focus group script, and the participants' statements were spontaneously given without prompting from the moderator. One respondent explained, "I always look for my fruits and vegetables to be grown locally or in the United States. I prefer fruits and vegetables grown in the United States. I don't buy anything from out of the U.S." Several respondents in each group voiced their support of local farming and cited shopping at farmers' markets and roadside stands. However, typically only one person per group explicitly stated that the origin of the produce influenced their purchasing choices.

### **Impressions of Fresh Produce in Southeast Gainesville Stores**

After establishing and prioritizing the general produce shopping preferences of the participants, the discussion proceeded with a series of questions designed to gauge the participant's impressions of the fresh produce available in retail stores in Southeast Gainesville. The questions drew from the previous responses regarding freshness, taste, variety, packaging, quantity, price, and visual appeal of Southeast Gainesville produce.

The researcher prefaced this series of questions with a discussion of where the participants shopped for the majority of their fresh produce. Respondents clearly found it important to discuss where they shopped regularly prior to making any subsequent statements. Discussion centered on the produce offered by specific stores where the participants shopped regularly. Respondents primarily shopped at four grocery stores, including Food Lion located on Southeast Hawthorne Road, Winn Dixie located on South Main Street, Wards Supermarket located on Northwest 23<sup>rd</sup> Avenue, and Publix located on North Main Street. Of all these, Food Lion is the only full service grocery store located in Southeast Gainesville. A minority of participants in each group shopped at a number of secondary locations. These locations included Publix on Northwest 43<sup>rd</sup> Street, The Fresh Market located on Northwest 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue, and Westcoast

Seafood, Meats and Produce located on Northeast Waldo Road. Many of the participants who shopped at the secondary locations cited the stores' proximity to their place of employment as a major factor affecting their patronage.

Each group approached this series of questions slightly differently, and it is important to highlight how each group organized their discussions. Focus Group A, the largest focus group, began their initial discussion by creating a scale between 1 and 10 in order to rank the various stores selling produce in their area. One respondent offered to give Food Lion a 1 ranking complaining that "they don't have a good variety and when you go in and look at the fruits a lot of them are rotten or starting to rot." An overwhelming majority of participants in Focus Group A agreed with the respondent's statement and the poor ranking. One respondent agreed adding, "the produce doesn't look appealing"; he then paused and continued by saying, "it just needs a lot of work at Food Lion." Westcoast Seafood, Meats and Produce received a ranking of 1 from another respondent. Again, an overwhelming majority of the focus group agreed with the ranking. One participant interjected, "I'd give them a zero." The participant continued by saying, "I shouldn't say that cause I still go there about once a week." Discussion moved onto other topics and the ranking system was abandoned.

Focus Group B's discussion began by emphasizing how certain desirable produce items, namely fresh collard, mustard, and turnip greens were usually difficult to find in Southeast Gainesville stores. One respondent explained, "there's not enough selection in Southeast Gainesville. I love greens but a lot of times it don't be time for the greens, and I don't like buying the canned greens, which I can fix them good, but I'd rather have the fresh greens." Another woman quickly agreed expanding on the previous statement, "you have to go so far looking for greens in other stores in Southeast, you have to go away a ways, you have to go to

Wards.” Another respondent, sharing a similar shopping experience, explained “I used to go to Hitchcock’s Foodway in Alachua for greens, when I used to work out there on Fridays. But look how far I had to go, and if I didn’t happen to have a job out there, I would have never have gotten any greens.” The availability of greens for purchase was an issue of critical concern and agreement for Focus Group B.

Discussion progressed and began to focus on individual stores where the participants did most of their shopping. One woman stated, “I do a lot of my shopping at Publix on Main Street. Publix is a good, nice, clean store. You know it when you walk in, it’s different, it’s in the atmosphere.” Other participants around the table echoed her statement. Indeed, in several discussions in each group, multiple respondents would agree that Publix is the cleanest and best maintained grocery venue in Gainesville.

Departing from the responses given by Focus Group A, Focus Group B viewed the produce choices at Food Lion favorably. One respondent stated, “Food Lion is good for fruits and vegetables.” Another respondent agreed and added, “it’s fine store for me, I don’t have a problem. They throw pretty good sales.” The previous statements reflected the general impressions of Food Lion from Focus Group B members. However, there was unanimous agreement when a third respondent explained, “I go to Food Lion, but Food Lion is the only store in the Southeast. I call it a one-horse town. It’s a place where you kinda just run in and out.” The respondent continued by explaining why she shops primarily at Publix. “Another thing too, you go to Publix, and you go to Food Lion, and you got more selection at Publix then you do at Food Lion. At Food Lion, all I’ve gotta do is drive up and it’s really close, but the selection is bad.”

During this portion of the focus group one respondent from Focus Group B raised an unexpected issue. The group had been discussing problems finding certain types of produce including good tasting sweet potatoes. The respondent, an older woman, explained that, “people don’t do sweet potatoes like they used to, they used to take sweet potatoes, before they took them to the market, they used to take them and put them out in the croker sack and let them dry and let the sugar come out of them.” Another respondent agreed, adding that she remembered her parents laying out sweet potatoes to dry before they were eaten. A majority of the group was aware of this practice and agreed that it was impossible to find sweet potatoes processed this way from any store.

Discussion in Focus Group C centered around two active participants with diverging opinions. Their disagreement helped to bring several critical issues to the fore. The remaining focus group members were roughly split between the viewpoints of the two vocal participants. This portion of the focus group began with one respondent offering her impressions of Southeast Gainesville produce.

Well I guess, for me it depends on where I shop. My personal opinion is there is not a large selection in Southeast Gainesville for shopping at all. You only have a couple of grocery stores. I shop 99% of the time at Winn Dixie over here on South Main Street. Because its close, I live right here in this community in Lincoln Estates so its close. I don’t care for Food Lion because I don’t think the store is clean and I don’t shop at Publix for personal reasons, mainly because Publix won’t put a store in East Gainesville.

Another respondent disagreed stating, “I think it’s (Publix) fine, it’s a good selection, might not be the store you want to go to. But the vegetables are there. I’m saying the availability of vegetables is there but it might be your personal choice to not shop there.”

Discussion moved on to more general impressions of Southeast produce choices. One participant shared her experiences shopping at Winn Dixie. “I found at Winn Dixie, there are times when you can go in there and there is a large variety and its fresh, which tells me that its

usually just arrived, but there's also times that I've gone in there, and you know, maybe the truck hasn't arrived, and your choices are limited what you can get." She continued by explaining how she has been in the process of changing her diet to eat healthier, including consuming more fresh fruits and vegetables and as a result, she is impacted when she cannot find quality produce.

Another participant, who generally felt that the produce choices were fine in the Southeast, admitted that, "the only thing I have about buying produce in Southeast is when they package them up, they have a tendency to put old, ripe, stuff in the packages and you go home thinking you've got firm tomatoes, and you find they've got some bad spots on them. And a lot of stores do that."

### **Promotion of Healthy Food**

Focus group participants were asked whether healthy food was promoted in stores in Southeast Gainesville. Each group interpreted the words healthy food to mean fresh fruits and vegetables and promotion to mean nutritional information displays, handouts, and sales. Members from each group unanimously believed that healthy food promotion was lacking in the stores of Southeast Gainesville. Members from Focus Group A responded with a resounding and unanimous "No!" "They don't display nutritional information and the stores don't encourage good eating," explained a participant from Focus Group A. One participant from Focus Group C examined the difference in the availability of nutritional information between fresh produce and packaged foods. "If you pick up a package, you can read the label, you can see the carbs, you can see the sodium, you can see the sugars, you can see all the preservatives or whatever's in there. But when you go to the fruit and vegetables, it's just there. You know, there's nothing that tells you the nutritional information. I know some stores do but 99% of my shopping is done at Winn Dixie here and there's not a lot there."

After this question, respondents were asked if, in their opinion, providing nutritional information and promoting healthier foods would have an impact in the amount of fruits and vegetables they or their friends and family purchase. While each group unanimously believed that healthier eating is not being properly encouraged in Southeast stores, opinions were mixed in each group as to what impact improving informational displays would have in resident's purchasing habits. "I think if people knew the value of eating good fruits and vegetables, if that was displayed more, then people would eat more, because like I read books or pamphlets or what not and find out what's good for you." Another respondent explained, "I agree that if, just like we shop for clothing, personal appeal means a lot, and if the price and the physical appearance was there and if the nutritional information was there, I too agree it would help in making better choices and it would even encourage people to try things they don't normally try." A respondent from another group argued that additional nutritional information would positively impact residents with special diet needs. "Without a doubt. Number one, especially if it was someone dieting, you have so many people now that are on special diets because of some kind of illness like diabetes or whatever, and it would be helpful to them so they could figure out how much of this you can have, how much of that you can have."

However, not every participant felt that nutritional information and healthy eating promotions would make a difference in what they or their neighbors purchased at the grocery store. "No, I don't think it would make a big difference because we're living in a microwave age now, where people want something right quick like and get on the road. You don't have people cooking like they used to, like cooking supper used to take two to three hours in letting the food cook. We live in a microwave age now." This attitude was echoed in the other groups as well. Age and a corresponding change in younger people's relationship with food were at the heart of

the issue. One participant stated that nutritional information was important for some but not for others. “Maybe for older people, but younger people won’t take a minute to read it.” This comment was received with unanimous approval and was followed by another respondent who explained that she would read the nutritional information but her kids probably would not. “If it looks good to them , they just grab it.”

Participants had several suggestions for displaying nutritional information and promoting healthier eating. “If they would have little pamphlets on different kinds of fruit or vegetables, maybe weekly, with the value you would get from eating them, I think people would be interested, I know I would. Publix puts out recipes using different vegetables too.” Another participant explained how a television cooking show helped her to change her diet. “What really got me started on this was the Food Network , and there was a particular show that showed how to cook healthier and eat healthier, and one of the things they showed you was how to take fresh vegetables, fresh fruit and use them to eat healthier, so that got me started.” Other participants shared similar experiences watching and being inspired by cooking programs focused on healthier eating.

### **Underlying Factors Shaping Southeast Produce Choices**

After developing an overall picture of the fresh produce options in Southeast Gainesville and establishing a list of specific issues raised by the focus group participants, discussion shifted to uncovering the underlying economic, social, political, and spatial factors that have shaped the contours of fresh produce in Southeast Gainesville. Participants were asked in which quadrant of Gainesville (NE, NW, SE, SW) could the freshest and highest quality produce be found. Unanimously, participants from every group stated that the Northwest quadrant had the best and freshest produce. Some participants cited specific stores, such as Ward’s Supermarket on NW 23<sup>rd</sup> Avenue and Publix on NW 43<sup>rd</sup> Street. Southeast Gainesville was ranked last by an

overwhelming majority of participants from each group. One participant summarized the group attitude explaining, “I think for me if I had to make one trip and say I wanted the best produce, and I didn’t want to shop around and compare, and I just wanted to make this one trip cause I got to get it now, then I would go Northwest, no doubt about it. I wouldn’t even stop in Northeast or Southeast Gainesville cause I don’t have time to shop. A participant in another group also echoed this statement. “If I just have to have something like a fruit platter for tonight, and I want the very best, I’m not going to stop in NE or SE cause I don’t want to take the chance that it might be there or it might not be there.”

Participants were then asked why the Southeast was not at the top of the list and were encouraged to brainstorm ideas. Economic factors and a negative perception of Southeast Gainesville were concurrent themes identified by each focus group as the most critical factors influencing produce choices in Southeast Gainesville. Citing competition from other stores in the Northwest, one participant explained, “It’s survival; it’s business; you’ve gotta have the volume, if you don’t have the volume you can’t produce the best.” This sentiment was echoed in the other focus groups as well. A majority from each group felt that Southeast stores do not attract enough shoppers to invest in better facilities and improve the quality of their offerings.

Income and price was also a major economic factor discussed in each group. “A lot of it has to do with the median income or the average income for these areas. A lot of the more expensive fruit and vegetables or the better ones, because where produce is likely to be better, there is likely to be more of it, and where some persons may not have a problem paying, I don’t know, more, 15 or 20 cents a pound more for a fruit or a vegetable, for a lot of people that’s a problem.” Other participants agreed that the average household income was major element in food stores deciding to not locate in the Southeast. “I think it has a lot to do with the market, the

income in East Gainesville is about half what it is in Northwest Gainesville and anybody looking to survive in a business, they'll look at the income of the area. Regardless of what it is, if you don't have the money, you can't spend it."

Another participant argued that while a wide range of incomes exists in Southeast Gainesville, any efforts to improve produce choices should be aimed at the average income range of the area. However, another respondent argued that income is only one factor influencing food choices offered by Southeast stores. "Stores go by demographics stuff, they cater to what people in that area are going to buy or want. You walk in Food Lion, there's a reason why you see the gum and candy and tobacco products first because, unfortunately that's what a lot of people over here buy."

Participants also identified other economic challenges shaping Southeast produce options. One participant asserted "that people know that Southeast businesses pay more for insurance for their businesses than any place else in town. The insurance rates are much much higher for business on this side of town." Other participants agreed unanimously with this statement.

One participant cited the prevalence of panhandling outside of several of the food stores in Southeast Gainesville. She argued that panhandlers were a primary reason why businesses were reluctant to make investments in Southeast Gainesville. Several participants agreed that panhandling was a problem but were unsure of its impact on investment in the Southeast. Another participant in Focus Group C disagreed that panhandling was a major problem, sparking a discussion of the role of perception in Southeast development.

Shopping loyalty was another issue raised during this segment of the focus groups. Several participants in each group explained that store loyalty influenced where they shopped and that their preference for shopping for produce in Southeast Gainesville was motivated by a desire to

keep their money inside of their community. “I shop in Southeast because I’m trying to keep the business here.” Another participant agreed, explaining that they shop in Southeast despite knowing that better produce can be found outside of their immediate community. “Because Publix won’t put a store in East Gainesville, I don’t feel like, you know, spending my money in Publix. So that pretty much limits my choices to Winn Dixie. And I try not to spend my money in West Gainesville, because I don’t live there and I try to keep my money in East Gainesville.” Another respondent recently moved her prescription from a store in Northwest Gainesville to the Walgreens on Waldo Road explaining, “whatever little bit I’ve got to take and have to spend, it will be in East Gainesville. Cause I want my money to stay here.” This theme was observed in each focus group with subtle variations. Thus, several participants from each group were shopping in Southeast Gainesville for reasons other than the quality of produce.

### **Transportation**

Participants were asked how accessible markets were in Southeast Gainesville. Generally, participants stated that food retail stores were in close proximity to their homes. However, participants unanimously agreed that shopping for produce and other groceries without the use of a personal vehicle was very difficult. “I wonder a lot of times people don’t buy a lot of what they need because they gotta go way across town on a bus. Even the jobs, they gotta go way across town, and they’ve got these little minimum wages, and by the time they pay bus fare or gas then its better to stay on your side of town.” Other participants agreed, pointing out that carrying multiple bags of groceries on a bus is challenging for a single person. One participant shared a personal story of waiting an hour for the bus with groceries after her car had broken down. Another participant explained the difficulties with walking to the supermarket. “You can get to it by bus, but you sure can’t go walking unless you really want to go walk that day. We can walk it,

it's not that it's out of sight, but you've got to want to walk it. And how're you gonna bring your stuff back?"

### **Negative Perception**

Negative perception of Southeast Gainesville and its impact was the single most important issue raised in each group. A significant amount of time was spent discussing the relative importance perception played in shaping the produce choices and the overall economic vitality of Southeast Gainesville. "It's the perception of East Gainesville, that it's higher in crime than any other section of Gainesville which we all know is not true. But it's the perception, no person's gonna spend their hard earned money to put up a nice establishment over here when its gonna end up looking like the parking lot of that Food Lion. Let's just be for real." Following this theme another participant explained why she refuses to shop at Publix.

I've lived in Gainesville all my life and East Gainesville has been neglected. One of the reasons why I do not shop at Publix is because years ago, there was an article about Publix in the newspaper, and Publix stated that East Gainesville was not conducive to the image that they wanted to project for their store. And that is why I do not shop in Publix.

The participant continues, explaining:

East Gainesville has been neglected, and the perception is that East Gainesville is the quote unquote bad side of town and you get a lot of this information from people who don't live in East Gainesville who have never been on this (east) side of University Avenue, who does not know about East Gainesville, who does not know and appreciate the fact that you have hard working citizens over here that pay their taxes, you know just like anybody else. So my personal opinion is the reason why that there are not more food stores in East Gainesville is because its been neglected. You've had officials and politicians and whoever, who has played lip service to this for years, but they have not done what has needed to be done to bring industry including supermarkets to east Gainesville.

However, as another participant from Focus Group A pointed out, negative perception can also come from within the community. "If you would put one of the best food markets out here in Southeast, you'd have to get a special program to reprogram people to start shopping here because of the perception that if it's in SE Gainesville, they think its bad. We know that better

produce can be found other places, and it's gonna be hard to convince people to change their habits.”

One issue that encompassed a great deal of discussion concerning perception was the opening of the new Walmart Superstore on North Waldo Road. The new Walmart store was viewed favorably by a unanimous majority of focus group participants. Several participants in each group viewed Walmart as a catalyst for change in Southeast Gainesville. “This Food Lion will die when Walmart opens up. They will either have to come up to standards and come up with the same kind of produce that Walmart’s doing or they are going to die.” Other participants believed Walmart would improve the shopping opportunities for Southeast residents to a point. “For instance, if you want to buy a pair of shoes, you gotta go to the mall and if you wanna decent pair of drawers, you gotta go to the mall. So I’m just saying, you know you can go to Walmart but you ain’t buying the same brand that you’re buying in Belks or Macys. You’re really not buying the same quality. When you want quality you’ve gotta go to the Northwest, that’s it. So if I wanna go shopping, I’ve gotta go across 13<sup>th</sup> Street and keep going.” Still others were cautious that Walmart would be viewed as a panacea for problems in Southeast Gainesville. “The new Walmart coming is gonna be good, but my personal feeling is that the way that it is touted is, you know, we’re bringing a Super Walmart to East Gainesville. Well Super Walmart is not the be-all and save-all to East Gainesville. It’s not going to take care of all the issues in East Gainesville.”

Within a wider context, participants believed that the negative perceptions of Southeast Gainesville were due in part to a real inequality in resources between the east and the west of Gainesville. Local politicians and the City and County Commissions were at the center of the discussion. As one participant argued, “My opinion is that, Southeast Gainesville has not been

promoted the way it should be, plus the fact that the interstate came through West Gainesville. Everything went west and nothing came east. So of course with the interstate and the mall out west, businesses began to locate over there, but nobody came this way.” Many participants felt that these disparities could be traced back to the City and County Commissions. “That’s what I’m saying, if they fill the Northwest up, they feel like they’ve just done everything, and they don’t need to do anything else. You all over here in the Southeast don’t need nothing. If you want what we got, come over here and get it. That’s how they feel. Get in your car, and come get it.”

Other participants believed that local governments had influence outside of the context of the City or County Commission. “I don’t think Southeast stores are held to the same standard as other stores in Gainesville. I don’t think the inspectors are the same, they’re the ones that makes a difference. You walk in Food Lion, you got chewing gum blots all over the place, you got grease walking in. But you walk in any store out there in the Northwest, it’s been power-washed. That’s an inspector making them do that. That’s the government.” Other participants argued that the problems with the local governments were an indication of a larger ideological divide. “You have a community of people in this town who doesn’t want a whole lot of industry in Gainesville anyway. They want to keep Gainesville the nice little college, wrap your arms around it town. But for the people who have to live here all the time, who have to work here, you know, who have to make a living, pay a mortgage and raise their children, that doesn’t work for us.”

### **Solutions**

For the final portion of the focus group, participants were asked to brainstorm ways to increase access to high-quality fresh fruits and vegetables in their immediate community. The responses included farmers’ markets, community supported agriculture agreements, government programs, healthy eating education, and community gardens. Overall there was a high degree of

consensus concerning farmers' markets amongst all three groups. Additionally, each focus group suggested at least one idea not thought of by the other groups.

### **Farmers' Markets**

Farmers' markets were easily the most popular solutions suggested by each group. An overwhelming majority of participants believed that a farmers' market located in East Gainesville would have a significant impact on the availability of fresh produce in Southeast Gainesville. One participant encapsulated the unanimous support for an Eastside farmers' market by exclaiming that, "there are so many people that are not sitting right here, in this room, that would use the farmers' market." Another participant from a different group touched on the benefit a farmers' market would have to local farmers. "You know what would be like a miracle? If you had everyone bringing in what they grow, like what they do at the farmers' market, people bring different things, different farmers bring in fresh vegetables." Intriguingly, the participant was also referring to local residents growing and selling produce in the farmers' market she envisioned.

The location and the hours of operation proved to be the biggest point of discussion concerning an Eastside farmers' market. One participant expressed her frustrations with the existing farmers' markets in the Gainesville area. "Except for the Downtown Farmers' Market, there is no farmers' market in East Gainesville. That's it, and that farmers' market is during the week when most people work. So you're either going to go to the Waldo Flea Market Farmers' Market or to the market by the highway patrol station, but that market opens at like 7 and its done by 9. If you're not there when it opens, that's it." Other common issues were raised concerning the existing farmers' market options. "The nearest farmer's market is downtown and there is no place to park." Adding to these issues, several participants observed that farmers'

markets are usually only open once per week, therefore limiting when individuals could purchase produce.

Participants were asked to brainstorm suitable locations for an Eastside farmers' market. Several specific locations and broader areas were suggested as possible locations. Summarizing the group reaction, one participant explained, "I think maybe if some farmers' markets were brought over here, you know strategically, like have one in Northeast Gainesville, and one over here in the Southeast, and one over in the Sugarhill area. Then people would have more opportunity to take advantage of that. I would love to go to the farmers' market but it's downtown and I work Monday thru Friday 9:00-5:30. So I have no access to that at all. "

### **Government Interventions**

A few participants from each group suggested different ways local governments could get involved to increase access to fresh produce in their community. One participant shared her knowledge of the local Senior Farmers' Market Nutritional Program (SFMNP) vouchers and suggested ways to expand their impact. "What they do with the elderly, they give them coupons to be able to go and shop at the farmers' markets, the ones who don't have money. I think that's a good idea, but it's only for a certain period of time. I think maybe, if they were to give them out every three months or every quarter, that would encourage them to eat more vegetables."

SFMNP vouchers are only available during the growing season. Typically, 6-8 months per year.

Other participants believed that local governments could do more to facilitate more direct farm to consumer relationships. One participant explained that it was common for farmers with excess produce to drive around Southeast Gainesville neighborhoods selling produce from their trucks. This practice, she stated, was generally accepted in her neighborhood. She continued by sharing an experience she had with a local farmer and a code enforcement officer from the City of Gainesville.

I had an experience last summer, there was a gentleman, and I spoke to him, he used to be right here on Waldo Road on the corner by the Kangaroo Station. He used to be there with his truck. Well I stopped one day, and it just so happens, I don't know if it was someone from the City's Code Enforcement or whoever it was, but anyway, they cited him and they gave him a citation. The lady up here at Westcoast said he was taking away her business. So maybe the City could make it easier for some of the farmers to come in and offer their vegetables seasonally.

Several other participants had heard similar stories of farmers being cited for selling excess produce. The same participant suggested how the City could get involved and cited another experience she had while volunteering in her community. "I remember when I was volunteering with the Boys and Girls Club, you could get a permit from the City, and with that permit, as long as you were on City property, you know you could sell stuff. So maybe that could be an option, where the City makes it easier for farmers to get street permits to sell their produce."

### **Healthy Eating Education**

Members from Focus Group A agreed that healthy eating was a critically important issue in Southeast Gainesville. A majority of the participants believed that healthy eating education was an integral component in increasing access to fresh produce. "I think that there are a lot of agencies, that we need to take advantage of more so, and depending on where you go there's always a pamphlet or hand-out. I went to one event today, there were two handouts on healthy vegetables, and one on the ten best things for your heart. We need more education. Lets use the other agencies and health programs that they have in this area. Churches would be a great place to start." Several other participants agreed adding their own ideas. "Even in The Guardian, that paper comes to Southeast Gainesville. I want The Guardian to do more. Put a weekly article on healthy nutrition." Another participant responded by stating that The Guardian had a semi-regular feature on health issues written by Vivian Filer, a retired nurse who resided in the Springhill neighborhood located in Southeast Gainesville, but that the column primarily focused

on illness prevention. Several participants suggested having a regular article dedicated to healthy eating topics.

### **Community Gardens**

Participants also offered community gardens as another idea. Currently, the McRorie Community Garden is the only community garden located in Southeast Gainesville. This garden is sponsored by the City of Gainesville and is managed by local residents. ““I know there have been discussions in the neighborhood meetings here about community gardens. I think that might be something people would be interested in. I know at one time, if I’m not mistaken, there used to be one on the other side of the T.B. McPherson Center. And I know there are a couple of places in the area over by Gainesville Regional Utilities, that little neighborhood there. They’ve had a community garden over there for quite some time. “ Another participant argued that Southeast Gainesville had a long history of residents growing produce in their own gardens. Several participants knew a neighbor who had a garden in their yard where they used to grow vegetables.

### **Community Supported Agriculture**

Members from each focus group were given a brief explanation of how a CSA agreement operates and were then asked whether or not they believed they or their neighbors would consider participating in this type of arrangement. Responses were generally positive however, after some discussion, members from Focus Group A unanimously rejected the CSA arrangement. The primary issue raised by the participants from group A was choice. Participants felt that the CSA arrangement did not offer enough choice in what fruits and vegetables they received each week. “Now see, I’ve seen something like that, but for me and my lifestyle that doesn’t fit. Some days it might be peas and greens, and I don’t wanna cook peas and greens.” Echoing this statement another participant explained, “I like a good variety. Let me pick what I

want.” A few participants expressed concerns that they would lose money if the farm had a poor harvest.

Responses from Focus Groups B and C were unanimously positive. Choice was not an issue for members from either group. “That’s what God wants you to do, eat what’s in season. Yeah, that’s what he wants you to do. And you know what? There’s no overhead because there’s no supermarket. Yes, I would buy.” The moderator reiterated that a CSA arrangement entailed limitations on the member’s choice of produce. Summarizing the group opinion, one participant stated, “It would make no difference with me, cause I like to cook it all. Squashes and cucumbers don’t all grow at the same time.” One respondent conditioned her support of a CSA arrangement on the size of the participating farm. She questioned whether the CSA arrangement typically involved large farms. The moderator responded by explaining that the farm needed to be big enough to support the members participating in the CSA. The participant expressed her concern with a partnership with a large farm.

Doesn’t that leave out the little guys? I would like to partner with the smaller farms, because the big guys they can take their stuff to Wards. Wards pay them so much and Wards probably has their own land where they grow their own vegetables, with people to harvest it and bring it in. But the little man, he’s gotta go from door to door, going in the neighborhoods and trying to sell his stuff, so it’s really cutting the little man out. I want to make sure the little man can sell his vegetables too.

Several other members agreed and expressed their preference for partnerships with smaller farms.

The results from the Census data confirm that Southeast Gainesville and the North Lincoln Heights, Lincoln Estates, and Springhill neighborhoods display household and spatial characteristics associated with increased risk of food insecurity and difficulties accessing high quality supermarkets. Results from the focus groups confirmed that access to fresh produce is a critical issue in Southeast Gainesville and the barriers to high quality produce generally

corresponded with the political, economic, institutional, and spatial barriers found in the literature. The following chapter will build on these results with a discussion of the major findings from the quantitative and qualitative data.

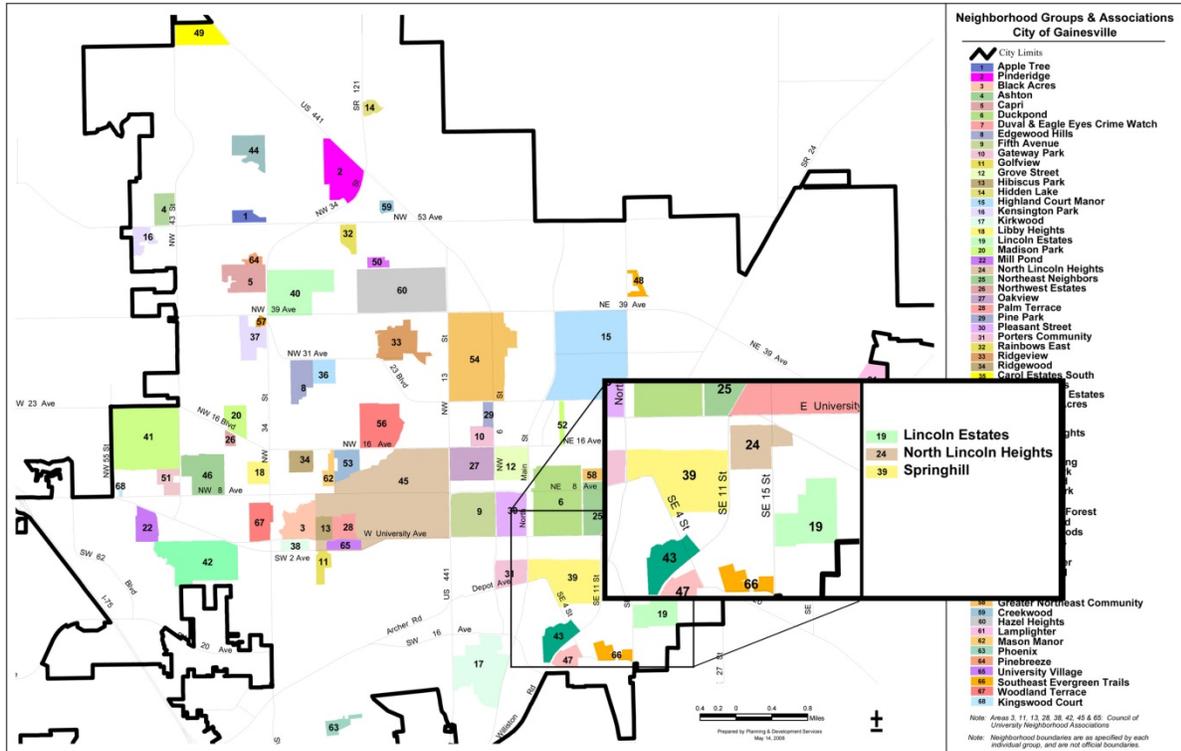


Figure 4-1. Neighborhood groups and associations (City of Gainesville, 2008) Adapted from City of Gainesville. (2008). GIS Map Library. Gainesville, Fl. Retrieved on August 12<sup>th</sup>, 2008 from <http://www.cityofgainesville.org/GOVERNMENT/CityDepartmentsNZ/PlanningDepartment/MapLibrary/tabid/259/Default.aspx>

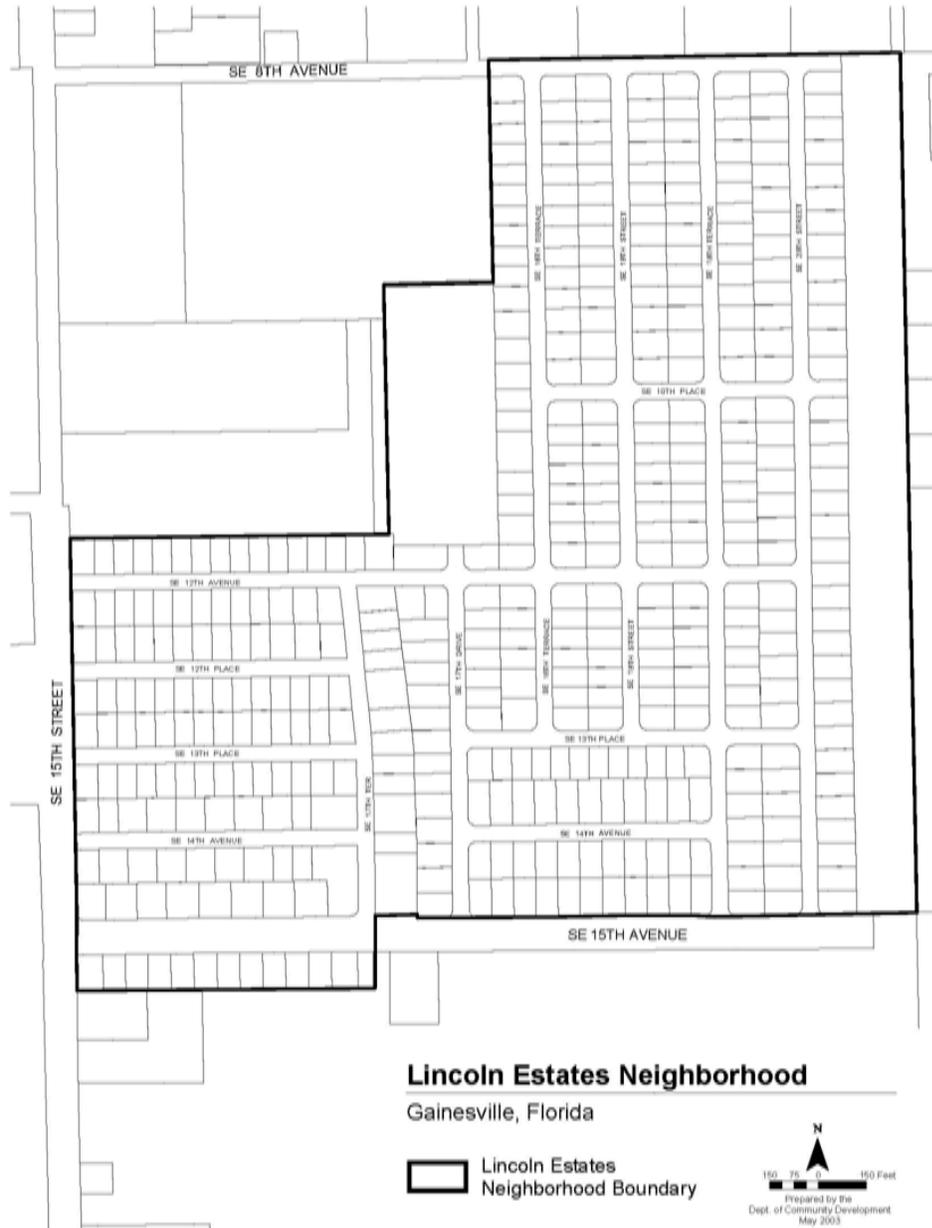


Figure 4-2. Lincoln Estates neighborhood map (City of Gainesville, 2008) Reprinted with permission from City of Gainesville. (2008). Participating Neighborhoods. Gainesville, Fl. Retrieved on August 12<sup>th</sup>, 2008 from <http://www.cityofgainesville.org/GOVERNMENT/CityDepartmentsNZ/NeighborhoodPlanning/ParticipatingNeighborhoods/tabid/254/Default.aspx>

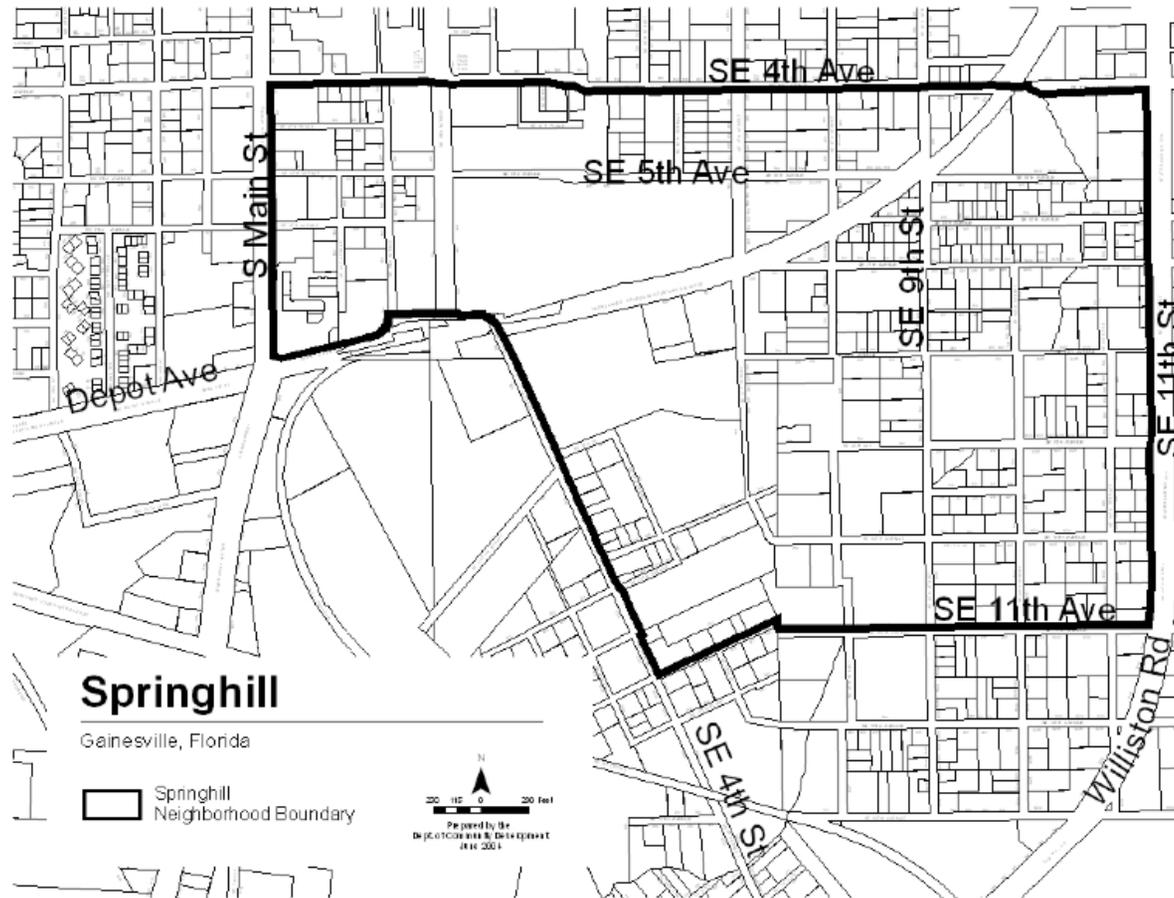


Figure 4-3. Springhill neighborhood map (City of Gainesville, 2008) Reprinted with permission from City of Gainesville. (2008). Participating Neighborhoods. Gainesville, Fl. Retrieved on August 12<sup>th</sup>, 2008 from <http://www.cityofgainesville.org/GOVERNMENT/CityDepartmentsNZ/NeighborhoodPlanning/ParticipatingNeighborhoods/tabid/254/Default.aspx>



Figure 4-4. North Lincoln Heights neighborhood map (City of Gainesville, 2008) Reprinted with permission from City of Gainesville. (2008). Participating Neighborhoods. Gainesville, Fl. Retrieved on August 12<sup>th</sup>, 2008 from <http://www.cityofgainesville.org/GOVERNMENT/CityDepartmentsNZ/NeighborhoodPlanning/ParticipatingNeighborhoods/tabid/254/Default.aspx>

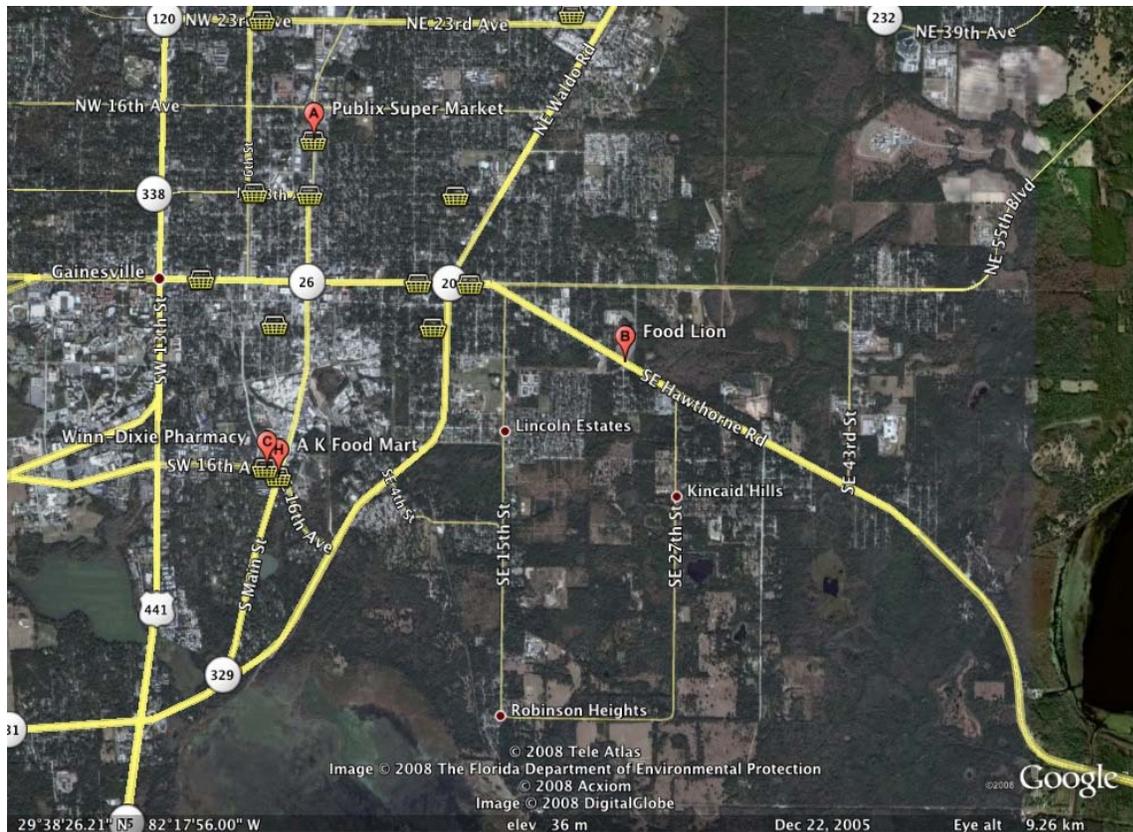


Figure 4-5. Full service supermarkets in Southeast Gainesville and the surrounding areas. A)The Publix is denoted on the map by pushpin A. B) The Food Lion is denoted by pushpin B. C) Winn-Dixie Supermarket is denoted by pushpin G pushpin. D) AK Food Mart is denoted by pushpin H. (Google Earth, 2008)

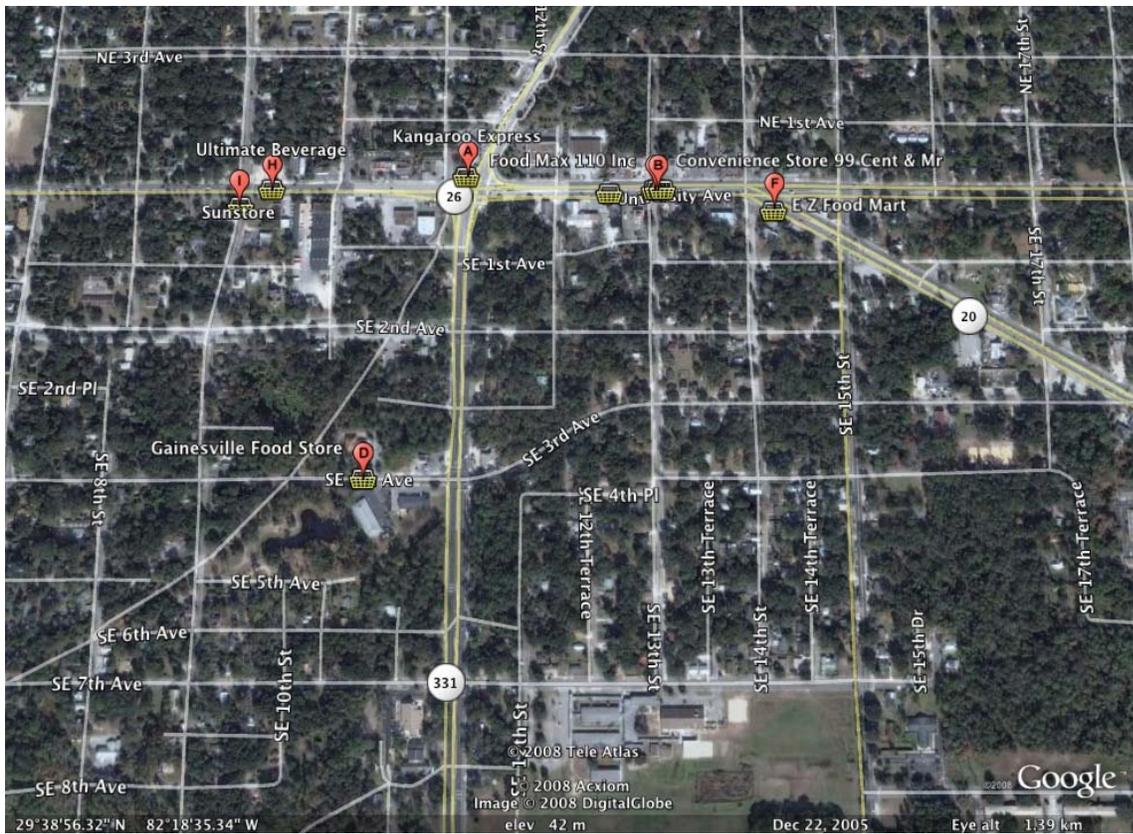


Figure 4-6. Convenience and beverage stores in southeast Gainesville (Google Earth, 2008)

Table 4-1. Southeast Gainesville urban and rural households (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000)

	Block Group 1, Census Tract 7, Alachua County, Florida North Lincoln Heights	Block Group 2, Census Tract 7, Alachua County, Florida Springhill	Block Group 3, Census Tract 7, Alachua County, Florida Lincoln Estates	Gainesville city, Florida
Total:	738	543	2,584	95,605
Urban:	738	543	2,584	94,451
Inside urbanized areas	738	543	2,584	94,451
Inside urban clusters	0	0	0	0
Rural:	0	0	0	1,154
Farm	0	0	0	0
Nonfarm	0	0	0	1,154

Table 4-2. Southeast Gainesville household race (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000)

	Block Group 1, Census Tract 7, Alachua County, Florida North Lincoln Heights	Block Group 2, Census Tract 7, Alachua County, Florida Springhill	Block Group 3, Census Tract 7, Alachua County, Florida Lincoln Estates	Gainesville city, Florida
Total:	738	543	2,584	95,605
White alone	4%	10%	12%	68%
Black or African American alone	96%	87%	86%	23%
American Indian and Alaska Native alone	0%	0%	0%	1%
Asian alone	0%	0%	0%	5%
Some other race alone	0%	3%	0%	1%
Two or more races	0%	0%	2%	2%

Table 4-3. Southeast Gainesville household size by household type by presence of own children under 18 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000)

	Block Group 1, Census Tract 7, Alachua County, Florida North Lincoln Heights	Block Group 2, Census Tract 7, Alachua County, Florida Springhill	Block Group 3, Census Tract 7, Alachua County, Florida Lincoln Estates	Gainesville city, Florida
Total:	240	289	862	37,361
1-person household:	16% (38)	57% (165)	19% (165)	33% (12,217)
Male householder	66% (25)	31% (51)	30% (50)	45% (5,450)
Female householder	34% (13)	69% (114)	70% (115)	55% (6,767)
2-or-more-person household:	84% (202)	43% (124)	81% (697)	67% (25,144)
Family households:	96% (194)	73% (90)	96% (672)	74% (18,526)
Married-couple family:	28% (55)	57% (51)	33% (221)	67% (12,427)
With own children under 18 years	18% (10)	59% (30)	40% (89)	42% (5,184)
No own children under 18 years	82% (45)	41% (21)	60% (132)	58% (7,243)
Other family:	72% (139)	43% (39)	67% (451)	33% (6,099)
Male householder, no wife present:	37% (52)	33% (13)	24% (108)	19% (1,182)
With own children under 18 years	27% (14)	0% (0)	57% (62)	42% (493)
No own children under 18 years	73% (38)	100% (13)	43% (46)	58% (689)
Female householder, no husband present:	63% (87)	67% (26)	76% (343)	81% (4,917)
With own children under 18 years	41% (36)	46% (12)	68% (232)	59% (2,910)
No own children under 18 years	59% (51)	54% (14)	32% (111)	41% (2,007)
Nonfamily households:	4% (8)	27% (34)	4% (25)	26% (6,618)
Male householder	100% (8)	100% (34)	80% (20)	54% (3,596)
Female householder	0% (0)	0% (0)	20% (5)	46% (3,022)

Table 4-4. Southeast Gainesville median household income in 1999 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000)

	Block Group 1, Census Tract 7, Alachua County, Florida North Lincoln Heights	Block Group 2, Census Tract 7, Alachua County, Florida Springhill	Block Group 3, Census Tract 7, Alachua County, Florida Lincoln Estates	Gainesville city, Florida
Median household income in 1999	25,833	20,919	20,694	28,164

Table 4-5. 2008 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services poverty thresholds (HHS, 2008)

Persons in family or household	48 contiguous states and D.C(in \$).
1	10,400
2	14,000
3	17,600
4	21,200
5	24,800
6	28,400
7	32,000
8	35,600
For each additional person, add	3,600

Table 4-6. Southeast Gainesville public Assistance income in 1999 for households (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000)

	Block Group 1, Census Tract 7, Alachua County, Florida North Lincoln Heights	Block Group 2, Census Tract 7, Alachua County, Florida Springhill	Block Group 3, Census Tract 7, Alachua County, Florida Lincoln Estates	Gainesville city, Florida
Total:	240	289	862	37,361
With public assistance income	11%	0	15%	3%
No public assistance income	89%	100%	85%	97%

Table 4-7. Southeast Gainesville ratio of income in 1999 to poverty level (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000)

	United States	Block Group 1, Census Tract 7, Alachua County, Florida North Lincoln Heights	Block Group 2, Census Tract 7, Alachua County, Florida Springhill	Block Group 3, Census Tract 7, Alachua County, Florida Lincoln Estates	Gainesville city, Florida
Total:	273,882,232	738	543	2,555	84,511
Under .50	6%	12%	7%	12%	16%
.50 to .74	3%	9%	3%	5%	6%
.75 to .99	4%	13%	0%	9%	5%
1.00 to 1.24	4%	10%	16%	14%	6%
1.25 to 1.49	4%	7%	13%	11%	6%
1.50 to 1.74	4%	8%	2%	3%	4%
1.75 to 1.84	2%	1%	0%	1%	1%
1.85 to 1.99	3%	1%	0%	8%	2%
2.00 and over	70%	39%	59%	37%	54%

Table 4-8. Southeast Gainesville means of transportation to work for workers 16 years and over (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000)

	Block Group 1, Census Tract 7, Alachua County, Florida North Lincoln Heights	Block Group 2, Census Tract 7, Alachua County, Florida Springhill	Block Group 3, Census Tract 7, Alachua County, Florida Lincoln Estates	Gainesville city, Florida
Total:	257	199	880	43,060
Car, truck, or van:	79%	93%	85%	82%
Drove alone	52%	81%	79%	85%
Carpooled	48%	19%	21%	15%
Public transportation:	0%	0%	11%	3%
Bus or trolley bus	0%	0%	88%	97%
Railroad	0%	0%	0%	1%
Ferryboat	0%	0%	0%	1%
Taxicab	0%	0%	12%	1%
Motorcycle	0%	0%	0%	0%
Bicycle	4%	7%	1%	5%
Walked	4%	0%	2%	6%
Other means	0%	0%	0%	1%
Worked at home	13%	0%	1%	3%

## CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION

### **Key Implications and Questions**

This thesis uncovers the multitude of barriers limiting access to fresh produce for low-income households and compares the results with findings from focus groups and statistical data drawn from three neighborhoods located in Southeast Gainesville. A related and secondary purpose here explores the feasibility of applying direct marketing and other alternative strategies to help alleviate produce access issues in Southeast Gainesville. A final verdict cannot yet be offered on whether a food desert exists in Southeast Gainesville. However, several key implications have emerged over the course of this research that confirm the importance of food access in Southeast Gainesville, expose the multiple barriers to limiting this access, and support the use of direct marketing strategies to overcome these barriers. Additionally, a list of questions is offered to guide policymakers evaluating access barriers to fresh produce for a given area. Finally, a number of intervention strategies are offered for planning agencies interested in improving food access in the local community.

### **Key Implications**

#### **Implication 1: Access to Fresh Produce is a Significant Issue for Southeast Gainesville**

Before the start of this research, it was unknown whether access to fresh produce was an important issue to Southeast residents. Statistical data and focus group responses clearly indicate that many residents consider fresh produce access a critical issue in Southeast Gainesville. Anecdotally, many focus group participants lingered after their groups had concluded to continue discussing fresh produce issues facing Southeast Gainesville. Several participants approached the researcher to express their desire that more research and attention be focused on this issue.

## **Implication 2: Shopping Preferences, Purchasing Behavior, and Supermarket Characteristics**

Produce shopping patterns and preferences can be understood both in terms of what types of produce individuals prefer to buy as well as the quantity, quality, retail market characteristics, and price point at which the produce becomes desirable. While the patterns and preferences may vary according to race, income, and region, a recent study in the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* found that desire for fresh produce is indifferent to these factors (Herman, Harrison, and Jenks, 2006). In their study the researchers monitored a group of low-income women who had been provided an economic supplement for fresh fruits and vegetables. The women had a 90% voucher redemption rate and purchased a wide variety of produce (Herman, Harrison, and Jenks, 2006).

Focus group data indicates that the visual appeal and the freshness of produce was the highest priority for respondents. Visual appeal meant that the produce was free of blemishes and the display and surroundings were well kept and clean. Freshness referred to produce that was healthy looking, free of insects, and had a shelf life of at least several days. Several participants from each focus group echoed a common theme and shared stories of purchasing produce at certain area markets only to have the produce go bad in a day.

The price of produce was not a significant factor influencing shopping preferences according to focus group data. A minority of respondents in each group cited price as an important issue. This fact may corroborate previous findings in the literature. Leibtag and Kaufman (2003) discovered that low-income households economize food choices using a number of strategies. These strategies include, purchasing a greater amount of discounted products, purchasing more private label or generic products, buying larger volume packaging, and purchasing a less expensive product in a product class (Leibtag and Kaufman, 2003).

Finally, the researchers argue that while price differences are influenced by freshness, convenience, and taste, differences in price are also influenced by nutritional quality and fat content (Leibtag and Kaufman, 2003).

Focus group respondents generally believed that produce prices in Southeast markets were roughly comparable with other stores in Gainesville. However, an overwhelming majority felt that Southeast stores had a lower quality of produce when compared to the same stores. Several respondents in each group explained that in order to maximize their food budget, they would shop around at different stores to find the most advantageous combination of price, quality, and quantity. Several participants observed that Southeast stores had more discounted sales and manager's specials than other area establishments. However, no indication exists that the participants regularly purchased discounted produce. Additionally, no indication exists that participants purchased private label produce or bulk items. Several of the discrepancies between Leibtag and Kaufman's findings and the focus group data may be attributed to inherent differences between produce and the products referred to in the previous study. Generally, produce is not sold in bulk packages unless it has been marked down and consolidated. Additionally, produce is not generally sold under private label or generic brands. Thus, not all of the economizing strategies found in the research apply to produce purchasing decisions.

Produce processing was another issue raised in the focus group data that was absent in the literature. Several participants discussed how traditional sweet potato preparation had disappeared over the years. Participants recalled how stores would routinely allow sweet potatoes to dry in the sun, thus sweetening and concentrating their flavor. This change in processing they argued diminished the desirability of this produce and influenced their decisions to purchase the product. While these concerns may seem small when compared with other

factors, it was difficult to gauge its effect, especially in rural communities where traditional processing methods were still remembered.

### **Supermarket Characteristics**

The focus groups indicated that supermarket characteristics also affected participant's produce purchasing patterns. A survey of supermarket characteristics in lower-income neighborhoods found that grocery stores with a significant portion of lower-income shoppers tend to be older, smaller, and have fewer checkout lines and parking spaces than suburban stores (King, Leibtag, Behl, 2004). Further, in terms of their competitive position relative to other supermarkets, stores serving lower-income communities are least likely to be the market leader in price, quality, service, and variety (King, Leibtag, Behl, 2004).

Results drawn from the focus groups corroborate earlier findings concerning supermarket characteristics. Food Lion primarily received criticism from participants concerning a range of produce and store related issues. Poor freshness and produce variety was cited as a significant problem by a majority of participants. Participants also ranked Food Lion produce low in terms of visual appeal. Southeast stores, including Food Lion, were criticized for not regularly stocking desirable produce items like greens and peas. Several participants expressed their frustration in trying to find these products in Southeast Gainesville. Clearly, participants did not believe that Southeast stores were market leaders in quality or variety.

Participants generally agreed that produce prices in Southeast stores were comparable to other stores in Gainesville. However, overwhelmingly participants agreed that Ward's Supermarket was the leader in price among the supermarket options in Gainesville. Additionally, a majority of participants believed that Ward's Supermarket had the best selection of produce and was roughly equal with Publix in terms of quality.

Service and convenience of shopping was another problem area identified by participants. Several respondents noted that Winn-Dixie and Food Lion had fewer cashiers on duty than other stores where they shopped. Another participant expressed her frustration with Winn-Dixie's automated checkout service, recalling how she could not find a free cashier to help her with her problem. Additionally, one participant faulted the placement and number of produce scales in Food Lion. She stated that Food Lion had fewer produce scales than other markets and that they were located apart from the produce displays.

One characteristic, not found in the literature, related to store appearance and cleanliness. The cleanliness of Food Lion and other Southeast stores was a key issue raised by participants. Several participants remarked on the unattractiveness of the Food Lion parking lot, which they claimed was regularly strewn with litter and other debris. Participants from every group explained that their primary reason for not shopping at Food Lion was because they felt the store was not clean. Cleanliness of the produce displays, the parking lots, and the floor were all mentioned during the focus groups. Problems with cleanliness proved to be a significant and common characteristic for Southeast stores.

Another unexpected issue that was absent from the literature was participants' preference for produce grown locally. One participant went as far as saying she did not purchase produce grown outside the United States. Several participants from each group were aware of the growing local food movement and stated they shopped at farmers' markets to support local farmers.

Clearly, focus group participants consider access to fresh produce a significant issue. Overwhelmingly, participants believed that in terms of quality, variety, freshness, and visual appeal, fresh produce found in Southeast Gainesville was inadequate. They emphasized

problems with the produce found at Food Lion, the Southeast's only full service supermarket, characterizing Southeast Gainesville and its singular supermarket as a "one-horse town."

Interestingly, price did not primarily influence produce purchasing decisions. Instead, a host of complex issues related not only to the quality, variety, and freshness of the produce, but also issues related to preferences for locally grown food, local business loyalty, and traditional produce processing methods greatly influenced buying behavior.

### **Implication 3: Barriers to Accessing Fresh Produce in Southeast Gainesville**

A review of the literature revealed several barriers faced by underserved communities that negatively impacted access to fresh produce. These barriers cut across a wide range of issues and are interlinked with the political, economic, spatial, and institutional inequities shaping the geographies of low-income communities across the country. While the focus group participants expressed many of the concerns documented in similar studies, some of their responses were unique to this study.

#### **Economic Barriers**

Economic barriers encompassed a wide range of issues identified in the literature and the focus groups. Research has shown that Black and Hispanic households, households headed by single women with children, and households with lower income to poverty ratios spent significantly less on food than married households, white households, and households with higher income to poverty ratios. The focus group results corroborate these statistics. Several participants argued that lower incomes in their community meant that people had less money to spend on fruits and vegetables. They argued that many residents cannot afford to pay 15 to 20 cents more per pound for produce, thus forcing these households to patronize lower quality stores or purchase less desirable produce.

Another economic issue raised in the focus groups related to store size, customer volume, and market conditions in Southeast Gainesville. Several participants believed that smaller supermarkets like Food Lion and Winn-Dixie faced competition from larger and better-supplied stores. Research has shown that supermarkets in lower-income areas tend to be smaller and subject to competition from suburban markets (King, Leibtag, and Behl, 2004). As a corollary to this sentiment, some participants believed that Southeast stores did not generate sufficient customer volume to attract larger suburban supermarket chains. As one participant explained, “you’ve gotta have the volume, if you don’t have the volume, you can’t produce the best.” These lower numbers at Southeast stores limited investment in better facilities and the stores’ ability to improve their produce quality.

For some participants, economic barriers, demographics, and social issues were difficult to separate. Several participants believed that some economic barriers in Southeast markets stemmed from demographic and socio-economic factors. One participant summarized this sentiment by placing some of the responsibility on individual choices. “Stores go by demographics stuff, they cater to what people in that area are going to buy or what. You walk into Food Lion, there’s a reason why you see the gum and candy and tobacco products first because, unfortunately, that’s what a lot of people over here buy.”

Insurance premiums for supermarkets and other stores was another issue raised in the focus groups but absent from the literature. One participant, a local retired businessman, stated that in his experience, Southeast businesses face much higher insurance premiums than other areas in town. While not mentioned in the literature, it is in keeping with other challenges faced by supermarkets serving lower-income areas.

Panhandling and other unwanted activity was another economic barrier not found in the literature. Several participants cited panhandling and loitering, especially outside local food markets, to be a significant deterrent to shopping at Southeast stores. Such unwanted activity they argued, was a visible reason why higher quality supermarkets were reluctant to locate in Southeast Gainesville.

Finally, shopper loyalty was a significant economic factor absent from the literature. Participants from every group stated that their preference for keeping money inside of their immediate community drove them to shop in Southeast stores they felt were inferior to other stores in Gainesville. The preference for shopping in the Southeast is difficult to categorize. While in a sense, an economic barrier limiting participant choice to lesser quality stores and produce, it also reflects a strategy to empower the community by strengthening consumers' buying power. Clearly, many participants were also grappling with this choice.

### **Political Barriers**

African-American access to political power and decision-making processes has historically been limited. "In most cities land use decisions, the local decisions that most affect the spatial environment of the city and its economic life, are a semiprivate process involving a triangle of capitalist developers, city bureaucrats, and elected city officials. The empirical record shows however, that land use decision-making biased in these ways contributes to increasing inequalities" (Elkin as quoted in Young, 2003, p. 351). Exclusion from land use decisions follows with larger patterns of minority under-representation in the political arena.

Unequal access to political power in Southeast Gainesville was also a critical topic for focus group participants. An overwhelming majority of participants believed that underrepresentation in land use decisions and the political arena was negatively impacting public and private investment in Southeast Gainesville. Many participants cited the protracted

negotiations between the City of Gainesville, the Wal-Mart Corporation, and several Eastside neighborhood groups to place a Wal-Mart Supercenter on Waldo Road, as an example of the difficulty Southeast residents experience breaking into the decision making process.

Many participants believe that the difficulties bringing the Wal-Mart Supercenter to the Eastside reflects other political barriers and unequal power faced by East Gainesville. One participant believed that Southeast supermarkets were not maintained at the same health and cleanliness standards as other stores. “I don’t think the inspectors are the same, they’re the ones that makes a difference. You walk into Food Lion, you got chewing gum blots all over the place, you got grease walking in. But you walk in any store out there in Northwest, it’s been power-washed. That’s an inspector making them do that. That’s the government.”

### **Institutional Barriers**

Institutional barriers identified in the literature include patterns of disinvestment in lower-income communities through a variety of means. Disinvestment in the form of redlining by the Federal Housing Administration and lending institutions significantly contributed to the decline in housing and economic development particularly in urbanized areas. Other institutional barriers identified included the Federal Urban Renewal program.

Focus group data indicates that institutional barriers operate primarily at the local level and are characterized by unequal economic development patterns and public disinvestment in East Gainesville. Many participants argued that these patterns of disinvestment are endemic of a larger ideological divide between East and West Gainesville and that this divide shapes the economic geography of both sides. “You have a community of people in this town who doesn’t want a whole lot of industry in Gainesville anyway. They want to keep Gainesville the nice little college, wrap your arms around it town. But for the people who have to live here all the time, who have to work here, you know, who have to make a living, pay a mortgage and raise their

children, that doesn't work for us." Another participant highlighted the economic divide between East and West arguing that the political and economic community has overlooked the needs of Southeast residents. "What I'm saying is, if they fill the Northwest up, they feel like they've just done everything and they don't need to do anything else. You all over here in the Northwest don't need nothing. If you want what we got, come over here and get it. That's how they feel. Get in your car and come get it." Several participants linked the problems in the Southeast with the decision to place Interstate 75 and The Oaks Mall in the West. They argued that the interstate and the mall acted like a magnet drawing businesses, investment, and people out west. Clearly, participants feel that this pattern of westward investment has impacted commercial development and investment in East Gainesville, directly resulting in diminished access to high quality supermarkets and other retail food establishments in their community.

### **Spatial Barriers**

Multiple spatial barriers affecting fresh produce access were identified in the literature. Middle- and high-income neighborhoods typically have three times as many supermarkets than low-income communities (Cotterill and Franklin, 1995). In addition to fewer supermarkets locating in poorer neighborhoods, personal vehicle ownership rates are significantly lower in low-income communities (Cotterill and Franklin, 1995). Fewer supermarkets and fewer automobiles mean that low-income households are forced to rely on rides from friends and family, take mass transit, or walk. Transporting groceries without a personal vehicle becomes very difficult, especially for elderly shoppers.

The focus group data confirmed that the limited distribution of supermarkets in Gainesville was directly linked with difficulties transporting groceries without a car. Participants were clearly aware that Food Lion is the only full service supermarket located in Southeast Gainesville. One participant referred to Southeast Gainesville and the Food Lion as a "one-horse

town” reflecting the majority of participants’ opinions that Food Lion alone could not fully serve Southeast Gainesville. Other participants cited the difficulties shopping for groceries and using alternative forms of transportation. Several participants argued that the bus comes too infrequently to be convenient for their shopping needs. One participant shared her experience riding the bus with groceries after her car had broken down. “I done been like that, my car broke down and I had so many bags I was about to cry but I finally made it home.” Another participant discussed the possibility of walking between her home and the supermarket. She argued that the distance was within walking distance, however, she added that she would have to really be in the mood to walk. She was skeptical that someone on foot could transport multiple bags of groceries home.

#### **Implication 4: Healthy Eating and Nutritional Information**

Focus group participants also discussed insufficient or non-existent nutritional information as another critical issue. Yet, researchers did not identify this characteristic of supermarkets serving lower income households. Healthy food promotion, including nutritional information displays, was an especially popular discussion point in the local focus groups despite participants only being asked one question about this issue. Respondents were asked to what degree are healthy food options promoted in Southeast Gainesville. Participants interpreted healthy food to refer to fresh fruits and vegetables and promotion as any array of sales, displays, pamphlets, and demonstrations aimed at promoting healthier eating.

Overwhelmingly, participants felt that Southeast stores did not adequately promote healthier eating. Several participants recalled experiences finding nutritional information and pamphlets at other supermarkets around town. In particular, participants criticized the lack of nutritional information for fruits and vegetables in stores sited in the Southeast and surrounding

areas. When asked whether additional nutrition information would impact their shopping behaviors, participants' responses were generally mixed. A majority of participants from each group argued that better nutritional information and promotions would help them make better choices and may encourage some to try new types of produce. Other participants were more skeptical towards the impact of healthier eating promotions. They cited the rise in convenience foods and changing attitudes towards food preparation, especially in younger people, as examples of barriers to healthy eating.

Little research exists documenting how healthier eating is promoted in low-income supermarkets, however, a British study conducted by researchers at the Wolfson School of Health Sciences discovered that shoppers in lower-income areas were aware of healthy eating messages, however, they were more concerned with quantity and price (Caraher, Dixon, Lang, Carr-Hill, 1998). These findings did not correspond with results taken from this study's focus groups. Indeed, several participants stated that they were trying to change their diets to eat healthier. As a result, they were very concerned with nutritional information. Additionally, participants were aware of healthy eating campaigns organized by the local Alachua Health Department and supermarkets in other parts of town.

Healthy eating promotion should be included in any plan to increase access to fresh produce in Southeast Gainesville. Disseminating clear nutritional information at the supermarket level is only one component. The City of Gainesville and Alachua County must coordinate with the Alachua County Florida Department of Health and other non-profit health agencies to increase awareness of healthier eating benefits derived from a balanced diet full of fresh fruits and vegetables.

### **Implication 5: The Power of Perception**

Negative perception was a critical barrier to fresh produce. However, this barrier was absent from the literature. A majority of participants in every group believe that the negative perception of Southeast Gainesville, especially in the business and political communities, presents a significant barrier to attracting high quality supermarkets and other retail food establishment to this area. Many participants argued that high quality markets have not located in the Southeast because of the perception that Southeast Gainesville has higher crime rates. One participant explained that she refused to shop at Publix, after she read an article in the Gainesville Sun, in which a representative from Publix stated the supermarket chain would not build a Publix in East Gainesville because it would not be conducive to the company's image they want to project for their store.

Additionally, several participants argued that negative perception also came from within the community. One participant believed that even if Southeast Gainesville received a high quality supermarket, a special program would have to be developed to "reprogram" people to start shopping in the Southeast. He stated, "that if it's in Southeast Gainesville, they think its bad. We know that better produce can be found other places, and it's gonna be hard to convince people to change their habits."

No research exists documenting the effects of how poor perception of an area influences development patterns. While an overwhelming majority of participants in every group argued that negative perception played a critical role in preventing high quality supermarkets from locating in their community, several participants noted that these perceptions had validity. Many of the reasons supermarkets do not site in the Southeast stemmed from real problems with crime and poverty.

The influence negative perception plays on determining the location, quality, and intensity of commercial development cannot be dismissed easily. However, negative perception is also very difficult to document or measure. While negative perception alone may not constitute a significant barrier to fresh produce access, it may exacerbate real barriers by creating psychological impediments for residents, politicians, planners, and businesses involved in Southeast issues. In this context, intervention strategies to increase access to fresh produce must overcome the inertia caused by widely held negative beliefs about Southeast Gainesville.

### **Implication 6: Direct Marketing and Alternative Strategies**

In the literature and among the focus groups, several direct marketing strategies were proposed to increase access to fresh produce. In addition to the direct marketing strategies, focus group participants brainstormed a number of other interventions tailored to their immediate community. This section compares the findings from the literature with the focus group responses related to Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) and farmers' markets and explores alternative solutions generated by focus group participants but absent from the literature.

#### **Community Supported Agriculture**

CSA literature indicates that a CSA arrangement benefits communities with diminished access to fresh produce through a variety of means. Produce prices are typically lower in CSA arrangements than in traditional supermarkets (Cooley and Lass, 1998). CSA farms can distribute shares of produce from conveniently located community-meeting spaces, more easily accessible by walking and transit than supermarkets (Lyson, 2004). Finally, low-income households can take advantage of several federal food assistance voucher programs aimed at linking groups vulnerable to food insecurity with farmers' markets and CSAs.

The focus group responses generally emphasized the potential benefits a CSA arrangement would bring to their community. The findings locally reinforced those in the literature that valued the flexibility of the CSA drop off locations and the perceived freshness of CSA produce compared to supermarkets. Several participants felt that the seasonal growing cycle of CSA produce was more natural than purchasing out of season produce in a supermarket.

Several challenges and considerations to the CSA arrangement were raised, especially in Focus Group A. Participants in this group, after some discussion, overwhelmingly rejected the CSA arrangement. For these participants, produce choice was the critical issue. Many participants did not respond well to the idea of not having full control over their produce choices from week to week. Conversely, participants from Focus Group B and Focus Group C felt that the limited produce choice in a CSA arrangement did not present a significant barrier.

Another concern, absent from the literature, that generated discussion involved the size of the farm involved in a CSA arrangement with a neighborhood. One participant expressed her concern that smaller farms would be left out of such an arrangement. Her support of the CSA setup hinged on the involvement of smaller farmers. Other members from her group supported partnering with smaller farms.

Based on the focus group findings, implementation of a CSA arrangement in Southeast Gainesville would require a combination of educational material, to inform potential shareholders of the risks and benefits of this arrangement, and involvement of neighborhood association presidents and the City of Gainesville. Association presidents would act as liaisons between neighborhood residents and participating farms. The City of Gainesville's contribution would entail facilitating meetings between the neighborhoods and potential farms as well as allowing City facilities to operate as CSA share drop off points.

## **Farmers' Markets**

Farmers' markets provide several benefits to communities with poor access to fresh produce. Farmers' markets benefit communities with fewer supermarkets by providing a flexible location where fresh produce can be accessed (Lyson, 2004). By siting markets close to underserved neighborhoods, residents save time and transportation costs. Farmers markets also create a community gathering space where residents can network and build organizational resources (Lyson, 2004). Finally, the Women, Infant, and Children's Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) and the Seniors Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP) are federal food assistance voucher programs aimed at increasing access to fresh produce for low-income seniors and pregnant, breastfeeding, and post-partum low-income women by connecting participants with farmers' market resources.

Focus group results reveal overwhelming support for a farmers' market located in Southeast Gainesville. Participants believed that a regular farmers' market would increase access to fresh produce in their community while benefitting small farmers. Locational flexibility was the most critical discussion point in each focus group. Participants noted that a farmers' market could be located much closer to their neighborhoods thereby making it easier for local residents to access fresh produce by walking or bus travel.

In addition to locational flexibility, farmers' markets have flexible hours and days of operation. Several participants complained that the existing farmers' markets have limited operating hours and are not conducive to individuals who get off from work later or have longer commutes. Locating a farmers' market in Southeast Gainesville will only improve proximity issues if operating hours are also tailored to better-fit Southeast residents' work schedules.

## **Community Gardens**

Community gardens were not included in the literature review. Consultation with Dr. M.E. Swisher, director of the Center for Organic Agriculture at the University of Florida, determined that community gardens did not generate the volume of fresh produce required to alleviate produce access issues in Southeast Gainesville. Research indicates that community gardens function primarily as community spaces and provide a hands-on workshop designed to increase agricultural literacy in the surrounding community. However, due to their relatively small growing area, community gardens do not generate enough produce to satisfy the demands of a larger community (Lyson, 2004).

Regardless, several focus group participants discussed developing community gardens in Southeast Gainesville. Many participants were aware of other successful gardens in town and stated that community gardens had been a recent discussion item at several different neighborhood association meetings. One participant argued that the Southeast community had a long history of growing their own vegetables, and a community garden would help bring older more experienced gardeners together with younger residents. This statement confirms the agricultural literacy function of the community garden.

## **Nutritional Education**

Another area not fully explored in the literature was the impact of healthy eating education on produce access. Several participants were aware of healthy eating promotional materials offered by the Alachua County Health Department. Clearly, participants felt that nutritional education played an integral role in increasing access to fresh produce. Several participants discussed the possibility of approaching the Guardian, a local newspaper, to run a weekly column on healthy eating practices. Other participants stressed the positive role churches and other community institutions can play in educating parishioners.

## **Government Intervention**

The literature reveals that a majority of government efforts to increase access to fresh produce in low-income communities are initiated at the federal level and are administered by a regional or county office (FNS USDA, 2007). Several focus group participants were aware of the SFMNP vouchers available to elderly residents. One woman explained that the vouchers were not valid year round and suggested extending the period when they can be redeemed. Because local government involvement in food planning is a relatively new concept, little research exists documenting the effects of local interventions aimed at improving produce access. Several participants suggested a number of ways local government departments could get more involved with this issue. Several participants suggested making the permitting process easier for local farmers trying to sell excess produce along roadways in Southeast Gainesville. One participant recalled witnessing a local farmer being issued a citation by a City of Gainesville code enforcement officer for selling greens in an empty parking lot. The City of Gainesville and Alachua County can increase access to fresh produce in the Southeast communities by opening their Eastside facilities for farmers' markets and CSAs and by leveraging their regulatory powers to facilitate direct sales between neighborhood residents and local farmers.

### **Key Questions: Evaluating Access to Fresh Produce**

The following is a checklist of questions and considerations in determining whether a community is experiencing difficulty accessing fresh produce. The checklist is intended for use by public planning agencies interested in food planning issues.

- What are the key household characteristics?

Research has shown that certain household characteristics correlate with increased food insecurity. Additionally, households possessing these characteristics have smaller food budgets and spend less on average on food than more affluent households (Nord et. al., 2006). These

characteristics include both demographic and spatial considerations that may point to larger problems of access to fresh produce.

- What are the food retail market and supermarket characteristics?

Suburban areas typically have three times as many supermarkets than lower-income communities, especially those located within urbanized areas (Cotterill and Franklin, 1995). Supermarkets serving low-income neighborhoods are typically smaller, have fewer checkout lines and parking spaces, and face strong competition from suburban stores. Assessments of the food retail market and supermarket characteristics reveal access problems stemming from a lack of full service food retailers and difficulty attracting high-quality supermarkets.

- What barriers exist preventing residents from fulfilling their fresh produce needs?

Barriers to fresh produce arise from various sources. When assessing a community's access to fresh produce, the political, economic, spatial, institutional, and psychological barriers must be explored through focus groups, surveys, and interviews. Soliciting public input from residents in the community is critical, otherwise, unforeseen barriers may go unaddressed and sabotage any efforts to increase produce access.

- What are the defining characteristics of the community and how can interventions be tailored to fit residents' needs?

Discussions with community residents should focus on defining key community characteristics that may influence intervention strategies. Finally, robust public input will ensure that a larger cross section of the community is represented in the decision-making process thus enhancing the likelihood that the intervention strategies will succeed.

### **Implications for Public Planning Agencies**

The findings from this research can aid the City of Gainesville Planning Department and the Alachua County Growth Management Office in drafting future land development regulations,

comprehensive plan revisions, and special area plans to address barriers to fresh produce in Southeast Gainesville. Additionally, a number of existing programs and government agencies are well-equipped to tackle these issues.

### **Comprehensive Plans**

The local comprehensive plans offer a blueprint for future development in the City of Gainesville and Alachua County. These plans express the priorities and character of the community through its goals, policies, and objectives, while simultaneously addressing the impacts of development. This study clearly demonstrates that access to fresh produce is a critical concern to Southeast residents. Addressing problems of food access in the comprehensive plans would send a message to the East Gainesville communities that City and County leaders consider this issue a key concern. Inclusion in the comprehensive plans would also encourage City and County departments to develop programs targeting increased access to fresh produce in order to meet these goals and objectives.

### **Land Development Regulations**

Land development regulations (LDR) implement the goals, policies, and objectives of the comprehensive plan. The LDRs provide an opportunity to codify efforts to increase access to fresh produce by addressing how the built environment impacts food access.

Development patterns in Southeast Gainesville have negatively impacted residents' access to fresh produce. Southeast residents have an abundance of convenience and beverage stores but only one full service supermarket. Zoning regulations must allow supermarkets to locate closer to residential areas to overcome transportation limitations for residents forced to walk or ride the bus to the market. Regulations can also facilitate the permitting process for developers interested in building supermarkets in underserved urban areas. Often development projects within the urbanized center are subject to additional regulations from overlay districts and special area

plans. The Northwest portion of Southeast Gainesville lies in the Traditional City Special Area Plan. This plan should include specific sections on supermarkets. These sections could reduce permitting costs, ease less critical design regulations, and parking space requirements on supermarkets wishing to locate within targeted areas while emphasizing regulations targeting better pedestrian and mass-transit access to the site. Additionally, the plan could encourage integrating food retail components like supermarkets and green grocers into mixed-use developments.

Improving produce access in distressed areas with little market demand requires different strategies. In some cases, incentives may not be enough to encourage supermarket developments especially in less affluent communities. Advocates from the Public Health Law Program are developing a new type of zoning ordinance that may have applications for Southeast Gainesville. “Deemed approved” ordinances, where businesses that have already been permitted must comply with new performance codes, are gaining traction in several U.S. cities (McCann, 2006). Building on this new approach, public health advocates Marice Ashe and Lisa Feldstein have developed a deemed approved zoning ordinance that requires convenience stores located in areas without a supermarket to meet nutrition-based performance standards by dedicating 10 percent of their displays to fruits and vegetables (McCann, 2006).

Sprawl and suburban development impacts access to fresh produce in low-income communities. Westward expansion in Gainesville and Alachua County has negatively impacted Southeast Gainesville by drawing supermarket chains and other food retail outlets away from the center of the city. Suburban sprawl has also negatively impacted farm-lands located in western Alachua County. Encouraging urban re-development through zoning, Community Redevelopment Agency Districts, and Enterprise Zones can increase access to fresh produce.

However, additional measures must be taken to preserve working farm-lands as well. Alachua County recently adopted a new Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) ordinance, aimed at encouraging land-owners and farmers in western Alachua County to preserve their lands for agriculture and open space. The City of Gainesville has yet to enact a similar ordinance. The City of Gainesville has little agricultural land, however, there are several desirable locations in Southeast Gainesville where, with the right mix of tax incentives, a receiving zone for TDR credits can be established thus preserving existing agricultural lands in Alachua County.

### **Other Government Resources**

#### **Neighborhood Planning Program**

The Neighborhood Planning Program (NPP) is a collaborative program between the City of Gainesville and its neighborhoods. Each year, the City Commission selects two neighborhoods to receive additional planning services and a \$15,000 grant for neighborhood improvements. The NPP staff meets with the selected neighborhoods to assess their strengths, weaknesses, and challenges facing the neighborhood. Through these meetings, staff and the neighborhood develop several improvement projects. Increasingly, several neighborhoods have used the NPP monies to develop community gardens on city-owned land. The NPP is currently working with several neighborhoods in Southeast Gainesville. For this reason, the NPP is uniquely positioned to address the food access issues in Southeast Gainesville. However, the scope and resources of the NPP must be expanded in order to meet this new challenge.

#### **Community Redevelopment Agency**

The Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) plays an active part in Southeast Gainesville. The Eastside CRA District is the largest redevelopment area in Gainesville. Additionally, the City Commission recently sponsored a study to expand the Eastside CRA District to include a large portion of the Southeast Hawthorne Road corridor. The strength of the

CRA district lies in its ability to generate tax revenue for infrastructure and beautification improvements within the district's boundaries. The CRA can take an active role in promoting access to fresh produce in Southeast Gainesville by focusing on attracting high-quality supermarkets to the Eastside CRA District. Additionally, the CRA could develop additional community gardens and provide incentives for small food and convenience stores to expand their offerings to include more fruits and vegetables. The CRA can more flexibly expend its tax revenues than other government institutions. This autonomy positions the CRA to take the lead in increasing access to fresh produce in Southeast Gainesville.

## CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSIONS

Based on the finding of this thesis, four categories of barriers exist that limit access to fresh produce in vulnerable communities. These barriers shape the political, economic, institutional, and spatial geographies of low-income neighborhoods. This thesis sought to explore how these barriers operate in a local context. Three neighborhoods in Southeast Gainesville were selected for further study based on an initial survey of selected household characteristics associated with food insecurity. A series of focus groups involving residents from the selected neighborhoods revealed that Southeast Gainesville neighborhoods face many of the barriers found in the literature in addition to several barriers not found in previous research.

Based on the findings, several direct marketing strategies have the potential to improve access to fresh produce in Southeast Gainesville. Farmers' markets, CSA arrangements, and community gardens offer a number of benefits to communities with limited access to full service supermarkets. These direct marketing arrangements are tailored to fit the needs of communities vulnerable to food insecurity by providing flexible locations for local residents to access fresh produce.

Public planning agencies possess a number of tools to address food access in the local community. Planners can implement strategies to improve food access through a combination of regulatory tools including local comprehensive plans, land development regulations, overlay districts, and innovative zoning and other governmental entities such as the Community Redevelopment Agency and neighborhood planning programs. Full access to nutritious food is a basic human right. However, without a combination of community action and government intervention this right will continue to go unrealized for many lower-income communities.

## **Limitations of the Research**

Several research limitations emerged during the course of this study, many of which stemmed from restrictions in time and money. Additional procedural limitations arose whose impact on the results are unclear. Finally, several limitations existed regarding the selection of the focus group participants and the focus group methodology itself.

Additional focus groups, surveys, and interviews would have been possible with additional time. New developments in East Gainesville, specifically the opening of the Waldo Road Walmart Superstore, occurred after the focus groups were completed. The new store may have affected responses given by focus group participants. Additional time would have provided an opportunity to conduct focus groups with local farmers to uncover the barriers they face bringing their products to market, particularly in this part of town.

Additional funding would enhance incentive packages used to recruit a larger sample of Southeast residents to participate in the focus groups. Funding constraints limited where the focus groups could be held to publicly owned facilities. Additionally, many of the focus group enhancements including, one-way mirrors, video recording, professional moderators, and dedicated meeting rooms were outside this study's budget. It is unclear if additional incentives would have greatly affected recruitment rates or if a more professionally run focus group would have generated different results. Still, the time and energy devoted to recruiting the participants and the moderator could have been avoided if more resources were available.

A number of limitations arose with regard to several aspects of the focus group. All of the focus group participants were African American. However, the moderator, researcher, and facilitator were Caucasian. It is unclear if the race of the moderator significantly impacted the responses given by the focus group participants. Other limitations included the use of audio recording. During the research-planning phase, several experts cautioned against using audio

recording in the focus groups for fear it would influence the truthfulness of the responses. Again, it is unclear whether the presence of the recording device influenced respondents' answers. Professional focus group firms typically use hidden recording devices in order to minimize the discomfort some participants may feel about being recorded. Finally, focus group attendance varied from group-to-group. Attendance in Focus Group B and Focus Group C was significantly lower than Focus Group A. Fewer individuals in the final two groups affected the group dynamic. However, the smaller groups allowed several issues to be discussed in greater detail and gave participants a chance to give full answers.

As was mentioned in a previous section, funding constraints may have impacted participant recruitment. Recruiting participants at neighborhood association meetings likely biased the results from this study. Clearly, individuals participating in a neighborhood association exhibit some degree of self-selection. Individuals participating in a neighborhood association are likely to be homeowners interested in the promotion and well being of their community. Involvement in a neighborhood association may have influenced the focus group responses. Finally, qualitative data drawn from a focus group methodology should be paired with current socio-demographic data to determine its validity. In this context, the quality and usefulness of the focus group data was impaired by outdated and nonexistent socio-demographic data. A significant portion of this data was drawn from the 2000 United States Census. While the 2010 Census data may not show significant changes from the previous Census, the age of the 2000 Census data is potentially a research limitation if significant socio-demographic changes have occurred between the two Censuses. Additionally, many of the barriers to fresh produce have no statistical equivalent and many of the indicators of food security and population health are reported at the County level making it impossible to apply health statistics to specific areas.

## **Recommendations for Future Research**

Our study results can be enhanced and expanded in three critical ways. First, our study focused almost exclusively on low-income neighborhoods and the Southeast Gainesville community. However, as the literature revealed, many of the same barriers impacting access to fresh produce in low-income communities also impact small farmers. Future research should focus on revealing the barriers faced by small farmers. Combining these two perspectives will reveal a more comprehensive understanding of why low-income neighborhoods suffer from reduced access to fresh produce.

Second, our study focused entirely on Southeast Gainesville. However, portions of Northeast Gainesville may also experience barriers to fresh produce. Additional research should include areas in Northeast Gainesville whose household characteristics correspond with those households shown in the literature to have higher rates of food insecurity. Demographically, Northeast and Southeast Gainesville are very similar. Additionally, Northeast Gainesville lacks a full service supermarket. Therefore, it is likely that Northeast Gainesville experiences many of the same problems accessing fresh produce that the Southeast faces.

Finally, holding separate focus groups with residents from other quadrants in Gainesville can enhance our study by gathering additional data to contrast with responses given by Southeast residents. Several focus group participants believed an ideological divide existed between East Gainesville and West Gainesville. Furthermore, focus group data indicates that negative perceptions of Southeast Gainesville present a major barrier to development. Expanding this research to include residents from West Gainesville could confirm or refute the focus group findings and may reveal how psychology plays a role in determining development patterns.

Limited access to fresh produce is a critical public health issue that disproportionately affects low-income households. In light of increasing food costs due to energy shortages, future

planning research should focus on strategies to develop the capacity of local communities to produce enough food for its residents.

APPENDIX A  
FOCUS GROUP SCRIPT

Hello, my name is Bob Cohen. Thank you all for coming today, your presence here is a testament to your commitment to your community and the issues it faces. Today we are all here to talk about food. More specifically, the fresh produce found in the supermarkets, convenience stores, and other retail business that sell food in SE Gainesville. We are here to get your opinion, as a group, about how you feel about the choices offered by SE stores. Think about why and how the fresh produce choices are what they are in your community. And finally, what can be done to bring fresher healthier fruits and vegetables into this community. Please answer honestly, your responses will remain anonymous and none of your names will be used in the study report. The discussion group will be audio taped so we can make sure everyone's opinions get recorded accurately. The audio tapes will be destroyed after the study is complete. Please take a moment to fill out the short questionnaire and then we can begin.

Fresh produce and supermarkets in SE Gainesville:

What are the main things you look for when buying fresh produce?

- Freshness
- Taste
- Variety
- Packaging
- Quantity
- Price
- Visual appeal

What are your general impressions of the fresh produce found in SE supermarkets and smaller stores?

If Bad:

What specifically needs improvement?

- Freshness
- Taste
- Variety
- Packaging
- Quantity
- Price
- Visual appeal

Are healthier food options promoted in the food stores?

If Bad:

- Prominent displays marketing fresh produce
- Are fresh produce and healthy choices regular sale items?
- Is USDA nutritional information displayed?
- Any other examples?

Do you think if some of the things we've talked about so far improved, you or your neighbors would buy and eat more fresh produce?

If Yes:

Why?

## The Whys of SE options

If you were looking to purchase the best, freshest, healthiest produce in town, what part (NW, SW, SE, NE) of Gainesville would you shop in?

If not SE:

Lets talk about this a little more, what are some of the reasons SE Gainesville isn't at the top of this list?

- Fewer Supermarkets
- Accessibility of markets (walk, bus, etc.)
- Lower prices elsewhere

If Bad:

Why do you think SE Gainesville has so few supermarkets?

Why do you think prices for fresh produce are higher at SE markets compared to other areas of town?

Can food stores in the SE be reached by walking or by bus?

If yes: Is it safe and convenient?

What about the government? Do you feel like access to fresh fruits and vegetables is an important issue for the City and County Commissions?

If no:

Why do you think this is?

What about perception? Do you think other food stores have a negative perception of SE Gainesville?

If yes:

Do you think this impacts where they locate their stores?

Solutions:

OK, we've talked a little about the current food situation in the SE and we've talked a little about how it got there. Now I'd like us to talk about what could be done to improve the situation.

I'm going to open it up and let you brainstorm a little and ask what should be done to increase the availability of fresh produce and healthier choices to SE Gainesville's neighborhoods?

General guiding questions if discussion stalls:

Do you want new supermarkets?

Do you want the existing stores to improve their selection and quality?

What about some other options like a farmer's market in SE Gainesville?

There is a relatively new type of set-up that's starting to pop up around the country. We even have a few in Gainesville. They're called Community Supported Agriculture farms or CSAs. The basic set-up goes like this: On one side you've got your local farm. On the other you've got people like you who want fresher produce. Generally you pay a set amount either each week or at the first of the year. In exchange, the farm delivers a bundle of produce pulled fresh from the ground. In this set-up both sides share the benefits and the risks. So your bundle might change in size from week to week, sometimes more sometimes less depending on how big the harvest is that week. Farms could deliver their bundles directly to a neighborhood center like a church or other meeting place.

That's the general idea. Based on your experiences do you think you or your neighbors would be interested in something like this?

If yes or no:

Can you foresee any problems?

Are there any issues you'd like to talk about that we've haven't touched on today?

Thank you for your participation. You've been a great group. Once the study is complete, Andrew will return to your neighborhood meeting and give you a report of his findings. If you think of anything else you'd like to add to this discussion, please contact Andrew. Also, please remember to pick up your gift certificate before you leave.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

My interest in food access is closely tied with my relationship with food and my twin passions for cooking and vegetarianism. My educational background in British History is worlds away from my current academic career. However, my study of history impressed upon me the interconnectedness of culture, economics, and politics and helped me view food access with the critical eye of the historian.