**Q: How would you describe the different connection strengths between retail use and the five retail types?**

**Interview** 19:05

So how do you sort of think about or have you experienced, you know, maybe the connection strengths of local restaurants versus chain restaurants, do people go to one more than the other about even?

**Participant 113** 19:18

Well, I think there are some strong local restaurants that have been able to, you know, penetrate the, I would say generally, I would think of Flint as being dominated by mostly chain restaurants. You know, when I think of where people, for example, would go out for a nice meal to celebrate something, most of that is a chain restaurant landscape. There are very few places that I think that have maybe come in the last Few years that maybe people would say were a nice occasion, but for the most part, there's a strong, you know, also pre pandemic times, of course, you know, the after church kind of out, go going out would be probably mostly chain restaurants or after, you know, after high school graduation or something like that I think a lot of that is chain.

**Participant 113** 20:38

Now, the local restaurants I think that have been able to hang in and hang on in Flint, they have a long history, so they have sort of a following. They've been able to, you know, to borrow a phrase from Flint, maintain through the struggle. And that I think is, you know, it's limited, but the ones I can think of off the top of my head, they're pretty strong, but I also think there's a strong desire to have convenience factors in the chain restaurant field as well. So, you know, those are your national players, your more convenience chain restaurants.

**Participant 113** 21:32

So in the landscape of chain restaurants, right, there's like the sit down, there's like- so when I was talking about after an occasion, I would say like, Red Lobster to, you know, olive garden to, you know, Cracker Barrel to, you know, any of those kinds of places where you sit where you would go with your family, and the other side of the chain landscape, there's like, quick dinner, you know, but even that's dominated and even I think, to make it even more fine grain, there's some local chains even within that. So in Michigan, there's a Leo's Coney Island is like a chain that is in Flint, or at least in Flint Township. And then there's Halo burger, which is a chain convenience, fast food, but that comes from Flint.

**Participant 113** 22:23

So there's a strong like, maybe local identity for that and local local appreciation for that in a different way. And then there are events, some small ethnic chain restaurants as well. For example, there is a group of Mexican restaurants that I think they they're usually like Los Tres Amigos or Los Quatro Amigos or something like that. And there's a bunch in the area, or for a chain, even in that there's a nuance of more than one location, but I would consider it a local restaurant. For example, there's a group of restaurants called Lucky's Steak Houses.

**Participant 113** 23:11

Those are really regional, but I you know, my impression of them is that, you know, like, they may be headquartered in Lapeer. So they're not, you know, they're not national on a scale. They're not really even outside of maybe three or four counties, but they have a real local restaurant feel. But there's more than one of them. So I debate like, is that a chain? It's not a chain, like Applebee's is a chain but yeah, so. And then some of that's subjective, too, right? What's, what's fancy, but I'm even thinking of like, when my parents were alive, like, what would be the places that we would go to?

**Participant 113** 23:56

And that we would enjoy? You don't really, and I don't know, if people are doing this where they're like naming restaurants. So I don't know. I don't know if that's kind of where you want to go. But like, the most local restaurants I can think of are, like Luigi's Pizza, like that's a place that is very local. I think they might have had a, they might have added a location in a suburb, but they're definitely like, they're definitely identified with the city of Flint, and they definitely have a neighborhood, you know, that they're part of. And that's a place that my family would, you know, that was like a big treat when we were kids to be able to go out there. And it's still thriving. As far as I know. I have to always just again, I'm like pandemic times? But I haven't heard anything bad about it, so I hope everything's good. And then yeah, I think that's probably a pretty good idea. So I think chain restaurants have just been able to be really successful at, you know, penetrating the first ring suburb areas around where the, where the mall is, and where, like the shopping centers and stuff like that. And so I think that that's probably pretty accurate.

**Interviewer** 25:31

Yeah, definitely. No, that's super helpful. And it's maybe something we should differentiate because I think for the purpose, we're doing some sort of a project related to this, but a little bit external, where the gating connections between local versus like chain or like national ownership and like, effects and health effects of that.

**Participant 113** 25:56

Yeah, there's also- I would say, there's a strong like, even just beyond like the chain restaurant, like there's a strong takeout kind of a thing in Flint. And then there's a, there's a nuance that I thought of, after you kind of laid out the sectors and the model and the way you're thinking about it. And I don't think this is unique to Flint, but there's definitely a strong, maybe underappreciated, or under-recognized informal economy around food. Let me be specific about that.

**Participant 113** 26:30

Like, it's the, it's the place on the corner that always has barbecue going and I'm thinking of, there's a, there's a guy at the corner of Saginaw Street, North Saginaw, and I want to say, Stuart, that is, like, there's always barbecue there. You know, I don't I actually don't know about in freezing cold weather. But generally, I will say, like, from May to November, there's barbecue going on. Now, I've never asked if there's a license or a, or if that's part of the formal or informal economy. But I think there's a lot that happens, there's like, you know, play dinners and catering that happens on the weekends. And it's you know, I don't know, to what extent that's mapped in this. But that would be, there's a part of me that's like that would be a fascinating research project to really understand that.

**Participant 113** 27:41

And then and then in addition to that, I think, you know, in terms of somewhere between somewhere between emergency and you know, there's a lot of places where- so emergency would include congregate meals, right, like church, soup kitchen or something like that. I think there's a real factor for that in a lot of places in the community. And I was just talking with someone on Friday, about how her church in Flint is continuing to do what they're doing. And I know that the church life included a lot of meals.

**Participant 113** 28:27

And I think I wonder sometimes like how the pandemic like she described to me just how they handled, having communion being made available for congregations and the ways in which that the church had packaged everything and made it kind of, you know, contactless, contactless communion. And that was, it was amazing to me, because I think of that. I know, I've visited that church, when there have been meals or other things, you know, for a funeral service, or for a celebration and meals at the through the church was a big part of it. So there's a little bit of like, that informal or maybe less visible piece as well.

**Interviewer** 29:19

Yeah, yeah. No, that's definitely super interesting. And yeah, and I don't think it is necessarily well represented. It's funny that you brought up the barbecue thing, because we actually had someone else bring that up. And we were sort of scoping this project of like, is how we're separating this out, like good for Flint and they're like, you might want to include like barbecue stands. I'm like, I love that this is something you brought up, but is it that significant of a sector that we should force everyone to talk about?

**Participant 113** 29:51

Yeah, I don't know either. I just- when I started thinking about that. I sort of thought like, Oh, and there's this whole- the other thing I think that's important is I had a conversation with a woman who was really interested in advancing entrepreneurship for the African American community. And she mentioned that the Flint farmers market has, you know, they have there's a, there's kitchens there that can be used for, for businesses can rent by the hour. She said, you know, it's really good. But she's like, I have, like, there's not enough capacity.

**Participant 113** 30:25

She's like, I'm talking to people who want to start, like, they're ready to start food businesses, and they just don't have anywhere to go. They're- and the time to get in those spaces, it's just, it's so busy. And she said, and we have people who, you know, she's like, I want to see them do it in the light of day, I don't want them to have to do it on Saturdays, or, you know, when the health department isn't looking. She's like, they're ready to be businesses, businesses. This would have been probably, well, two years ago now. And so I started in my role and started just asking some questions like, so, you know, how are we- how are people graduating out of the Flint food workspace? How? How are we thinking about where we have more demand than we have capacity? And it was, you know, there really weren't, there really weren't answers.

**Participant 113** 31:28

But I was interested in trying to help understand the factors, you know, how does a business graduate out of that space? And how did they make succession in their plan, help other people to get access as well. But, you know, I think that might be another role for those church kitchens or other, you know, other commercial spaces, that they may be getting inquiries, and not really know, what their liability is, or how they can engage with that either. And interestingly enough too, I was really naive about how much convenience stores had ready to eat hot food. You know, I always thought of it as like, a quick, you know, when I would do so when we were working on a grant in 2017, 2018, around these convenience stores, you know, we would go through with a quick inventory sheet and look at what kind of protein was available.

**Participant 113** 32:39

And, you know, how did it show up? And the convenience store owners are small, like they were small grocers really, were interested in adding capacity. So they could have things like frozen meats and frozen proteins. But other than that, it would be, you know, cans of tuna, or vienna sausage, or, you know, maybe a can of beans, but you couldn't count on seeing that in every store. And they were really like, we would like to have more, we would like to have more available, we want to have people be able to stop here and put a meal together. Because the owners knew the limitations of that. But we worked with 10, small corner stores, I would say probably four of the 10. And they were in different parts of the city, had some sort of hot, ready to eat food, or we're creating that as an opportunity. And I just was like, I never thought about that.

**Participant 113** 33:50

And in terms of- should I just keep talking?

**Interviewer** 33:55

Yeah, I was gonna say if we want to sort of talk about maybe contextualizing it in the sense of like convenience stores and grocery stores and farmers markets and maybe a connection strength. It's like, you know, this might be a fairly high connection that people frequent and use convenience stores.

**Participant 113** 34:15

Yeah, I mean, and I think it really varies based on, you know, how reliable your individual transportation is, and to what extent you feel comfortable or well served by mass transit. I think that's definitely intervening in that and there are some independent grocers now in the city. For example, on Davidson road, there was a Kroger that's been taken over by an independent grocer, and that grocery store. You know, I think it serves it really, for when it was closed, it was a huge problem for people who live close to there. Now.

**Participant 113** 35:00

When I, when I think it became, you know, it revived as an asset. But there was a period of time where it just seemed like every time we turned- right around the same time that everything was happening with the water crisis, when grocery stores on the near periphery were closing. And inside the city, there were, there were really, really fewer and fewer options. And I think that's when it became problematic. So or that, sorry, it didn't become problematic, that's when it became more problematic. It's always been, it's always been problematic. But in terms of the grocery stores, they're really on the periphery of the city of the community. And, um, you know, I think they're, I think they're well, well utilized.

**Participant 113** 35:53

You know, they're very popular. And yet, I think they're still suffering from, you know, some of the preconceived ideas about who the shoppers are, and who, who's using it. And whether or not what they have there is of good quality or not. And, honestly, from a point in time of today, it's hard for me to give input on whether the food in those places is of high quality, because I just don't have the ability to gauge that. But yeah, I think that's I think that's a big deal. And convenience stores, really, in some cases, really are trying to fill the gap. But I also would add, oh, no, I would add pharmacies to that list of convenience stores. Depending on where you are, you know, a rite aid or a Walgreens might be kind of a convenience store, because they'll carry a small amount of ready to eat convenience foods.

**Participant 113** 37:02

And, and that's something but you would think that convenience stores are laid out across the community kind of evenly, but it really is, that's not the case, they're very, sometimes you'll end up with a cluster of them that are kind of relatively close together. And even those store owners would acknowledge that most of their most of their sales come from either takeout alcohol, whether that's, I mean, they don't all sell liquor, but beer and wine or, you know, sweetened, carbonated beverages pop and, or, you know, snack foods, convenient foods. And when I was working with convenience stores, one of the things that they mentioned was that they, they had a desire to stock more foods that can make a complete meal, but they found it very difficult to get the quantities that they needed to get the price point that they desired, and to get the, you know, to have capacity to do that. So the grant that we had was related to the water crisis. And the desire was to add, you know, freezer space into stores, or to add cooler space, so that those stores could have more, more fresh food.

**Participant 113** 38:38

But honestly, you know, and I will say most of the stores that I went to the owners were very engaged and interested. But there were a couple that were just like, you know, they didn't seem like they really cared whether or not someone walking in the store would have a good experience. And I went, I took one of my colleagues around who works for the MSU product center, and she'd worked in retail, in the sorry, in the retail sector, in small stores and grocery stores in the trade area for years. And I said, you know, this is this is a, that we're going to show you a lot of diversity in the store. And of the 10 or so stores that we had I said the one thing that I will say is that nine out of these 10 or the owner is very engaged and very committed to having a positive experience for their customer and giving them what they want.

**Participant 113** 39:40

So at least in one store that I know we got to know the store owner pretty well. It was a very, very small store, but he would keep on hand, you know, he would keep cans of Formula on hand behind the counter. And he knew his customers when they came in, he would greet them by name and say- and he would keep the price pretty close to the, you know, he would keep the retail price in his store pretty close to his cost for those items. He added, you know, he wanted to have more things. In one case, the store was just not well maintained, it was, you know, evident that there was just a lack of attention, you know, and, and the staff I don't think really displayed a high degree of caring about customers. One time I walked in there, just to do, you know, to complete part of the grant to check in with them and the person behind the counter was smoking. Yeah, and, and a customer came in smoking as well.

**Participant 113** 39:42

And I was just like, it's you know, it's 2017. We haven't been smoking in stores or bars or restaurants for a while, and I just thought nobody's really got their eye on this. And so but that was very much an outlier among stores that I was working with. You know, store owners were trying to make things better. We also learned a lot, the traffic in convenience stores picks up, you know, before between 1030 and noon, then between, you know, between five and between five and seven. And that has to do with two things. One, obviously, people getting lunch, or dinner, and stopping after work or on their lunch break. And then also you know, those are the cutoffs for Michigan lottery daily, three and daily, four numbers. So if they're, and most of them were lottery retailers, if they were, if they were doing lottery, they would have a high surge of- so we, as people who were visiting that space learned that there were good times and good times to get the attention of the store owner and maybe more challenging times to get the attention of store owner.

**Participant 113** 42:06

In those cases, in the convenience store, we were able to add an open refrigerated case. And that was, that was an interest because the store owner wanted to have sort of like- his idea was I'll stock salads. We were also able to make a connection with a small farmer who would bring fresh produce and have it in that cooler for the public. But I think that maybe the connection was still a little bit, it's still a little bit strained, even for the farmer. Because, you know, she was stocking the cooler herself. And she, you know, she was making sure that that was in good order. And, and that's a big deal for these small stores to have someone who's going to help them maintain their stock.

**Participant 113** 43:05

And, you know, having distributors that will do that is a huge boon to those small stores. So I think that that is I don't know where that fits in this because it's not really it's not really the public facing story of this. But in terms of, you know, those convenience stores, I think that's really important. The other thing that my colleague recommended that I look carefully at when I go into is to just kind of get a gauge on stores, she's like, take a look at some of the products and see if they're in the date range of acceptable, and she's like, and especially look at anything that's for babies, she's like, a good store owner will keep their eye on whether something's expired or not expired. And it was really interesting to see the store through her eyes.

**Participant 113** 44:00

Because she just, she just had an instinct because of being trained to look at stores in that way. But yeah, lots of traffic, at least in the convenience stores that we were trying to work with. They wanted to have, again, more meat, they wanted to be able to carry, you know, more fresh vegetables. Our engagement with at least one of them encouraged them to have a large piece of refrigeration equipment repaired, so it would be serviceable again. And that was positive. In terms of grocery stores, you know, again, the independent grocers, I think I see that they're working really hard to make sure that they have what the customer or consumer will want for the chains. Sometimes I think that they allow their understanding of the story to be shaped purely by its zip code or process. activity to the city limits.

**Participant 113** 45:02

So that's challenging for me. So there's a Kroger on Corona road is right outside the city limits on the west side. And that's where it was close to my parents home when I was growing up. So that's a story that I would say I'm pretty familiar with. And when I've gone back recently, they have more visible security measures. I'm more monitoring people while they're shopping, which I, you know, I don't know, all the incidents that happen. I've had people say, like, oh, that's not the pro-, like the people that live there now, that's not where I shop for my produce, or this or that or the other. And that, you know, that helps me to understand what their experience is as well.

**Interviewer** 46:00

Yeah, it's something that came up in focus groups with Flint residents is that a determinant where they shopped was, you know, not only like, where they felt comfortable and safe, but like, where they potentially experienced, like sexual harassment or racial profiling was like, I mean, obviously a huge impact, but it is something that that came up that was like, determinants of like, what grocery stores they went to, and stuff like that.

**Participant 113** 46:25

Yeah, yeah. And I would say, yes, and I think just in general perception of the quality, and, and, and the real quality, and also the real availability of what was the what were the desired foods and desired availability. And in terms of the farmers market, so the Flint area, obviously, the Flint farmers market is really big. And when they moved to their new location, the focus for a lot of it is on the businesses on the inside that serve ready to eat food. So in some cases, the farmers market is sort of like a food court of local restaurants, it really is, it really is that local restaurant, sort of, it's a good starting point for those restaurants or it's, or it's a place where, and there are some there are some vendors that are at the farmers market who've had a presence at the either location for many years.

**Participant 113** 47:33

So there's a Beirut restaurant that has been with the farmers market for years. And some of the other ones that off the top of my head, I'm trying to think of who have been kind of the staples. The barbecue place at the market whose name escapes me, and I'm kind of kicking myself, they had a truck before they they ended up with an inside stall and [inaudible] in terms of creating an incubation space for those food businesses, it's really amazing, the farmers market amazing in terms of how many people are going on a Saturday morning to get there or on a Tuesday or Thursday to get their staple foods or to gauge and I do know that the market has made a consistent a concerted effort to keep vendors that are selling Whole Foods and ingredients engage with the market now that local, no, it's not all locally produced in every case. But in terms of creating an access point, I think they've done a good job of maintaining that.

**Participant 113** 48:50

So inside there's at least, you know, there's at least three or four different vendors that sell, you know, produce. And I think they're providing really good value there. In the periphery of the city, there's a farmers market in Davidson. And that Davison market has some folks that have split off from the previous from the earlier iteration of the Flint farmers market, then that change happened in 2013. Or it happened 2013, 2014 I think the farmers market opened in June of 2014 at its current location. Boy, I would have said a few just a few, maybe two years ago, but now I'm like, oh, gosh, that's like seven years now. But the Davidson farmers market started from vendors that didn't want to relocate to the new market and saw an opportunity.

**Participant 113** 49:55

Interestingly, they've decided to keep the same market days and almost identical market hours. As the Flint farmers market, which, you know, I think it creates consistency for them, but I think it also creates an odd kind of local competition. That said, you know, they're continuing, they're, they're continuing the tradition. And the Flint market also has beyond just produce. Poulterers and a meat counter, a cheesemonger, and an apple orchard that has not only apples in season, but they do some baked goods they have, you know, they have cider. So all of those, I think those are all carryovers from the previous market. So I think it's interesting that before 2014, I would have said that the farmers market was a very democratic place. And I'm white, but it feels whiter.

**Participant 113** 51:02

To me, but I also, you know, I don't know how much that's borne out by, by the facts. I you still see, you still see a really a broad mix of the community, you know, it's still a place where folks run into, you know, their, their former teacher, or their colleagues that they haven't seen in a while, or their neighbor that they, you know, or they're, like, if I count the number of times, I've said, like, seeing people say, like, oh, that's my aunt or oh, my cousin's here, or, you know, something like that, at the farmers market, I think that's pretty common. And that the market has done a good job of trying to- they've actually been on the leading edge in the state in terms of the supplemental sector. Each vendor there that qualifies for SNAP, has their own terminal, they developed- the Flint market developed the [inaudible] version of double up food bucks, cause they didn't want to deal with tokens.

**Participant 113** 52:10

And they, you know, they've, they really have kept a focus on trying- you know, who they are and what they mean to the community, that location that they moved to, is closer to the main bus terminal. So it's actually easier for a rider to get to the market and back home than it was at the original location. And I think that's really important in terms of that transportation link. People will tell you that, while parking is still a nightmare, but, you know, having worked with farmers markets all over the state of Michigan, I will tell you that if a farmers market is doing well, parking is always a problem. And it's almost like a leading indicator of success. And it also, I feel like it says a lot about who we are as a state and as, you know, a set of communities that was organized around automotive, automobile ownership and, and autonomy in that respect. And, you know, encouraging people to break free from that understanding is really challenging. So, you know, I think these communities haven't been like big cities for a long time.

**Participant 113** 53:31

And they're running into this sort of, like, big city challenge of not ever having closed parking and feeling like, well, you know, hey, I can always find a parking spot at Meijer and I want to say, but when was the last time you went to a Meijer, which, you know, gigantic store, and it was, it was, you know, full or busy, you know, it's just, it's not the same experience. And I think that's what makes it sort of unique and, and I will say, I think the Flint farmers market has done a good job of trying to maintain the flavor of the community and that's a broad array of options and new things and traditional things. They've just, it's amazing to me the job they've done and, and honestly, I think credit goes to the management for really listening to and trying to help vendors and also understanding that the vendors have to when when things change hands, that's sort of the typical succession of a place now, all of that, again, to just say like, I'm a, I'm a white, middle aged woman. I haven't tried to start a business at the farmers market. So I don't know if I don't know what the invisible barriers are. But there's some, I see that they're really working hard to, you know, help people create a niche niche in the marketplace and to grow in their importance there.

**Q:** **Okay, then thinking about the connection strengths between use of the supplemental sector and the different types of stores,** **how do you think about these strengths? Are supplemental nutrition programs used at certain places more often in Flint?**

**Participant 113** 55:11

I think just to get to the supplemental sector, I think there is a keen awareness by convenience stores, a farmers market, grocery stores, that the supplemental sector is important. At least when I was working with convenience store owners, a couple of them wanted to be able to who weren't able to accept, for example, WIC benefits. And that had to do to qualify to have WIC benefits, they needed to be able to show that they had, that they were regularly stocking and carrying staple items, including dairy eggs, some produce, we were working with working with those locations and trying to encourage them to know well, if we can add, you know, sort of the thought was, if we can help you have another cooler that you didn't have to pay for, you could stock that with the eggs, the dairy, the you know, these other products.

**Participant 113** 56:18

And that might make it might make the case for you to be able to have WIC stronger. But you know, I think there's a real- I've never been in a convenience store in the city of Flint, or in the surrounding area that didn't accept at least SNAP. You know, I think there's a keen awareness now. I will also say, in some cases, there are few, but it is a real thing where there's the you-buy-we-fry, where people buy a raw product that then becomes a cooked product, because it's snap eligible when it's raw. And I'm, I will admit to some internal conflict about that. I do want people to have choice. And yet I still think that that's an interesting adaptation to those rules. But I also- it's too bad that it's only you know, those fried foods in many cases.

**Participant 113** 57:22

I think also, in terms of the supplemental sector, I think, generally, there's, there's an understanding of how those benefits can be accessed and used. For the most part, the- I have observed though, very few transactions in my, you know, history, where I would say, there feels like a stigma or something attached with using those benefits. It's definitely something I've witnessed. And yet it's not I wouldn't say it was common in the last probably five or six years. But I think that that's not an uncommon, not an uncommon experience for users.

**Participant 113** 58:22

Um, there's definitely like I said, there's definitely access points. But you know, again, I think, if you look carefully at what was available from the convenience store side or the corner store side, that was what was desirable. You might say, well, you know, yeah, I can use my I can use my benefits here, but is that where I want to use them? Is it a good use of those benefits? Is it economical because even to carry milk, the markup is significant. So you know, I think oh, I didn't even think about grocery stores for example, like Aldi. So Aldi is a grocery store chain that has come into the community and I think they've really yeah, affordability is a huge deal.

**Participant 113** 59:22

And I think Aldi is a store that appeals to- it's interesting to me, what I observed is it really appeals to older adults who don't want to walk all the way around a giant store and who have made peace with you know, maybe they won't have 5000 kinds of cereal, but I really only eat this one and this one that is sold at Aldi is similar enough to the one that I like that I'm willing to make that choice. But I also think it's interesting that those stores I've seen in the last, you know, in the last three years, I think every single Aldi that I'm familiar with has gone through a renovation, slight expansion, and where they've expanded has been in their fresh produce area. Ironically, and also wine and beer, but they've been, they've definitely increased in that and the ones in, again in Flint or in Flint surrounding there's an Aldi on the east side of Flint.

**Participant 113** 1:00:29

Again, I think it's just outside the city limits, like center road and then there's one incur on Khurana road and again, that's probably a mile and a half from the city limits. And honestly, if Aldi would move to Pearson Road near that area in Flint, I think they would do extremely well. Extremely well. And, again, they and that is a retailer who I think has maximized shelf life by having more frozen products, more shelf stable products and a little bit less product where the expiration date will be a big deal. But, you know, they have, I mean, and honestly, I will say my own experience with Aldi has evolved over time. You know, at first I was sort of like, why would I want to buy- what I have to buy a grocery bag? Or I have to buy one or I have to pay a quarter so I get this cart?

**Participant 113** 1:01:46

But, you know, in terms of quality and selection, I think really- it's very high and it's pretty replicable. It's pretty well replicated at every store. Like I haven't seen one where I go like oh, I don't like that all the like I think they're all they're trying to make them all pretty much the same experience. Yeah, so the closures sell you out of that. So there are closures. There's a Meijer on Pearson road that closed, there was a Kroger on Pearson road that closed. You know, one is sort of to the west of 75 one was to the east of 75 there was an effort to bring back a chain grocery that had existed in Flint since the time when I grew up, Hamady stores. Trying to bring back Hamady stores, that had failed. In fact, we were talking with a corner store near the location where the hamady store was going to open. And that store was one of those places that was like, it was two months away from opening for about a year and a half. 2 months, we're two months away.

**Participant 113** 1:03:02

We're like, okay, we've been hearing that, but we're not seeing anything. And the store owner that we talked to, we were like, you can join this program and you could get, you know, more equipment and you can upgrade something in your store. And he was like, yeah, but you know, when that store opens, I'll be competing with them. And it's not, you know, seems like it's not worth it for me. And then that Hamady store ended up opening and I think closed within gosh, it was like less than six months. And like I said, there's some Kroger's more on the south side. So again, I think the way the dominoes fell with closures in the 2016 2017. It was almost like, it felt as though they all got the same demographic report or something.

**Participant 113** 1:04:01

They all got the same economic data at the same time, and then stores just started closing. And then there's a small grocery store downtown that's owned by a couple of entrepreneurs, and you may have talked with them and they're working really hard. It's hard work, I think, really, really hard work to keep their store open and they want to have, you know, Michigan grown products to a large extent or Michigan made foods to a large extent and that's the local grocer there. They're just a small player, but they're working really, really hard. But they had a little bump in the road with the supplemental sector and I couldn't- and I will admit that I tried to approach them tactfully and they're folks I've known for a while. It's not- I tried to probe like, well, why can't you accept SNAP?

**Participant 113** 1:05:04

But I just, I, there's also a strong factor of personality, like a very competent person that I, I felt uncomfortable that my question might imply that they weren't able to solve the problem on their own. So I'll just admit, like, I didn't work very hard at it. But last time I was near, I stopped in and it seemed like that situation had been resolved for them. So I think that was helpful. But it wasn't very clear, kind of what was going on with that.

**Participant 113** 1:05:42

Oh, wait, I like this map, by the way. It's really populated.

**Interviewer** 1:05:49

Yeah, if it makes sense to you, if we could go through and some of these connections, that still have question marks too, because there are things that maybe we talked about just a little bit. And then in the interest of time, we'll move on to the next section.

**Participant 113** 1:06:03

Sure.

**Interviewer** 1:06:03

The first one would be sort of connections from grocery stores, convenience stores, and farmers markets to availability. And so we're thinking about availability in the sense of like, you know, foods that people for the quality, the quantity, and then types of foods that people want, are they like, physically present? And so for grocery stores, I said that, you know, grocery stores in general, you know, food is very present and in grocery stores.

**Participant 113** 1:06:28

Yes.

**Interviewer** 1:06:29

The problem in Flint, is that they aren't very accessible or there aren't very many grocery stores.

**Participant 113** 1:06:34

Yeah, I agree with that.

**Interviewer** 1:06:35

How would you sort of like rate, the available how sort of convenience stores and farmers markets affect availability? Like, do you think that food is really available in them or not really?

**Participant 113** 1:06:48

Well, I think the farmers market food is available. It may not be- so it's available three days a week, that's the issue. And that's always going to be part of the issue for farmers markets, they just aren't going to operate the same hours as other stores. And I will say there are like I said, there's poultry, there's meat, there's cheese. I'm not sure if all of that feels- like I think some of the availability might be due to price so affordibility becomes that X Factor with availability. Like do they have it? Yes, they do. Is it so I can afford? Maybe, maybe not. And that's why maybe that's why it feels like it's more middle class and a little bit more white.

**Participant 113** 1:07:41

And in terms of availability, I think the farmers market, I think they've, I think they've done as much as they can to make that there's food available. I would say, you know, I would give them a positive sort of mark for that. But I would also say, you know, availability and affordability are definitely there's interaction between those. And I think that's where I see that that connection happening. Let me think, for convenience stores, I guess in general, I'm going to say there isn't a lot of availability. And I think even the store owners themselves would admit, like, their desire to provide it doesn't over necessarily overcome the difficulty that they have getting it. So even when I talked to, I talked to a store owner, we gave this this grant program gave them money to buy food now, the food that they could buy had to fall within three categories. And I think, to get these three categories created their own set of problems, so it had be adding to an area that they that was challenging for their store.

**Participant 113** 1:08:55

So it had to either be a fresh fruit or vegetable or you know, a protein or you know, we weren't giving them money to buy more Lay's potato chips we were giving them so that they could stock more vegetables and stuff like that. It also had to be from Michigan, which you know, in the summertime when things are abundant was not a challenge. But, you know, we had store owners that were reluctant, they were like, Can I get something frozen or canned from Michigan? And they absolutely could and the price point was higher than people were like, you guys, you want me to buy a pound of frozen peas, which, you know, your mileage may vary on whether peas are something you want. I like peas but these frozen peas came from an organic farm and were flash frozen and there were not a large quantity created of them.

**Participant 113** 1:09:57

And so the cost was like $2.09 for a pound, whereas Kroger would routinely have 10 for 10 on frozen vegetables. So somebody is looking at it like, I'm gonna pay twice as much for peas? I think it was really challenging. And then also, in some cases, the quantities, it's almost like the quantities were created for commercial use. So you could get five pounds of strawberries. I mean, you might really like strawberries, but five pounds for a single household with one freezer compartment. That's an investment, like you're really saying, like, we're going strong on strawberries for a long time. So, yeah, there's just some challenges in terms of that in terms of availability for convenience stores, and, and they had to end the owners had to stock it and maintain it themselves. They didn't have somebody coming in and checking on the stock and making sure it was working. So what is- remind me what quality of life is respected? What were you capturing in that piece?

**Interviewer** 1:11:11

Yeah, so we do have a sort of something that I sort of, instead of being an explicit part of it sort of work through as we're talking is that we have these these values that have come out of sort of these workshops with, you know, Flint residents think that they want from the food system. So I was sort of contextualizing the stuff you're talking about, sort of within these values. And so quality of life is respected. This is basically like, residents of Flint want to be able to move through the food system, their dignity choices, comfort and safety respected in a way that promotes common good and quality of life for all.

**Participant 113** 1:11:52

Yes.

**Interviewer** 1:11:52

Think of it as an evaluation of do people feel comfortable, safe and respected? You know, in these places? Yeah. And so thinking about that, sort of have made that connection to farmers markets is like a weak, weak, positive. It's-

**Participant 113** 1:12:13

Yeah, I agree with that.

**Interviewer** 1:12:14

Do they do good stuff? Are there some people who maybe don't feel as comfortable in those spaces? Definitely.

**Participant 113** 1:12:20

Yeah. Yeah.

**Interviewer** 1:12:21

And so the kind of question there is for grocery stores and convenience stores, if you have a sense of like, maybe how they might vary or how they might impact how much people feel safe and secure and respected?

**Participant 113** 1:12:36

Yeah. Well, it's interesting. The thing is, in convenience stores, in many cases, if someone is, if someone lives within walking distance, they're going to be a regular. In some cases, where the store owner or regular staff are very present, they may actually know those folks as neighbors in a different way. Now, does that equate to- does knowing them equate to respect, I think it's a mixed bag. It's hard for me to even I think- in the average it would be hard to even put it as a negative or positive. And then I think in terms of grocery stores, being a degree removed, maybe many degrees removed in terms of ownership and management, it would be, I think, overall, they're going for a positive, it's sort of like, I don't want to say this, if they were a student, they're working hard for like, a C plus b minus, either.

**Participant 113** 1:13:46

Maybe they're getting it like maybe they're getting a C plus b minus. I think that and again, it might be a situation where people's experience may vary based on the staff and that kind of thing. But you know, I do notice that for example, if you go into a Walmart or a Meijers it's likely that you're going to be greeted. If you go to Kroger? I don't know. Yeah, especially a Kroger in the Flint area, I might say you might get a hello 50% of the time and it might depend on time of day but I also think sometimes that might correlate more to how busy they are as a store.

**Interviewer** 1:14:32

Because I think they're prioritizing putting their staff in serving their customers, not doing things like having a greeter or something like that. But in terms of generally like trying to keep the store clean, trying to keep the produce that they have stocked, trying to, you know, trying to keep the meats and other things. I would buy food from those stores. And I wouldn't worry about its quality, for example. But I also I don't know, to what extent people would go in there and be like, I just went to Kroger and I feel so good about my- I cannot imagine somebody saying,

**Interviewer** 1:15:15

Yeah.

**Participant 113** 1:15:16

Maybe if they ran into their Grandma or something and maybe-

**Interviewer** 1:15:20

Maybe I'll delete a connection, just because there's not really a way that, you know, it's not like a real positive or a negative impact. It's, you know, not like an outcome that really isn't.

**Participant 113** 1:15:34

I mean, I don't think I don't think grocery stores or convenience stores are going out of their way to be disrespectful to anyone. But the average, you know, convenience stores, I think, even if someone says yes, I regularly shop at that store, if you ask them, like, would you- would you rather have it be something else or offer something else? I think in general, people will say, yeah, it might be nicer if it was a little different than what my experiences [inaudible]. And at the same time, though, they would come into the store and greet the store owner or say hello, or the store owner might say, How are you today? How was your mom? You know they might know that person well enough to know all that.

**Q7: When you look at the model you created, is there anything you think is missing, or that you want to add to better capture how you think about the food system in Flint?**

**Interviewer** 1:16:19

Awesome. So is there anything else you would want to maybe change or add to your map? Are you feeling pretty good about it?

**Participant 113** 1:16:31

Well we didn't really talk about the emergency sector, and I'm feeling like I've neglected that. I think, again, my experience with that really does tie back to that grant funded project where we're trying to assist. And I'll say this, I think pantries in the Flint community are working really hard to make food available, and some of them are doing an outstanding job. For example, there's a pantry that is a collaboration of a number of faith communities in the Flint community. They've created a choice pantry, and it's on the south side of the city.

**Participant 113** 1:17:11

The south side is often overlooked. But they've created this choice pantry and essentially tries to make you feel like you're going shopping in a store. When we added resources to that pantry, they were able to create an entire cooler that was devoted to dairy products, including eggs. And they said, you know, we've always said we've always been offered eggs as a thing that we could have but now we know we have a consistent way to maintain them and keep them fresh and wholesome. Or for our users and our pantry clients. They have a very efficient system. They're very good at getting volunteers. There's a pantry that we worked with, at a small church in the center of the north side of the Northwest. And that pantry is completely funded out of the pockets of the women that run it.

**Participant 113** 1:18:09

It's not a unique situation or unique story. There's efforts like that. We worked with Foss Avenue Baptist Church which was a big, big church. They regularly have congregate meals, and they would regularly host what the food bank of Eastern Michigan would call events, which is like a big giveaway. He had a regular time for that. But they wanted to be able to have predictable food, shelf stable food that was available. So we helped them to buy some shelving and things like that. And the person that was running that was doing like she was, she was basically the executive of the program. And she was a volunteer. I mean, she was running every part of it. And they're just, they're making those pantries that I interacted with in Flint are making do with whatever they can to make things as good as possible for the people that they're serving.

**Participant 113** 1:19:10

And, and I think that's pretty amazing. I would also single out St. Luke's New Life Center, which is supported, I think by Catholic Charities and many people who, you know, who say if they're, if they're engaged in the Catholic Church, they say I want to give back to the community might go to St. Luke's New Life Center. And that's a place where they're really just doing as much as they can with what they have. They have a garden that they're growing food that goes in their congregate meals, they have, you know, they're, they're giving away produce from that garden. They're maintaining a pantry, they're trying to you know, they're doing it all with, you know, volunteer labor that's that involved. You meet volunteers from there, and you're like, how long have you been volunteering here and it's almost like they can't remember when they weren't volunteering.

**Participant 113** 1:20:09

What else, um, crossover outreach downtown ministries like they're doing, they have not only food, but also other supplies, like they make clothing available and other things like that. They're trying to move as much as they can through their system. And we- this program added some kiosks, to those locations where people could find out about signing up for those supplemental nutrition assistance benefits or for others, you know, they could learn about the programs. And I don't know that, you know, sort of like one of those things where the grant ended, and they had the product, and it was sort of like, good luck, you know. So I don't think that wasn't sustained funding. And that's sort of an unfortunate failing of that effort. But yeah, I think committed volunteers are a huge, huge issue. And then, you know, the other thing is, I think those emergency sectors, places, they're really tied into food safety, and those kinds of those kinds of realities, they really want to be able to give people food that they'll value that is wholesome and high quality.

**Participant 113** 1:21:29

And it's, and I think it's a testament to the work that they're doing. And they also, you know, they also get what they can. And, you know, to some extent, they're- and again, there was a very small of a proportion of the places that we worked with a very small group that were kind of more interested in being like, well, someone needs to sort of prove to me that they are needy, like, that was that was very much in the minority. And, at least in one case, by approaching with curiosity, rather than judgment, we were able to sort of help them to understand like, one food pantry that we worked with, they had a, they had a set of policies that like a person who came in could get 11 items from the food pantry.

**Participant 113** 1:22:25

And better if they were a single person, or if they had a family of four or eight or larger, they could get 11 items. So interestingly enough, in just probing that with the, again, volunteer who was running it, who was a member of the congregation, we're sort of like, so what says that you someone could only get 11 items? Well, you know, I took this over, and it's just the way it's always been done. And we were sort of like, okay, so, you know, who makes the decisions now about how it's run? Well, I do. I was like, okay, well, you know, you might want to think through why 11 items is your limit. And, and who makes that if you're the one that makes that policy, you know, why is it important? I think they'd sort of- she was sort of like, yeah, I wonder why, like, just having us ask the question and be non judgmental about whether she was writing us an answer was a pathway for her to think about it.

**Participant 113** 1:23:23

And then, you know, we were able to provide that site with some refrigeration and freezer equipment, and hopefully, they're making good use of it. But, um, yeah, I just think there are folks that are really committed to making sure that people get food, that they're given food in a way that, you know, is positively related with their dignity and quality of life. And it's, I think that that's a really important piece of that I worked less with sort of the meal providers, the congregate meal providers. And so my interaction with those was really only when they were kind of co-located with one another when there was a pantry but also did a congregate meal or something like that.

**Interviewer** 1:24:12

So in the interest of time, I want to sort of question we have probably like two more questions we want to address that should be pretty painless. But if you need to leave at exactly 3pm we can-

**Participant 113** 1:24:25

No, I think I did turn- let me just check. I did turn off my email, so I wouldn't be distracted. It has a tendency- oh, I should- okay, I do have a three o'clock but I'll try to be less long winded. I know, it's me. It's not you. It's me.

**Q9: So now considering your map of the current Flint food system, how would you make changes to improve it?**

**Interviewer** 1:24:46

Oh, it's great information, and I [inaudible] your time. So yeah, the next thing would be you know, part of the goal of this project is to identify and explore leverage points. So like things that we could change or improve about the Flint food system that would have positive impacts. So this is I know, it's pretty open and freeform, but you know, considering how your understanding of the current food system in Flint, if you ran the world, what would you change to improve it? And that can be small or big are any sort of scale you want. Maybe one or two things?

**Participant 113** 1:25:23

Well, and even looking at this map that was created, I think that issue around transportation is really, really a big one. And I think that, you know, I'm really a proponent of local foods, but I don't know that local food can be that bridge. So I think if there were resources to help local food producers, you know, scale up in a way that was appropriate and timely for them, it could be a bigger player in this, but I don't know that it's, I see that that's a longer term, longer term goal and outcome. So even even selling into the Flint Fresh food hub, growers have to meet a certain set of, you know, standards, and some of them are able to do that.

**Participant 113** 1:26:17

And some of them are not, and some of them just get upset about the standard. And it's sort of like, well, you know, the standard is the standards in place, because as a receiver, they need to be sure about what they're getting, rather than trying to punish you for, for your circumstance or something like that. I think there's, there's a lot of there was a lot of investment at one time in adding coop houses and things like that. And to some extent, we know that many of them are either unutilized or underutilized. So I think, doing a scan of those resources and the way that technology has been used across the [inaudible], and trying to help make connections with folks, that would be really important. Yeah.