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**SPEAKERS**

Interviewer, Participant 201, Interviewer 2

**Participant 201** 00:00

due diligence.

**Interviewer 2** 00:03

Right, right. Yeah. Keep us in order here, right. Yeah. All right, great. So the very first question that we have for you this morning, Bob is, when you think about

**Interviewer** 00:16

a second, we need to get proper due diligence, we have to get verbal consent to have this recording to participate. And just want to make sure that you know, that like, again, everything's gonna be confidential. You don't have to answer any question or any part of question. And as well as like, if you ever have any questions, any follow up with us, so your consent is demonstrated by your continued participation in this interview with questions about informed consent process?

**Participant 201** 00:46

We have tried verbally consent to the

**Interviewer** 00:49

Perfect, thank you. You're welcome.

**Interviewer 2** 00:53

All right. I'm sorry. I guess that wasn't explicit enough. I thought I did. Okay. All right. Cool. Beans. Well, here we go. Um, so how would you how would you describe your role? And or your experience with the local food system?

**Participant 201** 01:11

Well, my role in the local food system is I'm a consumer of food. So that's, that's my role. I don't have a direct role in providing food. But I do work on a lot of structural issues around the food system itself. What was the second part of that question?

**Interviewer 2** 01:39

Yeah, just if, whether it's through employment, or volunteering or unpaid, which you were just getting into. So if you may want to share how you do that? The work that you do on structural issues?

**Participant 201** 01:52

Yeah, so I've been, I was initio member of the food navigator advisory group with our Tina Sadler at the Community Foundation, which actually precedes this research project. So there's an advisory group of about seven of us that met on an ongoing basis with our Tina, about the issues in the food system. So this is just a side note on that. So we always meet at the White Horse tavern, which is a 24/7, restaurant BB. So we'd be in one corner talking about the food system, drinking coffee, and other third shifters or be at the bar, drinking beer and having a good time. There's an interesting meeting spot.

**Interviewer 2** 02:52

Right? Right, right those days.

**Participant 201** 02:55

So, so I was all part of that system, and the work to establish the food hub and Flint fresh and all those responses that came out of that navigation of the food system and beginning to understand it more. I'm also on the board of directors of the North Flint food market, which is the cooperative food store that we are building on the north side of Flint is at the corners of cryo and Pearson and is kind of a economic anchor and the community. The food market is their egos Academy, which is a charter school with a Afro Afro centric curriculum. And then, actually pastor Flynn he's been working on both of those just secured the land next to the food market for a mixed housing project. Okay. Yeah. Awesome.

**Interviewer 2** 04:16

Congratulations on that.

**Participant 201** 04:18

Yeah, through the NorthPoint reinvestment Corporation. Okay. And, and, I mean, Reggie and I talked for years about what the store should look like what it should be, and should it be for profit should be regular store. And we came to a collective understanding around the power of a food cooperative, because you own our local economy.

**Interviewer 2** 04:52

Mm hmm. Okay, awesome. Bob, thank you for that. You're doing great. Great work. Awesome. Perfect. So let's talk a little bit about where we're going today. Chris is going to share her screen. And we'll talk through some of the definitions that are going to be useful to follow along. So are you able to see the screen now? Yep. Okay, awesome. So we're working with five different sectors of the local food system, the first being a production and that focuses on growing of crops or raising of livestock. And that can range in size, as we know from small, you know, gardens all the way to farms. The second sector is processing and, and packaging. So it's basically where we're dealing with the foods have been grown, how we got to wash and pack them, possibly process them into other value added products, which would also include the packaging as well. So that might be tomatoes that turn into salsa when they get mixed with seasonings or things of that nature. So that'd be an example of processing and packaging. Then we have the third sector wholesale and resale where they're we're looking at the products that have been developed selling them and goods by someone else other than a producer. So in that case, they are taking those materials and moving them into the market at a wholesale level. And then we have the retail level. So the seller foods are at the stores, the grocery stores, convenience stores, the farmer's market, restaurants or places of that nature. And then last but not least the sector where the food goes that we don't eat. So the collection and the management of waste. So that might be haulers and composters and folks of that level there. Do you have any questions about these sectors? And the definitions of them? Okay, all right. So when you look and think about your expertise in the food system, so Chris is gonna show us when you think about your expertise, within or across these different sectors, where do you see yourself having the most, you know, expertise in the food system sectors?

**Participant 201** 07:23

Yeah, well, I wouldn't say I'm an expert in these areas that I have understanding of production, processing, packaging, wholesale and retail retail.

**Interviewer 2** 07:52

Okay, so you had-

**Participant 201** 07:52

Not much around waste, and management of waste.

**Interviewer 2** 07:52

Okay, gotcha. Wonderful. Thank you for that. Awesome. So we're going to take a minute now. And I'm going to hand the mic to [Interviewer]. And we'll just come back to the process we're going to use, [Interviewer].

**Interviewer** 07:52

Yeah, um, well, first, I'll give you the option to to save some your time. But would it be useful to go through just like a quick refresher of the FCM process? Or because you've, you know, been engaged with this work? Do you feel confident, and we could skip it if you'd like, but I'm happy to hop through an example.

**Participant 201** 07:52

Yeah, we can skip it. All right. Great.

**Interviewer 2** 07:52

All right. Wonderful. Right. Well, we'll dive right in there. So let's just take a look at the based upon the the expertise, the roles that you have, you said you had expertise in these four sectors. So when you think about that, how would you draw or kind of depict your involvement in these different sectors? You know, in the food system, where would you place yourself and how would you draw connections between them? So [Interviewer], do we need the concepts that [Participant 201] represented? Like he said, He's a board member of the [Organization] and he's also a-

**Participant 201** 07:52

I'll just talk. And you figure out how that fits?

**Interviewer 2** 08:12

Yes, absolutely.

**Participant 201** 08:45

Okay. So as far as producers are concerned, early on in the effort, prior to the research project, we spent time looking at small scale farming that was localized. And one of the things that definitely came out of that from the producer of the [inaudible] was that small scale farming has a hard time selling to institutional buyers, because of the scale that they-and that's where the most make their their their money, you know, selling more to sustain institutional buyers. And I'm just making things up here. But let's say a hospital system, wanted continued access to fresh vegetables at a certain level, an individual small farmer probably cannot produce enough food on a scale to meet the needs of the hospital. So the hospital goes outside of the region to a more statewide or national provider to get consistent product. And that's when we started thinking about aggregating products from small farmers together to be able to sell more to institutional buyers. And that's when the food hub came about. So that all fits with retailers and wholesalers [inaudible] into the world. From the retailer position, you know, in Flint-and this is with the North Flint food market-there are not a lot of full service grocery stores, and those that are left are not owned by people in Flint themselves. They're owned by people outside of Flint so that part of the economic gate of circulating money in local economies is removed. So if I go to a party store, or landmark, or one of the small grocery stores the profits from the store go out to another community outside of Flint, and they're not reinvested. You know, so in that end of the world, the North Flint food market is more than a grocery store. It's a community builder. It's a local economy builder. And it's a anchor for locally owned economies. So, yeah, I'm definitely involved in that. There's definitely potential within the food hub-and I can't ever remember its name that we call that actually-well isn't [Organization] the mobile market that comes out of their program, that distribution site? Yeah, and I don't keep up with them enough to understand all the products that they now have, but they have the potential of doing that value add processing. They could make salsa, you know, or something along the lines by combining the foods there in ways that are attractive to the local market.

**Participant 201** 14:04

The other thing I would say with that, and the retailer in the world, is that culturally appropriate foods can be enhanced on the local level where national chains don't have as much. Yeah, so if-and I'll give you an example-if our North Flint food market, if our customer base ultimately is primarily African American, then we need to have the array of fresh vegetables and foods and meats that fit culturally with the customer base and maybe not have some foods that our cultural alien to-?

**Interviewer 2** 15:05

Mm hmm. Yeah. Great. Okay, well, let's do it. Let's do a little bit of a check in. Because [Interviewer] has been working and I'm taking notes while she's putting things on the map. So I'm going to play back some of what I heard. And, [Interviewer], if you can help us distinguish how it's showing up on the map, [Participant 201] talked about the producers, you know, localizing small farm scale. And that part of that was dealing with the attempt to sell to institutional buyers, and an issue of scale of not being able to have enough product to meet the needs of institutional buyers. And that institutional buyers would then go outside of Flint to meet their needs. And one of the responses was the food hub, to begin to aggregate small farmers so that they could sell to institutional buyers. So let's see if you could tell us where that happens.

**Interviewer** 16:11

So right sorry if I'm looking up, I have a screen above my camera. So there's this scale barriers to selling to institutional or large buyers has a negative impact on local producers and, you know, supports non local producers. And one way to combat it is through wholesalers or retailers who aggregate many small farmers. And so that will actually move it back to support producers, but also lower views. Actually, that's how that does. It lowers some scale barriers, and that feeds into retailers. And then we talked about stores. So they've been impacted a lot by grocery store closures and contributes to locally owned businesses. And some of the dynamics talked about was that contributing to like local economic development and community building, but also the presence of culturally appropriate foods. And you said, this is also supported by, you know, local producers versus non local producers. More supports that. Is that sort of accurate to your understanding? Again, this is very much of ownership. If there's anything you want to wording connection, let me know.

**Interviewer 2** 17:27

Yeah. Go ahead, [Participant 201].

**Participant 201** 17:30

Yeah, no, this is fine to me. I mean, there's lots of other issues. I don't know if they show up on this map, or if they show up later in the conversation. You know, there's transportation issues, there's choice issues, all that stuff. So I don't know if you want to talk about that now or later.

**Interviewer** 17:46

We can, I think, yeah, our goal for this for the conversation is really to establish an understanding of how the local food system in Flint is currently working or not working. So anything that relates to that we're happy to bring into the conversation.

**Interviewer 2** 18:04

Absolutely.

**Participant 201** 18:05

Yeah. So from a basic needs perspective, and from you know, entities like the food bank. The food bank, at least when when I-30 years ago when I was working at the food bank-our mainstay of products was from the larger national chains, and the food that they were going to dump, so cans that were okay. The food was okay, but they had good dents in them instead of bad dents, foods that were on the verge of expiration dates, foods that weren't selling. So those were a lot of the types of foods that we get, and when those go out into food pantries, they meet some food needs, but they don't necessarily meet culturally acceptable food needs because-and I'll just use myself as an example this is just my own vegetable ignorance-if I got a food box with it, I would go, "Wow, what do I do with this, do I bake it? Peel it up and boil it? I'm gonna have to look this up. Oh, I don't have any way to look it up. You know, I don't have internet access." Like my grandmother's recipes never had rutabaga, so I end up throwing it away anyway. So yeah, so that's always an issue. But it still meets an important need. But it creates its own its own waste. Yeah, Flint Fresh was also an effort to overcome transportation. So if a grocery store is not somewhat close to me, and I don't have transportation, other than public transportation, it's difficult for me to go grocery shopping, unless I really plan it out.

**Participant 201** 20:49

Yeah, so me, I'm thinking about what's for dinner tonight, and I have two ingredients. Ah, so I hop in my car, drive eight miles out to the grocery store, get the stuff, and come back. Somebody who's got to take a bus to do that is just not going to do that. And, you know, they're going to see, if the party store has something or they're just gonna try to do something else. So transportation at times, limits my ability to access. The other thing around producers that affects local production of food, especially in the city, and surrounding areas, are local ordinances. So for example, in Flint, there are certain sections of the city that are zoned for hoop houses, and other areas that aren't. So if I'm living in an area outside of a zoned area for hoop house, my hoop house either has to be illegally put up, or I have to go through to try to get permission from the city to do, so there might be abandoned land in non zoned areas for hoophouses that could support that local production and extend the growing season. But because of local ordinances, I can't put up a hoop house.

**Interviewer 2** 22:30

Okay, so it also-it limits-so what I'm hearing you say is that the ordinance affects it, but it also affects the production methods because they get to pass for extended growing, correct?

**Participant 201** 22:42

Correct.

**Interviewer 2** 22:43

Okay, so that's the extended growing part. Okay. So it affects their methods too.

**Participant 201** 22:48

Yeah, so but there's no hoophouse police going around stopping houses, you know, but you could run into a city problem if somebody wanted to make a huge issue, and somebody might try to force you to dismantle your hoop house if you're not in zoned area for hoop houses.

**Interviewer 2** 23:11

Okay, great. So there's zoning for growing areas, for hoop house growing.

**Participant 201** 23:16

Yeah. And hoop houses are-to increase access to food in Michigan, hoop houses are critical because growing season here is pretty short. And hoop houses, I plant earlier in spring and I you know, harvest later in the fall. Actually, [Name] you know, from the local grocer and her small farm, they really utilize hoop houses, you know, for their production, but they're outside of the city, so.

**Interviewer 2** 23:53

Okay, now, I did also hear you mentioned abandoned land. So you mentioned growing methods from producers, which is also impacted by the ordinance. You also mentioned abandoned land as well. So could you talk about land as a concept, as you mentioned that?

**Participant 201** 24:13

Yeah so these are lots that no longer have houses on them and are either owned by people locally or owned by the land bank. But there are neighborhoods that have very large sections of vacant land that could be turned into local agricultural zones. But resources would be needed to do that, but it might be things like, Okay, I've got feed lots back to back and across from each other on a square block are, I need to cut down some of the trees, you know, so that more sunlight in. I need to process the land and then build the hoop houses, but I'm not going to take that on, because I can't get the permission from the city to do that, because it's not zoned, and that has to go through a zoning process. It's really-it sounds really complicated, and I don't do that kind of work. And I could be wrong about that, but I know that-and this never came to fruition-but at one point in one of the neighborhoods that are not zoned for hoop houses, we were trying to take an abandoned house, and reengineer it into an aquaponic production center. And then ultimately, to try to get things rezoned for hoop houses so that this one neighborhood-a small neighborhood-would have their gardens, their hoop houses, and then their aquaponics for your own production. It won't be large scale, but it might be enough to provide fish and vegetables to a select group of families on that block. But you know, we get stuff from the land bank for the house and it was a tricky process to go through. You never could find funding for it. And we couldn't find enough staying power with the local block club to be able to pull it off. But they still own the house so we'll see where they go with it.

**Interviewer 2** 26:43

So the piece that I'm thinking-in that little quadrant there, [Interviewer], where he has access to land-vacant land, that also what the production, the structures for extended growing needs to be in that little quadrant, because that's what the hoop houses represent. You know, the hoop houses, yeah, that needs to be added over in that little quadrant. Thank you.

**Participant 201** 27:10

Yeah. And that's what the aquaponic house would have done.

**Interviewer 2** 27:14

Yes. Okay. Hoop houses and aquaponic houses, okay, thank you. Got it. Okay.

**Participant 201** 27:23

And the aquaponics notion was to repurpose abandoned houses. But you would have to re-engineer the house to do that, because you're taking out floors, and-

**Interviewer 2** 27:33

For abandoned houses. Okay. Hoop houses for abandoned houses-

**Participant 201** 27:37

For doing aquaponics. Yeah, because the growing tanks would be in the basement, the main floors would be structurally altered so that you can grow straight up, the back of the house would probably be taking off. And you'd have to do like a greenhouse effect on the back of the house to get enough light in.

**Interviewer 2** 27:57

Okay. Okay. So we want to kind of capture those separately, because one is a hoop house is a structure. That's one thing as a structure for growing food. And then the aquaponics is for growing fish. So they're both-

**Participant 201** 28:13

Well, it's fish and vegetables.

**Interviewer 2** 28:16

Yes, right. Okay. Great

**Participant 201** 28:19

Yeah, it's a closed growing system.

**Interviewer 2** 28:21

Exactly. Yep, familiar with it. Okay, does that example there kind of catch the flow that you were talking about, if we give that back to you? So producers, part of the issue, they have access to land, the vacant land, the ordinances and zoning are affecting that, which also affects the ability to create extended growing for food, whether it's in a hoop house or in a house for aquaponics? Yeah, we got there. Okay. All right. Other connections that you see, you talked about your role in the [Organization], you talked a little bit about the early stage work. Any other connections that you see?

**Interviewer** 29:13

Any other, you know, elements or pieces of the local food system that you would want to add that sort of aren't part of the map right now?

**Participant 201** 29:28

Yeah.

**Interviewer** 29:35

It's okay. If the answer's no, also, things come up during the conversation.

**Participant 201** 29:38

Yeah I'm just looking at it and you know, this, this looks pretty complete from everything I was talking about.

**Interviewer** 29:45

The one question I would have, would be, so something that we've heard a lot as an opportunity for a leverage point in the Flint food system would be, you know, increasing value added processors. So people who are make salsa or other foods from locally grown produce, and I was wondering if you had any experience given your involvement with the [Organization]? To get a sense, like, is that something that's happening very much in Flint? And, you know, what are some-is it easy? Or potentially are there barriers to, you know, sourcing from local value added processors at sort of like a retail stage? Like, are there ways that that could be easier or facilitated?

**Participant 201** 30:30

Yeah, but that's a really good question. Yeah, I probably think access to resources to be able to do that type of work on a scale that makes it profitable is probably the largest area, I would say. Yeah, our-and this is all [Name]'s, you know, seven years of just not giving in. But, you know, finding the money to do the North Flint food market was incredibly difficult because major investors always wanted-they were out playing a game of chicken with us. Somebody's got to go first and it's not us, you know, and trying to get a major lending institution to say, okay, and we'll give you some money to open the doors. I think every locally owned processor to do value adds that is coming out of non white entities have that difficulty in accessing the resources to scale up.

**Interviewer 2** 31:59

Mm hmm.

**Participant 201** 32:02

They're, you know, and and I don't know about, I'm sure Detroit is this way too but maybe not so much in other cities-and this is primarily for ready to eat food-but there are just a ton of pop ups all over the place, that are grilling food, and selling food on streets. Yeah, and sometimes that actually can be a value add in the basic need area. So for example, a member of [Church], who's actually a [Role] in the [Organization], but lives in Flint also does pop up grilling all the time, year round, and once a week or so, goes out into poor neighborhoods and grills up food and gives it away. So last Friday, we were out on the corner of Martin Luther King, and Fifth Avenue, which is just north of downtown., and fortunately, there's a building that we had access to that another church had access to. And we did a food resource giveaway, where we cooked this huge pot of chili outside and then gave away coats and mittens and scarves and stuff inside, and you know, there were probably 50 homeless people who came in and sat with us and had conversations and got some good food. But that came out of this pop up notion, and then selling some of it for profit and giving some of it away to feed this group.

**Interviewer 2** 34:15

That's wonderful and those pop ups are kinda like mobile retail, they really just kind of put them out there in different places. Like you said, so I think there's a connection there between that pop up and retail, [Interviewer]. Yeah, great. That's perfect. And you mentioned-you actually-I'm gonna bring you back to a point you made earlier about value add-you mentioned that the potential was there for the food have to do value added process and you want to say a little bit. Do you have more that you might want to say about that because you did mention that they might have some potential there for value added process?

**Participant 201** 35:02

Yeah, if there are foods that are you know, it's, well one I would think along the lines of culturally appropriate foods and the opportunity to [inaudible] that. So I'm making this up at this point, as an example, but let's say the Latino community in Flint, you know, says, store bought salsa is not salsa at all. It's ketchup and vinegar. You know, it's not true Mexican salsa, and that's what we need a market for. You know, the food hub, if there was enough to sustain that and make a profit on that, could do things like that, perhaps.

**Interviewer 2** 35:57

Mm hmm.

**Participant 201** 35:58

And there might be there might be other examples of that, too.

**Interviewer 2** 36:02

Mm hmm. Great, perfect. Thank you for that. Yeah. beautiful map. Ah, looking at all the connections that you've made. We saw why you said that you didn't have a direct connection on waste. You did make the point that there was some waste generation out of the foods that that, you know, don't quite make it out. Because of the quality of the food.

**Participant 201** 36:34

Even with Flint Fresh, that could be an issue too. So getting a big box of food or a small box of food, but I don't really have a choice of what's in the box, it's whatever's available. And sometimes that works, and sometimes that might not work-I'll go back to my rutabaga example.

**Interviewer 2** 36:55

Mhmm. Exactly. Because they don't know how to cook it or you don't?

**Participant 201** 36:58

That's right. Got it? Yeah.

**Interviewer 2** 37:01

Excellent. Excellent. Okay. Take a quick, any other connections you want to make? Are you thinking and you've talked a lot about, you know, the the store?

**Participant 201** 37:12

Yeah, I return it back to you and say, Is there any connections that you want to ask me about that are up there?

**Interviewer 2** 37:19

Yeah, I would ask you about the markets, possibly because you're familiar with, you know, the farmers market in the city. Do you have any anything you want to say about that as it relates to the food system?

**Participant 201** 37:33

Yeah, the farmers market is a great place for middle class shoppers who want locally sourced foods and interesting variety. Okay. But it's not a market for poor folks. One you got to get there. And then two, you got to have enough money to afford the products that are there. Mm hmm. Yeah, because that's also the issue with local producers. And this is goes back to the conversations that we've had with [Name], about pricing, that you have to price locally sourced food high enough, so that the farmer is not going broke producing the food, which is going to be higher than then at the giant retail stores that are getting food nationally, that can even do loss leaders, and still make a profit. So, you know, that's part of the dynamic of meeting the needs of producers while meeting the needs of retailers while meeting the needs of consumers. And there are trade offs in all of that.

**Interviewer 2** 38:52

Mm hmm. Exactly. Exactly. Excellent point, the trade off in terms of the farmer themselves is what you were saying there.

**Participant 201** 39:03

Yeah. And that's why it's so important that we market the Flint food market as more than just a grocery store.

**Interviewer 2** 39:11

Mm hmm.

**Participant 201** 39:12

You know, it's a community builder. It's a local economic engine. Yeah.

**Interviewer 2** 39:20

Excellent. Excellent. What about the restaurants, so we got the farmers market you talked about the stores, anything about the the restaurants that you can share from your experience?

**Participant 201** 39:37

Yeah, I don't know what to say about restaurants. Once again, you gotta have enough money to afford the foods there. In the poor community-the poor neighborhoods, there are fewer restaurants. And you know, restaurants have to locate in areas where they can draw enough customers in to survive. And that isn't usually important. Now, the restaurants that are there are fast food places.

**Interviewer 2** 40:25

Okay.

**Participant 201** 40:26

You know that that because of the-I'll give you an example this is from a long time ago. But in the late 80s, I worked for the United Way, here in town, and we were doing the [inaudible] and one of my main volunteers owned, like 15 McDonald franchises. So, it was the collective profitability across all 15 that made his business go. So he could put McDonald's or two in neighborhoods that the value would be lower, but with access to more people. A locally owned restaurant can't do that.

**Interviewer 2** 41:13

Right. Gotcha. Yes. Yes.

**Participant 201** 41:16

And, and, with with the pandemic, a couple of locally owned restaurants on the north side have all closed. Okay, yeah. Cuz they were probably hanging on the edge to begin with. And then once people would no longer come in because of the pandemic, they just could not survive. Okay.

**Interviewer 2** 41:37

Okay. All right. So I'm seeing that, um, so we hear that the restaurants, fast food, you know, fewer restaurants, fast food, affordability of prices, and then the impact of COVID. Okay,

**Participant 201** 41:55

Yeah so for example, in the neighborhood that the North Flint food market is in, I drive up and down there all the time because [Name]'s school is up there. There's a McDonald's, a Burger King, Popeye's, but no local restaurant in that stretch; it's all fast food chains.

**Interviewer 2** 42:18

Fast food chains. Okay, yep. Okay. All right. So we've got fast foods. Yeah. As opposed to local foods at the restaurants.

**Participant 201** 42:31

Yeah. And the locally owned restaurants that tend to survive, at least from what I've seen, have a long history of being here. So like the local owned restaurant in my neighborhood has been here as long as I've been in Flint. So they have a steady customer base of people who probably don't even live in the neighborhood anymore, but keep on coming back to the restaurant because they like it. Yeah but for a new restaurant to be established, they're not gonna go to a restaurant, [inaudible] that's for sure.

**Interviewer 2** 43:12

Mm hmm. Gotcha. Okay. That's helpful. So their longevity tied to a long term customer base. Yeah. Back to your thing about community. Yeah. Okay. Okay, looking good. All right. And we can add if things pop up, because we're gonna talk with you a little bit next, about the connection of racial equity to the local food system. You know, how would you make that connection? What are some of the ways that racial equity or racial inequity as part is impacting participation in the local food system in Flint?

**Participant 201** 43:56

Well racial inequities, that's the core of the dysfunctionality of the local food system. It's real simple. I mean, yeah. And this might get too deep for this exercise. But you know, capitalism is basically a racist system and capitalism is what drives the major retailers you know, and profitability. And they're going to go to where middle class white people live and shop because they have disposable income. The other thing-and we were actually talking about this last night in our [inaudible], that middle class people of color tend to move out into the suburbs also, and abandon the city. So now poor people are even more isolated from a economic system that they can't participate in, or even access. So, yeah, that inequity is at the core of the disparities within the food system. And this is not to make the big retailers into the bad guys, because their whole premise is they're in it as a business to make a profit to increase shareholder value. But poor people are shut out of that entire system, so participation at that level in the food system, is something that is not here. And I think he knows [Name] Yeah and [Name] last night said, "you know, the power structure is never gonna give up their power and we have to organize locally, to create our own economic power to be able to create alternative systems, because they're just not gonna give up any of their power and control."

**Interviewer 2** 46:29

Mm hmm. I would say ditto, that's what we're doing in Detroit too. Yeah. So So [Participant 201], talk about it, talk about it. When you think about your producers, your growers, in in Flint, um, you know, some of the folks that might be inclined to want to do value added processing, because you made that connection there earlier about, you know, access to resources and things that would would affect that. How do you how do you think an equity or racial inequity is actually impacting your producers engagement in the food, the local food system in Flint?

**Participant 201** 47:10

Yeah so I think it's less of racial inequity and more economic inequity that paralyzes and confronts small local producers of food. I spent a lot of years up in the thumb, and corporate farming is taking over and driving local farmers out, because corporate farming could scale up where local farmers could not scale up. And especially if I'm a producer of a variety of vegetables, you know, that's really really difficult, because I can't match the scale of corporate vegetable producers. So, the thumb, the way that that happened was the major crops in the thumb were soybeans and sugar beets. And sugar beets were a huge crop, and was one of the few crops that local farmers could compete because the sugar producing and I don't know if there's [inaudible] or not, but the the local sugar producers were easily accessed by farmers producing sugar. But you know, using [Name], and [Name] is an example and what they grow. They've always had additional jobs to support themselves. They create their own grocery store, because they tried to source their own food into their own store. You know, so it's the economic inequity that drives the small producer out. And actually [Name], a local, small farmer, who got out of the business because he could not make a living and eventually went to work for the state government. But he was a farmer in part, but I can remember him saying, I can't I can't even feed myself on the money that I make farming. Mm hmm. Yeah. I lose my money. I can't continue to do this.

**Interviewer 2** 49:55

Yeah, yeah, their livelihood. So I heard a couple things. So when you talk about economic and equity, you talked about scale, because you don't have a capacity to scale up. That was one aspect. Then the other was being able to have additional income sources like jobs, and some type of retail outlet connected to their production, so that they made enough money. Did I get to hear you? Okay, so I'm trying to make sure we get those concepts here as well. So the economic inequity of scale. And the other aspect is, you know, enough overall revenue coming from jobs or other sources for their life.

**Participant 201** 50:49

Yeah, so I'll give you another example. So one of the stalls at the farmers market, I think it's called [Farm] or something like that. And the producer there has a small firm in [County], but is also an ag teacher at one of the high schools. And being the ag teacher, he has a steady income, that allows us to do the farming on the side and the farmer markets gives him access to middle class buyers, you know, for his products. So, you know, he can price it at a level where he doesn't lose money on it. But that's the kind of the trade offs that local small farmers have to think about.

**Interviewer 2** 51:44

Right? So I want to make sure-

**Participant 201** 51:47

Yeah, when I looked up in the thumb, the guy just in the next farm-farm-I live out in middle country-worked for one of the GM plants with third shift, and then came home and farmed all day, and then had a few hours of sleep and then go to work back to the factory.

**Interviewer 2** 52:09

Mm hmm. Yeah. So I want to make sure we get that up at the producer with the fact that two things that economically tied in here is the stability to scale. And then having supplemental income sources, in order for them to be able to do this.

**Participant 201** 52:30

It's almost as if the farming was the supplemental income and the other was their mainstay of income.

**Interviewer 2** 52:37

Okay, they have to have a primary income source as long as being a farmer. Okay. I want to make sure somehow we've got that there we go. There it is. Supplemental or primary, I guess, [Participant 201]'s where it was primary. Okay. Thank you for that. That's, that's so real. Okay. Any anything else that well, here's another question for you. Are there ways that the food system is actually contributing to racial inequity?

**Participant 201** 53:20

Yeah, that's a really difficult question. I don't know if it's the current food system itself, that contributes to racial inequity, or the economic system behind the local food system that is a contributing factor to the ratio.

**Interviewer 2** 53:52

Gotcha. Okay.

**Participant 201** 53:54

Yeah, because a lot of it has to do, I would think, around access to investment. Because if it's next generation, yeah, I hit my store down to you. I hand the farm down to you. Where do you go for capital, to create what you're trying to do? And if if you're a person of color, it's incredibly difficult to find white lenders, which are all institutions in the world to support your efforts. Especially if you're located in your community, that is primarily Iike Flint, poor. You know, disinvested in. I mean that's the whole problem that we ran into with the [Organization] and and we're struggling with finding additional dollars now because of supply chain issues. Mm hmm. Yeah.

**Interviewer 2** 55:01

Gotcha. Okay. So playing that back, thank you for that, because you point out something really important is that the equity starts in the economic system that then creates the, you know, inequity within the food system itself.

**Participant 201** 55:21

And you can add on that by saying, you know, in Flint, the vast majority of the food system is not owned locally, it's owned by people outside of the community.

**Interviewer 2** 55:31

Right. Okay.

**Participant 201** 55:35

I mean, most of the party stores are not owned locally, in terms of local being in the city of Flint, owned by people who live outside of city. Mm hmm.

**Interviewer 2** 55:51

Got it. And then the part you just you've also teased out was that being able to get access to investment funds, particularly white lenders. And then the other part you teased out was that that the actual location of where you're putting your operation also is a barrier because they don't want to land in places where it's disinvested or poor people? Correct? That's what I heard. Okay. So we want to make sure, so [Interviewer], help us play back how that shows up in the map, if you could, please.

**Interviewer** 56:33

Fine. So I know it's looking like spaghetti. But that's just because the actual system is really complicated. And so we're getting accurate, even though it's messy. And so there's sort of this circle, this reinforcing relationship between racial inequity and capitalism and economic inequity. And that has connections out to access to resources and capital, you know, inequitable access to resources and capital. That is also reinforced by geographic disparities and differences. And then one of the big impacts of this is competition with large national companies or non local, which, you know, kind of has impacts that supports chain and fast food restaurants and non local producers and has negative impacts on local producers, local value added processors and local retailers.

**Interviewer 2** 57:38

[Participant 201], does that capture that reflect what you were saying? accurately?

**Participant 201** 57:44

Oh, I totally trust [Interviewer] to be able to map this out. [Laugthter]. Oh, yeah. I'm impressed.

**Interviewer 2** 57:49

Absolutely. Yeah, me too. Me too. That's why she's driving the drawing right now. I can listen really well. Is I don't draw as fast as she does. Well, great. That's really, really good. If something else comes up, we'll listen for it as you talk. We do want to ask you also about some other major influences. You know, what do you think are other major influences or impacts? You know, on the food system, some drivers or shocks or things that you feel that have affected the food system in Flint?

**Participant 201** 58:30

No, I mean, I think we've talked about most of it--the capital, access to capital, access to transportation, access to culturally appropriate foods, access to a variety of income consumers. Mm hmm. Yeah. Mm hmm. Okay, because the key to the crop is going to be impart people within the neighborhood, there's also going to be people like myself, who will make a point to shop there, as opposed to going out shopping at Kroger. Mm hmm. Yeah. That is with intention, and for some of the members of the co op getting to the top is going to be a long journey as long as getting out to the burbs, but those are more than middle class members of the co op, who are there for reasons beyond food. Mm hmm.

**Interviewer 2** 59:43

Okay, reasons beyond food. What about the water crisis? When you think about the sectors here or the food system, what do you how do you see the shock of a water crisis impacting

**Participant 201** 1:00:00

Well, it wasn't the shock of the water crisis, what the water crisis unveiled was the lack of access to lead mitigating groups. Mm hmm. You know, and that the whole notion of once your lead poisoned, you don't get rid of the lead, you know, the lead goes into your bone. But you can keep it at bay by consuming enough lead mitigating foods. And that's all around fresh vegetables and fruits, and, you know, dairy products.

**Interviewer 2** 1:00:40

Okay. Okay, so that was the and last but not least COVID. It's on the map. How did you How do you see COVID Having impacted the food system and flu?

**Participant 201** 1:00:56

Yeah, it's all simple is supply chain issues, regardless of the retailer, supply chain issues have become critical. Maybe a month ago or two months ago, I stopped in one day at the local grocery, you know, [Name]'s store close to downtown, because they have a deli there. And I walked in, and I had to ask her, "[Name], are you closing?" because 60% of her shelving was bare and she was the only person in the store. And she said, "I'm just having tremendous difficulty getting the store stocked. And we're just waiting forever, for simple products to become available to us." You know, and I think larger stores, chain stores are faring a little bit better than locally owned stores in that, but they're still having issues also. I go into Kroger, shopping early now, and at different times different things are just not there. I went in one day, and there's hardly any meat there, and then I just trying to get [Name] some cinnamon rolls, and you know, to bake. And none of that was available, it was all bare. So you never quite know when you go into a grocery store. And I'm sure it's in Lansing that way, Ann Arbor, Detroit, you know, that's, you know, how the pandemic has affected that. A larger store can, I think, tolerate that kind of shock- supply shock-where a small local entity is on the edge with that, and then, you know, I think the first wave of all that people begin to lose their jobs because I can't pay enough staff here anymore. So I'm working here all the time by yourself. Should I keep things floating? And the longer that supply chain issues remain, the more tenuous my economic situation becomes.

**Interviewer 2** 1:03:25

Right? Yes. Got it affects your income. Okay.

**Participant 201** 1:03:32

And we already talked about how that affects restaurants and, now, the the flip side, is it's created additional industries that are probably exploited of workers. So DoorDash you know, getting food, delivered getting groceries delivered. I wonder how much a DoorDash driver actually makes and whether that's a sustainable income for them.

**Interviewer 2** 1:04:08

That's a good point.

**Participant 201** 1:04:10

Yeah, but that's a spin off industry that might be here to stay. Since we're all getting used to deliveries.

**Interviewer 2** 1:04:18

Mm hmm. Right, that's a good point. You made the point that the spin off how does that affect wages and income?

**Participant 201** 1:04:28

Yeah. But it also affects the delivery system. It's a different innovation in the delivery system that I think will be here to stay. Because like I said, we're getting used to it. So [Name] doesn't like the food I'm cooking, it's really easy for me to DoorDash him McDonald's. I don't have to go out to get it. But now my expectation is, I want this to continue.

**Interviewer 2** 1:05:05

Right? Yeah. You like that convenience? That's right. But I hear you say also taking a look at the impact that it has potentially on the wages and income of those food workers.

**Participant 201** 1:05:18

Yeah. It could be there's another exploitative market.

**Interviewer 2** 1:05:24

Got it? Got it. That's a good point. All right. I think [Interviewer] got that. I see. I see the orange arrows. Okay. Delivery Service. Got it. Transportation. Okay. Wow. So when you're looking at that, anything else that you think is important or influential? Any other concepts you want to add to this picture? Your beautiful brain on paper about the food system in Flint?

**Participant 201** 1:05:53

Yeah, yeah. You know, I can't think of anything. I mean, we've covered a lot.

**Interviewer 2** 1:05:57

Okay. Okay. All right. Well, good. I mean, it's, it's amazing and excellent too. So what we want to shift now to [Participant 201] is change. So let's talk leverage points. So when we consider leverage points or ways to make change to improve the food system, for example, you know, you've talked about a number of things. But when you think about changing the system, either strengthening relationships, or some of these connections and things that you've talked about, you know, what would you change? If you were looking at this system? How would you change or improve it?

**Participant 201** 1:06:43

Okay, so I have to ask avclarifying question. If I had the power to change anything, what would I change? Or, in reality, what is possible to change?

**Interviewer 2** 1:06:55

So it's, that's your- that's yours to say, when you think about leverage points. So what would change? Or what changes might improve this system?

**Participant 201** 1:07:05

Yeah, so one thing that could change the system would be... especially more locally owned, people of color lending institutions. Yeah, not white dominated lending institutions. Yeah, so one of the things that [name] is is trying to reinvigorate is the credit union that they once had out of [organization]. And he's going to do that through North Flint Reinvestment Corporation. But that would be a local lender, that would be attuned to locally owned economies, in disinvested parts of cities and communities. It could be rural also. And a credit union is also a Co-Op. You know, so it's- the lending institutions is also locally owned. And then it invests in local projects, and local businesses and local efforts. I think that would be a critical piece, in a leverage point for the food system.

**Participant 201** 1:08:42

I also think that demonstration projects that aren't set up as demonstration projects, but are. So the success of the North Flint food market is gonna is going to become paramount to avenues for access to larger investors. Because if the North Flint food market can be profitable, and sustained over a long period of times, that demonstrates the viability of investing in that type of locally owned business. Which then opens the doors hopefully, to those white dominated lending institutions.

**Participant 201** 1:09:34

And then, I think another key issue is consumer commitment to buy local. And especially for middle class consumers, to be willing to spend a few more dollars on locally sourced products Yeah, it's like the middle income folks, including myself, who paid a few more dollars for organically grown produce verses chemically grown produce. Although I go back and forth between the two. Yeah. And I'm making this stuff up- five dollars for that onion, I don't think so! Let me go back to the commercially grown, chemical onion over here for 50 cents. That's a little bit better.

**Interviewer 2** 1:10:34

Yeah, I got both hands up on that. I do the same thing. I do a mix and match.

**Participant 201** 1:10:39

Yeah. But that kind of willingness of consumers, especially middle class consumers, to support locally sourced products, that there's a a larger reason to do that beyond my own food consumption, my own nutrition.

**Participant 201** 1:11:08

Yeah, so part of it is education around and marketing around the importance of locally owned economies, and the damage- that destruction of local economies, what that does to communities. You know, and a prime example, in Flint for the African American community, and for other communities of color was the demolition of the St. John neighborhood to put 475 through that area, because all of that was there. The local banking institutions that were black owned were there, black businesses were there. It was almost a self contained community because of racism. But it was a local economic engine, then we white folks came along, and just annihilated it to put a highway through.

**Interviewer 2** 1:12:16

Mm hmm. Yeah, that practice has been repeated across the United States. Lots of times. Yep. Yeah, I'm just gonna interject that yeah, it's kind of

**Participant 201** 1:12:28

So the importance of that, is that generations are beginning to forget that. You know, in this conversation that we were having, the other day in our truth racial healing and reconciliation group. [name] and a few others, so [name] is Latinx, and he said, and we were talking about St. John's. And he was saying, and other people were saying, yeah, exactly where was that neighborhood? I'm trying to picture it. You know, I know, my grandparents had a house, and their business there, and they lost it all. But I can't really picture where that is geographically at in the community. And we were finally pulling up maps, you know, from the 50s, that oh, here the streets that are no longer even streets. But this is where the neighborhood was. Oh, now I know where everybody's talking about. There's nothing there. It's just abandoned land. And 475, and abandoned GM plants. But then, that understanding, if we lose, we lose the history of economic systems. It's like the Black Wall Street in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and the destruction of that. That kind of history, you know, shows the potential of what can be and what the future can be. Because it was done in the past.

**Interviewer 2** 1:14:00

Yes, that's excellent. Thank you for that. So, um, you're doing this is amazing. So would you say if and when you think about change in the system? You probably touched on this just to see if you have anything to add? What would be needed for racial equity to occur? You talked about the lending institution. Is there anything else you would add to that? Or is that pretty much get it for you?

**Participant 201** 1:14:25

Yeah, it's the lending institutions and local ownership

**Interviewer 2** 1:14:29

and local ownership. Got it. Okay. Yeah. Yeah.

**Participant 201** 1:14:33

And this is where the real hard part comes in, in disinvested communities. And it pits one group against the other. And this happens in Detroit too, I know. But the Arabic population and some of the Asian population have really cornered the market on party stores. But they don't live in the community where the party serves that. So now we have, you know, African Americans competing against Arab Americans. And there's tensions between those two groups. You know, it's almost like what the Koch brothers and others did to convince poor white people, that poor people of color were their enemies, when in reality, they're allies. And they're both being exploited. So then that same thing happens because of different accesses to capital to do things.

**Interviewer 2** 1:15:50

hmm. Okay. So you're saying that the access to capital different between minorities?

**Participant 201** 1:15:59

It- I don't know, it might be? I don't really have any [inaudible]. I just know that in the African American community, you know, and [name] talks about this a lot, is, you know, we're being exploited by multiple groups, including people who should be our allies.

**Interviewer 2** 1:16:18

Okay. All right. Great. Wow, this was a lot. Thank you. Is there? I mean, I would ask this question. All of that greatness. Is there anything else important that we either forgot to ask you, or something that might just have pinged in right now that you would want to add?

**Participant 201** 1:16:40

Well I don't think so. I mean, we've gone from huge to minute. And the influencing factories of all them.

**Interviewer 2** 1:16:52

as awesome, thank you. Thank you, Bob. So again, we just we wonderfully, thank you for your participation. As we've already said, confidential research team will be using it. And if you have any questions or concerns, you know how to get in touch with both Chris and I. So feel free, if there's something comes up to you. Just reach out to us. And we can certainly add it to your to your interview. And then also, there's a survey after which we would really like you to complete has dropped it in the chat, if you'd like to click there. Also, she can send it to you via directly in your email. So you could have access to it right there and your email, whichever your choice is, is fine. Here would be my choice. Okay, great. Great, and only takes a couple of minutes. Feel that out. And you're one of the questions in there. As you know, we're trying to make sure we engage as many folks in plan as possible. So if there's folks that you want to point us to let us know, we're working rigorously to touch as many people as we can, they can inform this particular conversation, so any help you get there will be fine. Okay. All right. So again, thank you. Thank you so very much. We appreciate it.

**Participant 201** 1:18:10

Well, I appreciate you, both of you and the work that you're doing. And this is real stellar work that you're engaged. So thank you.

**Interviewer 2** 1:18:17

Thanks, Bob. See you soon.

**Participant 201** 1:18:20

Okay, see you in half hour. Exactly. Thank you. Bye bye. Bye.