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producers, people, food, connection, compost, processing, talking, retailer, farmers, wholesaler, product, sectors, system, guess, programs, added, grow, production, market, price

**SPEAKERS**

Interviewer, Participant 207, Interviewer 2

**Interviewer 2** 00:02

Great. Um,

**Interviewer** 00:03

so some things about informed consent, I sent a document to you, you don't have to read it, but it's there if you want to. But it basically goes over, like the risks and benefits are participating in this research, which is pretty minimal. As well as things like confidentiality, so we won't be sharing, you know, your name or any identifying information in any of the research results. But I do want to talk about two things. One is really your, your option to not answer any of the questions or any part of the question or, you know, withdraw yourself from the research at any time or for any reason. So we really want to make sure that like, you feel comfortable and in control to say, like, I don't really want to talk about that, or like, you know, I don't really, you know, I don't think I can speak to that just feel free to say like, No, I don't want to Yeah, and the other with confidentiality, as we're doing stuff in a virtual space, which is kind of weird. You know, just be aware, if there's anyone on your side who might be in the room are able to hear your comments. We don't care if there's anyone there. Just you know, we've talked to folks who are like at work, so it's like, no, if your boss is next to you, there might be certain things you don't want to say. So just you know, having that sense of what would you be comfortable with people passing by hearing stuff like that. And so your content is demonstrated by your continued participation. Okay, any questions about that? No. Awesome. Okay, so I'm gonna mute myself really quick and call Renee and we'll see if we need to reschedule or if we're good to go. Alright, she will be here momentarily.

**Interviewer 2** 03:20

Okay. No rush. Good morning [Participant 207]. Hey, how are you? I am well forgive the Zoom shuffle this morning. I think all of my things were sitting on top of each other. Sorry about that. Good. All righty. How are you today? Pretty good. All right, great. Well, let's get right in because I understand Chris already took you through the informed consent part of this. Well thank you for that. And as always, it's good to see you. So let's jump in our first question is you know, um, how would you describe your role or experience in the in the local food system?

**Participant 207** 04:48

Well alright I don't know how much time do you have. So speaking specifically to the Flint area as well, I've farmed here for for about eight years, eight or nine and then previously had been working with [Organization] and [Organization], so kind of developing farms and supporting them through Farm Bill programs and all that good stuff. And then now, more so on the, you know, private sector side of things, still developing farmers, but more on the business side as oppose the dollars and cents of everything. developing local markets. Yeah, the main thing I suppose is, on the consumer end is food access and making sure that those those markets are there to support the farmer but then also to service the community.

**Interviewer 2** 06:01

Great. Wow. I didn't know you did all of that. Yeah. That's a good question. Wow. Great. When you, so Flint Fresh, when you think about Flint Fresh, it fits in that same-all of these things covered that the farm developer development?

**Participant 207** 06:27

I would say so. Yeah. Yeah. You know, seed to like, basically the entire cycle. So yeah, developing the farmers, making sure that supplies are there, making sure that supplies have a place to go, getting that supply to that place, and then we even go so far as to now we work with [Organization] on composting, so all of our waste is composted, so farmers can buy the compost, so it's the full circle.

**Interviewer 2** 06:56

Excellent. That's one of my favorite compost sites. By the way, let's have a different conversation. Well, let's get started with reviewing the systems definitions that we're so today we're talking about, you know, the localized loot system sectors, and also the implications of racial equity. And so the definitions we're using are these five sectors, and the first being production, you know, growing boom in livestock crops and livestock and ranging anywhere from the small garden outside somebody's backyard, and to the large farms and producers, which you're very familiar with, that are processing and packaging, looking at, who's washing and packing, and also developing value added, you know, products out of the food, you know, that's grown. And then our next being our wholesale and retail sectors. So those who are now taking those materials, and selling those goods that the producers and value added processors, so the resellers that are retail, so the places where people are going to buy their food, the grocery stores, the convenience, the markets, the restaurants are those retailers. And then last but not least, what you just mentioned, where we collect the food that we don't eat, when we rescue it, whether it's composters or people that are doing food rescue. Any questions about those concepts? Or? Okay, all right, great. Then we'll dive right. So when you look at those, I'm going to ask this question, you pretty much answered it when you described your role. But based upon what you've shared thus far, where would you say that you have the most expertise and from the sector standpoint? To pick one? No, you have to pick just one, where do you do you have the most expertise? It doesn't have to be just one.

**Participant 207** 08:57

I mean, personally, certainly production. For me, personally, if I if I were to pick one, it would be production. But but then the processing and packaging, wholesale and resale and retail would be a close number two. And then waste is only I mean, we don't process ourselves. So it's only like, cursory you know,

**Interviewer 2** 09:23

okay. All right. Great. Well, thank you. Thank you for that. Um, and I'll hand it over to Carissa now to re connect you to the mental model process itself just

**Interviewer** 09:39

Yeah, so the process will be pretty exactly the same basically, as our last interview, but as it's been about a year or maybe over a year, I'll just do a quick refresher about natural process. And so the two big pieces are concepts and connections basically, what are the pieces of the system? And how do they influence and connect to each other. So if I'm, you know, wondering about the issue of traffic in a city, I might say that something that influences the amount of traffic is the number of cars. Once I've decided that there's a connection, and basically have three decisions versus direction, the connection, so what influences the other, so in this one, the number of cars influences how much traffic there is my second decision if it's positive, or negative, um, and that doesn't necessarily mean like good or bad, it just means if one goes up, does the other one also go up move in the same direction, or does it go down move in the opposite direction. So for this one, if there's more cars, more traffic, less cars, less traffic, same direction, and that'll be a positive connection, and we'll get a blue arrow, public transportation might be more of a negative connection onto traffic. Because if you had more or a better public transportation system, then there might be less traffic, as you know, more people are riding a bus or, you know, maybe you have a subway or something that doesn't drive on the street. So it will be a negative connection, and we would have an orange arrow. My last choice here is the strength of the connection, which is really a measure of you know, how impactful or influential is one thing on the other, so number of car traffic might be a strong connection, because it's really the end all be all, if everyone tomorrow decided to not drive a car anywhere, we probably wouldn't really have traffic, whereas public transportation might be more of a medium connection. Because it can be really influential, but you know, maybe it's not gonna fully solve the problem, there are going to be some love driving their cars, no matter what or you know, they work somewhere that isn't serviced by public transportation, or like, they have to move a couch, and they need their friend's truck for it. So it's, you know, still pretty influential, but not more of a medium connection. Something that might be a weak connection could be like the number of cyclists. So you know, it can have an impact on how much traffic there is, but somewhat of public transportation is not going to be you know, the solution to a traffic issue is just increasing. You know, everyone can just ride bikes everywhere, so more of a weak connection. So those are three decisions, you know, what direction? Is it positive? Or is it negative, and this is a weak, medium or strong connection. And the goal of this really, is to make sure that, you know, you can double check my work. So as you talk about your understanding of the system, I'm going to be building the connections, but we want you to be able to step in and say like, No, I wouldn't connect it that way. Or I think it's a positive, not negative, or, you know, even like stuff like, I wouldn't word it that way. I wouldn't say number of cars, I would say something else. So it's very much like your map, we would love you to have ownership over it. And so just as I, you know, we'll, we'll chat, and then we'll stop, and then I'll go through like, Okay, here's how I represented this relationship or this dynamic in this system. Is that accurate to your understanding? Awesome.

**Interviewer 2** 13:11

Cool, awesome. Perfect. And so now the map you're looking at is a reflection of the sectors that we talked about the five sectors, as well as another factor that we'll be discussing to around racial inequity and implications as so based on on your experience and in your roles. You know, how would you see the connections between these different food sectors, based on the roles that you play today? Where would you draw connections in the system here?

**Participant 207** 13:51

We're talking kind of between the five?

**Interviewer 2** 13:54

Yes. And notice that on the retail, you'll recall, we break that one out a bit, so that you see markets as well as stores and restaurants. But yeah, the connections that you see between these based upon your your expertise and the work you do?

**Participant 207** 14:12

Let's see. I think I had this issue before as well. I have like kind of competing thoughts about producers and value added processors. On the one hand, the value added-if the processor exists prior to the producer, that what that processors product is, is going to drive production. But the way that we tend to operate and I don't know if this would be more common or not, is that what the producers decisions are driving what that's actually being processed. So for instance, if if we don't have enough people growing potatoes, then we don't process as many potatoes, right? So the producers, but that but that feeds back on itself, right? So like we then have that conversation with them is like we would love to process more potatoes, please grow more potatoes. So they kind of cycle between themselves and it's really a similar interaction with the wholesalers and resellers. I mean they'll sell what's available, but also if they have you know, we know we can sell twice as much of this, then they'll communicate that to the producers. Yeah, I'm not sure how to how to look at any other way really? Fine. So they all kind of feed back on themselves when it comes to the producers.

**Interviewer 2** 16:12

Mm hmm. No that's perfectly fine. Yeah.

**Participant 207** 16:30

So I guess with... how would you distinguish-so in my mind, retailers and wholesalers or resellers are somewhat similar categories?

**Interviewer 2** 16:45

Yeah, so the retailers you want to think about are the people-where people are actually getting the food, if they're... so the wholesalers are getting it from the producers, the retailers are getting it, you know, they're providing the food to the consumers, they're the ones that have the markets, they have the stores, they have the restaurants, that's where all the people are going to actually eat and, and buy their food from, so that's...

**Participant 207** 17:16

Okay, so retailers a little bit more brick and mortar. The wholesalers are pretty purely the intermediary.

**Interviewer 2** 17:23

Yes, pretty much. Yes. Mm hmm. I

**Participant 207** 17:37

So I suppose there would be... I'm just gonna keep talking. Like the positive and negative effects.

**Interviewer 2** 17:49

That's the best way there, [Participant 207], is just kind of talk about how you're experiencing it and the way food is flowing. And we'll ask some questions along the way, as you're going into that, if it helps.

**Participant 207** 18:01

So there's kind of like, a few competing side things amongst these, right, which is the the price of things, the ability of the producer to grow them, and then the obviously like the market demand, so let's say if the producer grows something, I'll say what's, what's the best way to put this. It's, again, it's that feedback. So the retailer-like their market, or the wholesaler, whichever way you want to look at it-might be able to say, "okay, we can sell this vegetable for this amount, that's what the market will bear." Now, the producer might have already grown a certain amount of that, if they grew too much, they're going to have to sell it to that wholesaler at a lower price, which might not be profitable for them.

**Interviewer 2** 19:20

Okay, so the amount of their production.

**Participant 207** 19:25

Yeah, so like the the amount of production the it's basically there's a balancing act happening between those three components between the producer the wholesaler and the retailer, where it depends which end you start at with this conversation, right. So if the producer has is operating in a vacuum and has already grown a set amount of something. If they grow much, then they're they're going to have to reduce their their price right, and not going to be profitable for them. Then they get that feedback from the others from the wholesale or retail. Basically saying that, okay, we can't sell it. We can't sell that volume of it at this price.

**Interviewer 2** 20:17

Okay, so there's a connection between the wholesaler and the retailer and the price of the food. So the, the price is given a. Yeah, based on their demand, right, there you go. So they're both flowing through the demand both the retailer as well as feedbacking to the farmer too, right, in addition to the wholesaler. Okay. Gotcha. So we got that connection to demand. Okay. All right. So now catch up, so you're saying there's a connection between the retailer and the market demand as well, which also affects price?

**Participant 207** 21:04

Yeah. So like in I'm having trouble separating the wholesaler and the retailer, just not, I understand your definition of them. But it's almost like we'd have a lot of the same lines. Because really the only thing happening the wholesaler is purely in the middle. They're more so just communicating the same information. They're not making a judgement, necessarily, right? They're saying to the retailer, I have this and I have this much from the producers. Yes. Or conversely, they're saying to the producers, I have this much demand, but they're really the mouthpiece for it. Not so much the decision maker.

**Interviewer 2** 21:50

Right. Right. Right. But that's fine. This, we see those connections, because sometimes in the localized people are going direct between producers and retailers, and they're skipping past wholesalers. It's good to see both of them. You know? Okay, so just playing back what you said there's the market demand, you know, retailer that's affecting the retailer, the also the wholesaler, but it's also feeding back through the price, the full price, and that's tied to also the supply from the producer. So the demand is also driving the price as well. Yes. Okay. Okay, does that look at do we did?

**Participant 207** 22:40

Yeah, I'm impressed that you're able to put all that down.

**Interviewer** 22:46

Doing economic models, and this kind of modeling is a little bit hard, because the fancy math is that there's only linear relationships, and so it is fairly simplified, but hopefully the core dynamic of like, this interaction, the balance between demand and supply influences food price, which influences profit, which has huge implication like changes how people do business, basically, very simplified, but hopefully still.

**Interviewer 2** 23:19

Yeah. Right. Right. Okay. Yeah. Other connections that you see?

**Interviewer 2** 23:38

You know, I did hear you say, and [Interviewer], you tell me if it's here, and I'm just not seeing it the way it's seeing. So, the ability to sell it at a certain price also drives the price. Because I heard Brian say that, if the wholesaler the reseller says that they can't sell it at a particular price that's going to drive the price that the farmer can sell it for down. Can you show us where that's reflected, or if I'm not seeing it properly?

**Interviewer** 24:13

Yeah. So I guess I'll draw some connections that it's not only market demand that influences and supply but also wholesalers and resellers do have you know, influencer on the some degree, of impact on-

**Interviewer 2** 24:29

Okay. Okay. All right. Thanks. Sorry. remember hearing that? Okay. Good. Thank you.

**Participant 207** 24:35

Yeah, and then this might get a little bit into the weeds with this, but I guess that's what we're doing. Kind of along those those same lines you were drawing-it will take me a minute to think back through exactly where there is., but ust because-even though it was that interaction with suppliers price, right, it doesn't necessarily mean, like a supply of something could exist, but not hit the market. So if the market is over supplied, the producers unlike somebody that's making a physical product that doesn't have a shelf life, the producer might decide it's not worth their time to harvest it. So we could have a local supply of something, but if there's not demand from retailers, it might be more cost effective for them to just plow it under. You know even though it's there.

**Interviewer 2** 25:44

Gotcha. Gotcha. Mm hmm. That happens. Mm hmm.

**Participant 207** 25:54

I guess maybe something that I hadn't mentioned yet that would have an effect on supply outside of like price and all this is like climate, like weather, things like that. This last year that had bumper crops of certain products, and it's-which would have the effect of depressing price? Labor as well, that's been one of the biggest things that producers have talked about, of late. There's no labor for any step of the process, so that's causing them to essentially, like contract their supply and increase price.

**Interviewer 2** 27:01

And increase price? Yes. So is that labor? Are you saying labor shortages? When you say no labor, is it like labor shortage?

**Participant 207** 27:13

It's a couple different things. One is a lack of seasonal labor, including, like, from from Mexico, in particular, some farmers in [Organization] talked about that a lot. The other piece, though, is, at least the way they're describing it is essentially an unwillingness of people to do that labor, even offering good pay upwards $20 an hour. There, people will not come in and, you know, pick cherries or whatever the crap is.

**Interviewer 2** 27:53

Okay. So seasonal being on a, you know, available labor in terms of the season and then the other is the unwillingness to work for even living wage as what you're saying even?

**Participant 207** 28:13

Right, what they're expressing is that it's not a not an issue of underpayment. It's that-it's the type of work that they're doing.

**Participant 207** 28:24

Because they're trying to pay them, you know, as much as they possibly could, you know, which is more than a lot of places, which is unusual for farm labor. They still can't get people to come and stay.

**Interviewer 2** 28:38

Okay. Okay. So whether it seems though or just willingness Thank you for calling that out. Mhmm, that clarifies some things. Okay. Other things affecting the local sectors?

**Participant 207** 29:11

So, thinking very locally here, there's a lack of value added processing. So there might be capacity of producers to grow more. But because the only real pathway is through what we've just talked about is through the wholesaler through the retailer to the consumer. If there were more value added processing capacity, then that would be a huge market. It's-I just want that clear.

**Interviewer** 30:03

[inaudible]

**Interviewer 2** 30:05

Okay. All right, so you were just sharing that, if the value add capacity-value add processing capacity was higher, it could lead to higher production as well. Yes. Yeah. Okay. Okay. Great. Um,

**Interviewer** 30:51

What are some of the causes that you see of there being a lack of value added processes?

**Participant 207** 31:03

I guess like the, I was gonna say skill, but it kind of falls into two categories, it would be the, I don't know, if it's like, willingness. Like, on the business side, you're going to start a new company. Do you have any experience or desire to make a value added product? Right. So there's that entrepreneurial side of things of, does someone have that experience or ability? And then the kind of, you know, subcategory of that is, is there a labor force that has that skill and ability to make a product, so that all of that, but both of those levels of training?

**Interviewer 2** 32:05

So are you distinguishing the first is like the entrepreneurs, and then the labor force who can actually do the production of the product?

**Participant 207** 32:16

Right. So basically, like, for whatever reason, then this would be obviously all baseless opinion. Like why a person that maybe is an entrepreneur would or wouldn't want to start a food processing business, right. But then even for those that do, they would have a lack of skilled labor, and they would have a lack of infrastructure to get off the ground.

**Interviewer 2** 32:49

Infrastructure-say more about that?

**Participant 207** 32:52

Like processing facility. We would be starting from scratch, even if you just wanted to try out a product. There's not-there's things in the works for that, or like Flint Food Works is something that can kind of work to that end, but we're talking about like a full scale food processor that would take in large amounts of product, that doesn't really exist here.

**Interviewer 2** 33:29

Okay. Okay, earlier, you mentioned materials that you're sending to Country Oaks. Where's that coming from?

**Participant 207** 33:52

So that's all of our waste products. So it's all of the-when we do school processing, so actually, this would be a tie into the value added. So when we process products, all of that scrap goes into the bins, they go to Country Oaks, and then also any just waste in general that like either, you know, part of a box of something, you know, wasn't okay or whatever else or, or it sat around too long and went bad.

**Interviewer 2** 34:27

Okay, coming out on the wholesale side. Yeah.

**Participant 207** 34:30

Yes, that'd be wholesale or retail.

**Interviewer 2** 34:32

or retail. Okay. Okay, great. I'm here to catch that. Okay. All right. Looking good. Okay. Okay.

**Participant 207** 34:57

I guess just sticking with that for a moment. Although Country Oaks is-it's fairly new that they've been doing this at the scale they have. But they're the only one doing it to the best of my knowledge in this area. So even though those pathways exist, that would be the limiting factor is that there's like, it's not ubiquitous, you really have to want to do it. There's there's not an incentive to do it necessarily.

**Interviewer 2** 35:38

Okay. Got it. Okay. Great. Well, let's see. Anything else popping out?

**Participant 207** 36:03

No, at the moment.

**Interviewer 2** 36:06

it'll keep coming. Alright. Well, let's, let's ask you. Let's talk about a couple of other things, then, as we've done a great job. It is a beautiful map. One of the things we wanted to look at was the connection for racial inequity to the local food system. So when you look at the the system, as you've described it here, what are some of the ways that racial equity or inequity impacts participation in the localized food system in Flint?

**Participant 207** 36:41

So with... not sure where to start? A lot of it, I think, anyway, comes back to the training and education, like we're talking about the value added stuff, is that... related thing and specifically about production, like producers? Is that training beyond growing things? So we're fortunate in this community to have a number of organizations that do a lot of like growing education, but there's a distinct lack of business education. Okay, business side of production. Ranging from like, how do you start? Where do you get capital? How do you manage that capital? That's something that that there's not enough And that's been, you know, historically unavailable, so I think USDA is working on that quite a bit more now, in making resources available to because then, when we're talking about racial inequity, a lot of it's going to have to do with that, like, that initial capital to do it. Combined with training, of course, but there's been a lack of access to that capital, and people, I guess, the intermediaries providing access to those resources, right, so like the person at the field office that would make would tell someone that you know, that resources available to them?

**Interviewer 2** 38:44

Mhmm. Yeah, so the business side. Mm hmm. I heard education and training capital, as well as just even knowing that the resource exists access to resources. Mm hmm. Okay, you mentioned the USDA in terms of resources, are you talking programs? Are you talking...

**Participant 207** 39:28

A little bit everything, so they have they have programs for once you're started to help with production, basically, but then as far as in pure dollars, the biggest is Farm Service Agency and farm loans, crop insurance, things like that. And they've had, I mean, well documented their own issues with, you know, injustices and not providing access to those things. But even stepping aside from the race side of it, they really didn't have a [inaudible] design for small scale agriculture, which would be a lot of this group that we're talking about is that if you're starting from scratch, they didn't have a small scale program to support you. And especially if you didn't have like financial track record, things like that, to support a loan. I've been removed from it for a few years, but I believe that they have some programs now that are geared towards small farmers, and more new and beginning farmers. But then the the hang up is the actual people in the offices, are they informing everyone or willing to hold their hand through that process? Or is maybe there a greater need for for outside actors to show show people that this is what you asked for? This is how you do it, you know?

**Interviewer 2** 41:20

Okay, so I heard two things there. I mean, thank you for calling it out the whole bill, beginning and small scale farmer, you know, the gap in terms of just general resources for beginning as far as your farmers, but the last thing she just said, I want to tease that out just a hair, then not only is it the people in the in the USDA offices, but she called out access to other outside actors who could help facilitate access to those resources as well.

**Participant 207** 41:49

Yeah, so I'll just give like as a, for instance, when I was at the [Organization], like it was about to close its doors before I started, and where we wound up at the end was is one of the top performing counties in the state. And part of how that was done was there's, my opinion of course, there's a distinct lack of-I don't know what the best word would be, interest-from from field staff depending on like, basically, you're only going to get as far with them as you are in... You're fortunate to have a field office that is interested in helping you. It's not necessarily that they have to, right, so all of these USDA programs are big cumbersome contracts, and all these things, and it's very easy for someone that doesn't necessarily want to put in a lot of effort to just hand you a stack of papers. Hey, it's all there, you know, come back when you're ready. Whereas there's a limited number of field offices where there's people that are genuinely interested in supporting individuals, and willtake them right through the entire process and hold their hand in the hallway. So yeah, there's just that difference in, you know, I guess, experience that you might expect that, you know, depending on the the people that are present. Okay, so that's where-that's I guess why I mentioned like the external factors is that there's going to be no way to correct something like that across the board is the issue with any government office is maybe the person there is great or the person there isn't great. It's not a reflection necessarily on the program itself, it's just who you're working with as an individual human being. But the element we can control of that is if there's external groups like Flint Fesh or whoever else that we're partnered with, that develops that same knowledge of those programs, so that they can be the ones to say, here's they can hold their hands, because who knows who field office at any given time?

**Interviewer 2** 44:28

Gotcha. So that's the distinction between field office support and external. So yeah.

**Participant 207** 44:34

Yeah, like the direct support from USDA. So USDA says program exists, but then they have person in the office actually administering it, so we can cut that person out of the equation and say, You will tell that person this is the program you want. This is you know, people- anyone on the outside can set that up and and take people through it.

**Interviewer 2** 45:01

I'll take that. Okay, great. Thank you for calling. Okay. Other factors that present? Here's a oppose it a different way. Are there some racialized barriers to participation in the local food system? The things that you might have already covered?

**Participant 207** 45:28

I'm not sure. Um maybe there are and I'm blind to it. I mean the biggest ones for me that just in my experience have been getting over that barrier to starting. That lack of education and things. Because once it gets to the stage of like the producer selling to a wholesaler, or selling to a retailer, that's sort of just universal barrier to producers, not so much one that's racially motivated. I mean, at least locally, I could probably go to other places in the country that you know, where that is a big issue, but here at least I don't see that issue.

**Interviewer 2** 46:27

Okay. All right. Great. Here's one last question to ask at a slightly different way. is, are there ways that the food system contributes to racial inequity?

**Participant 207** 46:42

I guess, in terms of access predominantly, where, you know full well, how, like the leaving of grocery stores here, and the food deserts, lack of transportation, all those things that we talked about before. That are a barrier.

**Interviewer 2** 47:05

Okay. Right, yeah. Okay, great. I'll give her a second...

**Participant 207** 47:17

Yeah, well, this might be a little bit outside of this. But just anecdotally, one thing I've noticed is whether it's racial or income based, there's a common perception that certain type of people aren't interested in this certain type of product, whether the reasoning for that is, oh, they wouldn't know what to do with that, or they, or it's too good of a thing to give away at a distribution or any number of those types of thought processes I tend to notice, and I'm often surprised at the types of things that I guess I was-what I was about to say I am a victim of that myself is that like, having the perception that because someone is getting food assistance, that they aren't interested in, and I don't know like healthy eating fad, like name your fad or whatever. Like, that type of cooking, like all that, that ingredient doesn't make sense for this, and kind of having that preconceived notion that because someone is receiving assistance that they wouldn't also be interested in gourmet cooking, or any number of other things. So being able to provide those things. I think that, especially on the-I forget how you how you guys have been terming it but like a food bank or like a food giveaway, that support system, I think presumes that the recipient is purely in need of calories and if I had anything else to like actually make a whole meal out of it, that some of those things will just be thrown away, or it would be a waste of resources to provide those things.

**Interviewer 2** 49:27

Okay. Okay, great. Thank you. Okay. Right. We good. All right, good. Okay. Okay. And if anything else comes up, just add to it. Um, let's talk a little bit about the things that are having major influences or impacts on the food system. What do you think has been having impacts major impacts and influences on the food system in Flint?

**Participant 207** 50:06

You know, for us, it's been a lack of producers. We've not had any issues with developing markets to sell the stuff, we've had mostly been having issues with increasing supply. Okay. So yeah, we, the more we put out, certainly it's, you know, it's moving in the right direction, I think, but we've had a lot fewer farmers. So essentially the farmers that remain are increasing in size, I mean this is true of all, you know, big ag and all that. Whereas there's a lack of new and beginning farmers that stick with it beyond a year or two. Part of our interpretation of that is the connection between them and the markets, so that the connection of the producer to the wholesaler, the producer to the retailer, they may be interested in growing things, but commonly farmers aren't as interested in marketing their product. So that's kind of like a gap that we try to fill here, is to be that marketer of their product.

**Interviewer 2** 51:48

Okay. And being in Flint, what do you see is the impact of the water crisis on the food system in Flint?

**Participant 207** 52:06

I have kind of competing thoughts. On the one hand, and this is a common sentiment of people here is that there's been such an influx of free food, people aren't willing to buy things anymore. But in practice, I'm not certain whether or not that's true. Certainly those individuals exists that if it's not free, then they're not going to bother. But at the same time, I think enough attention hasn't been paid-kind of like I was talking about a minute ago-that it's presumed what people want to buy, but not enough attention has been paid to asking them what they do actually want to buy. We're able to get that, what they really want to buy information fed back through the system up to the producers, then those producers will grow it, they would be happy to grow it and send that back on down the line to the retailer's right.

**Interviewer 2** 53:20

Mm hmm. Right. Okay. Okay. And it wouldn't be 2022 if we didn't mention, the two year COVID experience that having impacted the food system in Flint?

**Participant 207** 53:42

Kind of in a similar way to what I was just saying, is that there's a big influx of food available right. Now, what I'll say is different now compared to then is, especially from federal dollars coming in, is there's more of a focus on can this be a local product whereas in the past it was purely getting food out or not, not so much that as you know, purely getting, you know, lead mitigating food and things like that. But now there's more of a focus on getting local food, which used properly can be a catalyst to build and develop new and beginning farmers. So if we can communicate to them that there's an enormous market right now to get you off the ground, then that can be enough of a push to get certain people to think more seriously about growing or about increasing their the supply Yeah, there's a, we've also had a lot of interest from schools and institutions and local purchasing. So I'd be getting off of COVID a bit, but that interest from them is having the same effect that I was just talking about. We basically from our perspective, you know, yes, we can supply enough of the product, X to meet your demand. And right now we're sitting at, you know, 20% of that's local. So trying to shift that needle to where 100% is local. And so we're communicating that information back to the farmers to say, we were able to use your product for for these 10 schools, the rest of them might want it too so there's, you know, that there's a potential market of whatever for, for that product at the institutions.

**Interviewer 2** 56:08

Okay, thanks for calling out that distinction under COVID. And you said primarily as federal?

**Participant 207** 56:17

Yes. Yeah. Most federal programs coming through a lot, most recently, the local food purchasing partnerships.

**Interviewer 2** 56:31

Purchasing.

**Participant 207** 56:33

I don't remember what it was previously, in 2020, or 2021. They put out a bunch of grants for the same thing, like a food box. That was was local.

**Interviewer 2** 56:45

Mm hmm. Yeah, I think that was one it was a farm to fork. Yeah, yep. Okay. Okay. All right, great. Any forces that you feel are the main source of, of racial inequity in the food system? As we think about major influences, and impacts? Is there a major force that you think contributes, outside of-if you've already covered it in the things you talked about, that's fine, as well, but just as a closing question on that one?

**Participant 207** 57:30

Yeah, I guess I'd have to think more about the, my gut says the biggest factor is that federal or whether it's state or federal, whatever that the angle of their programs. So without the focus, and not that they would all turn it as a racial issue, but looking at what I'm saying is the foundation of that issue being like things like training or local purchasing, things like that developing the markets that people in our community would benefit from the now having this interest from federal programs and state programs, in supporting local things, rather than just feeding-shifting the focus from just feeding people to actually buying the products from the people, at the same time, is strengthening that system. And the more that those state and federal programs continue in that direction, I think the the stronger the struggle will be for it.

**Interviewer 2** 58:55

Awesome, thank you. Anything you would add to your map that you haven't already there? So going back kind of to [Interviewer]'s traffic example. Is there anything that you're thinking that would have influenced on the things that you have identified on the map that you would add?

**Participant 207** 59:05

I have no idea.

**Interviewer 2** 59:06

There's a lot there. And you've talked about a lot. So as [Interviewer] likes to say the answer could be no, and it may come up in a moment. Okay.

**Participant 207** 59:09

Well, let's say that then.

**Interviewer 2** 59:09

okay. Okay. No worries. So let's let's let's talk a little bit about when you look at the at this map, we want to talk a little bit about leverage points or change that might improve the food system. So again, going back to Chris's example, you know, having more more bus transportation might help improve traffic as an example. So when you're looking, you know, at this map of the current food system, So, what would you what? How would you make change to improve it?

**Participant 207** 59:44

So, this would be... I guess, somewhat internally talking about this because I... Because as I had mentioned we like, [Organization], we kind of do all these things, right. So the way that... I guess that could be extrapolated to like the whole area, I suppose. The way that we look at it internally is like, the value added processing is something of a failsafe for the producers. So there's always going to be this traditional route of products from the farmer grows it, the wholesaler moves it, the retailer sells it to the people, right. And there's always gonna be that back and forth feedback on price and volume and all that. That's like the traditional way of things. If we were to create, though, more value added processing, particularly in frozen items, we can dramatically increase the amount of production. Because the producer is willing to grow it, they're just not going to grow it on a whim. If they know that there's a place to sell it, then they will grow it. So if- that would be a big leverage point, is if we had the the capacity and infrastructure and knowledge built up around value added that they would have a home for all these products. And then in times of need, like with COVID, or with the water crisis, those products are already in the ground and growing. And maybe that stream can be diverted to fresh product. But it's at least already there because they knows it has a home in the value added processing.

**Participant 207** 1:01:41

The... lets see. That also, I don't know if this is just saying the same thing over again. But having that value added seems to have a big effect on, I guess it would be on like, well it wouldn't be a retailer, but like the institutional purchasing. So because there's that interest in buying local, they would like to have more than carrots for the whole winter, or apples, right. So that value added processing exists, then the schools have a source to buy those things year round. So like we've had blueberries year round for the past two years, because we sell fresh when we can, freeze the rest, the schools can use it during the offseason. So developing that side of things seems to be beneficial.

**Interviewer 2** 1:03:09

Okay, yeah, get that year round. Okay. Okay. Other things that you could change to improve it?

**Participant 207** 1:03:30

I mean, that, well, there's the like, the things I've called out before is that just the, you know, as probably everybody says about everything is the training and education and, you know, all of that's obviously necessary for any of this to work. You know, it's not a course in most high schools, like all of- whether we're talking production or the business side of things. That seems to be the biggest hurdle is even someone that is very interested in doing something the abstract... will even perceive barriers, even if the barrier isn't large, just the lack of knowledge about it makes the perception of that barrier large. That's what we encountered a lot with, like when I was talking about the federal programs. It seems scary because you don't know anything about it. But if someone is there to just say, it's not that scary here, you know. it's that the barrier itself is not actually that bad. It's just the the perception of the barrier that makes people not even start. In that sense very simple training and education would probably help.

**Participant 207** 1:05:07

I guess the... you know, again, composting isn't like a major focus of ours but any type- I guess you've got it there already- is like any way to incentivize people to do it or on the composters side to streamline people's access to it. So I think that's been the success of Country Oaks, you don't have to really desperately want to compost your things, they bring the bin to you, and you fill it up and they take it away. All you have to do is put it in the bin as opposed to the dumpster. That like simplification. And then if there were any way to incentivize that, to get more people doing it, especially for retailers, I'm sure that would be the the hardest piece would be to get retailers to compost.

**Participant 207** 1:06:20

There's a like... Potentially, there's a leverage point between wholesalers and value added, even if it's just communication. And I guess like communication on two levels, one in the same type of feedback that we've talked about, you know, oh, they know that they can find access to a lot of these products XY and Z that might drive what the value added processor is processing. The other piece there though is.. shoot I'm losing it. So many things to look at. It'll come to me in a minute.

**Interviewer 2** 1:07:18

It was between the wholesaler and the value added. Yeah, you say two type two aspects. Two types of access to communication. One was the types of foods available driving what they make. That was the one trigger for you.

**Participant 207** 1:07:40

Oh, I think I was thinking, not unlike the relationship they would have with composters. But if there was some type of mechanism to where they could unload things before they went bad. So that's something we do internally is like if we know we're not going to be able to move enough of something we bought, first step isn't put it in the compost. The first step is, can we make a value added product out of that, then the latter step is we can't. Okay, then either it's donated or it it's it has to be composted.

**Interviewer 2** 1:08:26

Okay, so you are doing some donations of food rescue?

**Participant 207** 1:08:32

Yeah, if- Yeah, if, I mean, we gotten to where we're running pretty, pretty trim, you know, like, we've got a pretty good handle on things, but, and obviously, like, if... most of the times we're composting whole things, it's because it's, it's not usable. That's no, fine, technically, but it's not you know, we're not even going to give it away. But yeah, if there- if we find- we've occasionally especially with like highly perishable things like, like dairy items and stuff like that. If well, we over ordered, and, you know, rather than throw this all out, yeah, well, we'll take it somewhere.

**Interviewer 2** 1:09:14

Okay. Okay, and the somewhere is?

**Participant 207** 1:09:21

It's usually someone we've done business with. The most recently we've taken a lot of things to St. Luke's New Life Center for their food distributions. And there were maybe a bit unique in this respect, but there tends to be a lot of good back and forth. So we, if they have a grant or funding or just need a source for produce or whatever the product may be, we can facilitate that. And then conversely, now we have a relationship. And if we have our own resources, or you know, we might get a grant to do a food distribution, and they would be one of the sites. So there's a good, good networking between all the the nonprofits and mission organizations.

**Interviewer 2** 1:10:20

Okay. And if I could pull it, just tea, but just a hair, I heard two things that trigger that. One is if there's an over order, you know, this move food, you will donate to folks, and the other is a grant opportunity. And you might circulate food between the two, you know, over orders or grant, you know, grant programs for food, create those opportunities, and that's coming out of the wholesale side, correct? Or is that-

**Participant 207** 1:10:51

It's kind of both wholesale and retail? I guess you could, I mean, you can look at it whichever way.

**Interviewer 2** 1:11:00

You tell me, I'm asking [laugh].

**Participant 207** 1:11:03

So, so, we very... like the... Okay, the dairy example I gave that would be more more of an example of wholesale because like, essentially, well, we ordered two pallets of milk, and someone backed out, and we have an extra pallet of milk. Right. So that's, that's certainly a wholesale, you know, dropping it off, you do what you want with it. More commonly, it's, we actually put the boxes together. So we're not just dropping you off 10 cases a green peppers and 20 cases, you know, we're not just dumping food on you, it's we've already put the boxes together for you. Whether that's because we're donating it or because you purchased it for your distribution. One of us had a grant or you know, whatever, whatever the case may be where it's a little bit more of a retail. Because a lot of times the- if they have a grant, it's not always that they want to do a distribution, because we do home delivery. So especially with seniors and different populations in the city. They're actually rather than having a food drive at their location, it's more practical to hire us to prepare and and deliver the food ourselves.

**Interviewer 2** 1:12:30

Okay. Okay. Good. Good. What great we got that Carissa, should I move on, you got it. Okay, wonderful. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Um, and after looking at all of that, we talked about a lot of stuff. Yeah, anything? Is there anything we either didn't ask or something that's kind of pinging back to you now, as we close out, or?

**Participant 207** 1:12:59

Nothing's really jumping out at me. No.

**Interviewer 2** 1:13:01

Okay. But a lot of that beautiful map. So thank you for that. So as always, Ryan, we really appreciate your you know, your participation. And just a reminder, as we do these interviews, we basically are the affirmations you know, confidential we share it is research team to do the things that we need to do. If you should have any questions, concerns, or otherwise, following the interview, you have chrysalis contact information, please, you know, don't hesitate, just reach out. And she'll, she'll take care of that. And you have two options in terms of your evaluation, which we definitely would appreciate you taking. We've got a link in the chat, which you can click on and also Chris's, emails them out. So if it's easy that way, as well, you can do that, you know, either way, but we definitely appreciate both your time today and in completing the evaluation. So thank you so much. Yeah.

**Participant 207** 1:14:00

We can make sense of all that.

**Interviewer 2** 1:14:04

Oh, yeah, we did we got is a beautiful map. I mean, there's really good stuff. I mean, really, really appreciate you taking the time to do it. There's not a great perspective there. Thanks. All right. We'll see you soon. Take care. Bye. Bye.