2014
Berea Community Food System Assessment
A Project of Berea LIFE Locally Integrated Food Economy
Introduction

In October of 2011, Berea Mayor Steven Connelly, with the support of the Berea City Council, convened a public meeting “with the goal of developing a consensus on the best ways to create more jobs, build a bigger economy, and exploit opportunities offered by the global economy while maximizing the power of local ownership and spending.” This meeting initiated a six-month process known as the Berea Economic Advancement Team (BEAT), which included three public meetings and a score of separate meetings of individual work teams evaluating particular strategies and action plans.

The “local food” work team adopted the name of BEAT LIFE (Locally Integrated Food Economy) and set to work developing the local food component of this strategic plan. The group came up with a clear vision but also realized that to achieve that vision, we needed to know the current state of Berea’s local economy – thus launching this community food system assessment (CFSA).

This CFSA is just one milestone on the road to realizing the opportunities that a more localized food economy can bring to Berea. Maybe the most important thing about this CFSA is not the “data” it produced but the process that built upon existing efforts within the community and expanded the conversation – a process that has already paid off, such as through the revitalization of the farmers market and the creation of the new Berea Urban farm.

We have not achieved our vision yet, but Berea is getting there.

Martin Richards
BEAT LIFE Chair
Mission Statement

The mission of Berea LIFE was to identify the opportunities and challenges to localizing Berea's food system through conducting a Community Food System Assessment. By assessing the current state of Berea's food system, the team aimed to develop achievable recommendations to promote economic development, health, and environmental sustainability.

Process

1. Held community meetings to discuss vision and goals
2. Divided into teams: Consumption, Production, and Retail
3. Developed surveys and protocol
4. Conducted data collection and analysis
5. Held meetings with community members and key stakeholders to draft recommendations.
6. Compiled final report and presented findings and recommendations to city leaders

About Berea

Berea is a small city in south-central Kentucky, situated on the border between the Bluegrass region and the mountains of Appalachia. It is known as the folk arts capital of Kentucky, with a vibrant artisan culture. Berea is also home to Berea College, and the town has a long tradition of diversity, social justice, environmental responsibility, and community service.

Population in 2010: 13,561  Below poverty level: 25.9%

US Census | City of Berea
The following is a summary of key findings of the assessment. For a full description of the results and tabulated responses to all survey questions, see the full results in the Appendix (available for download).

### Berea Households

The following data summarize the results of 259 surveys that the Berea LIFE team conducted between April and July of 2013. The research team knocked on the door of every third house on nearly every street within the Berea city limits and explained the project to the residents. If the resident indicated that they would fill out the survey, the Berea LIFE team returned the following day to collect the survey. For every survey that was successfully delivered to a home, more than half were filled out and returned to the research team.

#### Where do Berea residents "often" or "always" buy food?

Berea residents buy most of their food in Berea, but a considerable amount buy food in other areas, presumably Richmond. This represents a source of economic leakage from Berea.

#### What kinds of food would residents like to see in Berea?

The majority of residents would like to see more locally grown food and fresh fruits and vegetables in Berea. Most residents would like to see fewer or the same amount of fast food restaurants.

#### Does price prevent residents from buying foods at the farmer’s market?

Higher prices—real or perceived—prevent about a third of residents from buying food at the farmer’s market. A quarter of respondents had no opinion, suggesting that they had other reasons for not visiting the farmers market.

#### What other factors are important to residents when purchasing food?

In addition to price, nutrition and ease of preparation are both very important to Berea residents when making food purchasing decisions.
Residents identified price as the main problem in Berea’s food system, followed by availability and freshness of produce.

Residents indicated some level of interest in all of the listed programs, with the most interest in Farm to School programs and increased access to local food.

Comments from Berea Residents

“I enjoy the farmer’s market. I love the local food that it provides when I am able to go. Due to my work schedule when I can’t go I rely on driving to Richmond Kroger to buy organic and fresher items not available at Walmart.”

“We buy most of our food...in Richmond. Would like to buy more at the farmer’s market but it is too expensive for us.”

“It is so expensive to eat healthy. My family and I simply can’t afford it. This is so sad!”

“I LOVE the Berea farmers market and the CSA’s.”

“Options are very limited at Walmart.”

“Would be more interested in locally grown produce. Not sure when or where about local farm markets.”

“The ease, price and availability of processed food will continue to contribute to the health (or lack thereof) of the community.”

“If I had not searched online I wouldn’t have known there was a Farmers Market here.”

“Time and expense are a problem. Lack of time and convenience is a big problem.”
Food Insecurity in Berea

The household surveys completed by 259 Berea residents included several questions related to food security status. The term “food security” refers to the state of having reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food.

### RESULTS SUMMARY

#### How many residents experienced a form of food insecurity in the past year?

- We couldn’t eat fresh fruits and vegetables, because we couldn’t afford that: 35%
- We couldn’t eat a balanced meal, because we couldn’t afford that: 28%
- We skipped meals to keep within our food budget: 18%
- We relied on only a few kinds of low-cost foods because we were running out of money to buy food: 23%
- We worried whether our food would run out before we got money to buy more: 30%

Over half of residents reported that they “sometimes” or “often” experienced a form of food insecurity within the past year.

#### How many residents have received food assistance in the past year?

- SNAP: 20%
- Free and reduced school lunch programs: 15%
- Food Bank: 10%
- WIC: 5%

About a third of residents reported receiving some form of food assistance in the past year.

### Comments from Berea Residents

“Love fresh fruits and veggies. I love to be able to provide nutritional food for my children. I just wish they were more affordable.”

“Increasing food cost from all sources is disturbing to we who live on a fixed income.”

“I have a car, but many elder people don’t – so transportation is important. Also have diet restrictions and can’t afford to buy everything fresh. So I’m constantly missing meals. If possible – set up a system to deliver fresh foods for those without transportation. Love the community garden and work for free food. I can’t because I’m disabled – but great idea.”

“Educated single mom, unemployed, going through divorce, post domestic violence, on food stamps. Hard times. Wish I ate better, but have to say that I get cheap and fast food, which is not healthy. [It’s] quick and easy to prepare.”
Farmers

The following data are based on the results of 41 surveys and one focus group that the Berea LIFE team conducted between April and July of 2013. Surveys were conducted via SurveyMonkey or in-person. Farmers who grow or sell within Berea were eligible to participate. Although the research team conducted outreach throughout the county, respondents were primarily those farmers affiliated with the Berea Farmers Market or Berea LIFE.

Focus Groups

Resources that the Farmers Market Provides to Berea

"Community." "Access to healthy foods is obvious, right?"

“The base of knowledge from farmers that have a lot of experience. Gardeners can come and ask about problems that they have. There is a base of wisdom at the market. “

Challenges and Needs of Local Farmers

“I don’t think that enough people are aware that they can get as much food locally as they can. Because we get a very limited amount of people that come to the market compared to how many people live in Berea.”

“I think technical assistance and good examples of financially viable business models for small scale farmers, because that seems to be...one of the biggest missing links.”

“I think there is a lot of talent in the community that has more experience in doing these kinds of things [like marketing] than the actual farmers in the market. So I think that the more help we can pull in from the outside to kind of help give us some direction would really be beneficial.”

“It seems like it has always been a struggle to get people to participate... and I think it’s imperative to have some community buy-in to kind of spread that work load out. Because nobody has time to do it all.”

What do Berea farmers produce?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product</th>
<th>% of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goats</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dairy</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beef</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pork</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honey</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicken</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herbs</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eggs</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vegetables</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Berea farmers produce a wide variety of foods. Those who selected “other” listed foods such as nuts, grains, baked goods, and mushrooms.

How far do farmers travel to promote or sell farm products?

Although many Berea farmers sell their products locally, many travel to other areas to promote and sell.
Backyard Gardeners

The following data are from approximately 111 surveys that the Berea LIFE team conducted between April and June 2012. Surveys were conducted via SurveyMonkey or in-person using snowball sampling methods. Survey respondents lived within the Berea city limits or nearby surrounding areas.

The majority of the backyard gardeners in Berea learned how to garden from family or friends. About half also relied on books or the internet for gardening information.

Berea gardeners reported that they grow primarily vegetables, herbs, fruits, and berries.

Comments from Gardeners

"I have just moved to Berea and am planting my first garden. I hope it will provide some inexpensive, healthy food to supplement my diet. I find it hard to come by healthy, affordable food here."

"I've really benefited from all the local "buzz" and seed/plant distribution."

"My kids were just begging today to plant a garden. I told them I would love to, but I don't know how. And no space to do it in. Plus no money for supplies. We'd love it though."

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Only about one third of backyard gardeners said that they had no barrier to growing food. Other gardeners identified access to land, knowledge, supplies, and regulations. Common barriers indicated by those who selected “other” were the financial cost and time.
Retail Outlets

The following data are based on the results of surveys and interviews conducted with eight retail establishments in Berea between June and August of 2013. Retail outlets were invited to participate in the surveys and interviews if they were identified to have the capacity to sell local food items. It was estimated that there are approximately 25 such establishments in Berea, and therefore about a third participated in this study. Seven of the eight participants indicated that they already purchase local food to some extent.

Most businesses believed that local food was very important to their business.

Interviews

Retail establishments consistently indicated an interest in selling or serving more local food.

Key challenges that retailers identified include:

- Lack of consistent, guaranteed delivery time of local food.
- Lack of consistent, guaranteed quantity of local food.
- Cost: although retailers did not believe that local food is necessarily more expensive, they indicated that if they had to buy food at the farmers market they would not get a wholesale price as they would from a distributor.
- Communication and coordination between farmers and retailers. Retailers expressed the need for farmers to understand retail business and marketing.

"Restaurant taxes are too high. The local government makes a fortune off of us and they don't share it. Local restaurants are struggling."

"Serving local food supports local farmers, cuts down on the use of fossil fuels, and provides our customers with a fresher, healthier product. It's just better for everyone."

"I would think the best reason to buy local is for quality. Any time you ship a product, you're losing quality. If you buy from someone local, you know what you're getting. You know the person who grew the food, and they depend on their reputation to ensure that you will keep buying from them."

Businesses identified several barriers to purchasing local food, discussed in more detail at left.

Businesses purchase a variety of local foods.
RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations were developed based on data from community surveys, focus groups, and statewide and national best practices. The Berea LIFE Steering Committee drafted the recommendations, and members of Berea LIFE edited and approved these recommendations.

Increase accessibility of local food for all residents.

- Increase outreach and publicity for farmers’ market.
- Incentivize and encourage use of farmers’ market. For example:
  - Develop a market coupon or voucher program
  - Accept and promote EBT usage at the farmers’ market
  - Include more local food in summer feeding program(s)
- Promote, incentivize, and provide support for Farm to School.
- Work with retailers and local branches of chain stores to promote, sell, and incentivize more local foods, fruits and vegetables
- Assess the feasibility of providing a diversity of value-added products at Farmers Market

Encourage sale of local food at restaurants and retailers.

- Increase outreach and publicity for farmers’ market. Encourage sale of local food at local restaurants and retailers. For example:
  - Instate tax exemption or incentive for selling local food, such as a local version of the Kentucky Restaurant Rewards Program
- Institute a way to connect farmers and institutions. For example:
  - Hire a local or regional Farm-to-Table coordinator
Provide community support for farmers.

- Incorporate local food in Berea Tourism.
- Secure a permanent, accessible winter location for the Farmers Market.
- Hire a local or regional Farm-to-Table coordinator.
- Create a Food Policy Advisory Council for the City of Berea.
- Increase collaboration between local food-related businesses, governmental departments, local non-profits and agencies, and Berea College to increase access to resources for farmers. For example:
  - Connect farms to financial training, marketing assistance, and marketability testing
  - Increase community awareness of local food options, issues, and nutrition.

Incorporate local food into planning and policies.

- Seek formal recognition by the Berea City Council that food and farming are legitimate economic development strategies, and include these strategies in economic development initiatives.
- Adopt a formula business ordinance to support the unique character of Berea and encourage a local food economy.
- Ensure that zoning and future land use maps support agriculture as economic development. For example:
  - Ensure that gardens and hoop houses are not limited by city ordinances
  - Develop an agriculture variance for areas not zoned as agriculture
  - Explore the feasibility of a soil severance tax to preserve topsoil

Early Successes

As a result of this assessment process and the collaboration it has fostered, community members have already used these recommendations and the findings of the assessment to obtain grant funding and guide projects related to food in Berea. These have included initiatives to increase outreach to the farmers market and promote access to local food for all residents of the Berea area.
Conclusion and Next Steps
Conducting a Community Food System Assessment in Berea is a great step toward localizing our food economy. We hope that the community will institute as many of the recommendations as possible, use the primary data to support grant applications, and continue investigating topics related to food in our region.

We have found that the process of conducting this assessment has been as valuable as the final product. Through the collaborations and partnerships that this process has developed, members of the community have already led initiatives to increase outreach to the farmers market and promote access to local food for all residents of the Berea area.

Members of this project are currently involved in statewide food policy networks, and the Berea Food System Assessment is being used to model similar projects in other communities.

For more information
The complete report and more information about Berea LiFE can be found at: bereaLiFE.wordpress.com

For questions about the assessment or Berea LiFE, contact Martin Richards at martin@cfaky.org.

For questions related to data analysis, contact Hilary Dolstad at hdolstad@gmail.com.

Acknowledgements

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