212

Thu, 3/10 12:45PM • 43:34

**SUMMARY KEYWORDS**

restaurants, business, people, connections, producers, sectors, questions, produce, food, wholesalers, impact, inequity, farm, system, harder, farmers, thinking, local food system, customers, composters

**SPEAKERS**

Interviewer, Participant 212, Interviewer 2

**Interviewer 2** 00:00

Awesome, thank you. Alright, so thank you for your permission to record, the recording is now on. And again, your participation is totally voluntary. You can choose not to answer any of the questions or even to withdraw from the research at any time, if you desire, I will keep the recording confidential within our research team. And we won't share or, or your name or any identifying information in our research results that we develop. However, you might be mindful. If there's anyone around you in a room nearby, that's able also to hear your comments for your own sake for confidentiality. And you can follow up after the interview, if you have questions by emailing Carissa twist of your contact person for that. So your consent is demonstrated by your continued participation in the interview process? Do you have any questions before we move into any? No, no. All right, cool. Beans. Thank you for that. Now, here's, here's the, here's the hardest question of the day for you. How would you describe your role or experience with the local food system?

**Participant 212** 01:18

Um, I would say, you know, in the last 13 years, I see the-my role in the local food system would be supporting the local urban farmers every season and supporting the farmers markets, you know in seasons, and buying my produce even off season from a local produce company. So I see my role is, you know, I tried to use everybody local, you know, I even go out of my way to try to use local. So I'd say it's, it's a pretty big roll, I guess. Yeah. I mean, I'm not sure I think that's what you're looking for. Right.

**Interviewer 2** 02:15

And I've got, the next question will also give us some additional insight. So thank you for Thank you. Um, as we talked about this particular set of interviews, we're working with the five different food sectors in the local system, the first being production, you know, people are growing crops or raising livestock. And that can be anywhere from your backyard to the larger scale, you know, growers and producers. The second sector is the processing, which we're including the packaging in that as well. So the folks who are taking the things that have grown in animals of wash pack, and even making value added products out of that include that in that sector. So it was a tomato today, it's some really amazing salt. So tomorrow, we're looking at the wholesalers, where the products and goods are actually gathered together and then sold by somebody other than the person who actually produced them or process them. And then our retail section where we all go to buy food. So the grocery stores, the convenience stores, the farm stands, farmers markets, the produce box restaurants, caterers, you know, all those kinds of folks who are selling food to consumers. And then last but not least, because we can't eat everything or we don't eat everything. What who's handling and managing and collecting the waste, whether it's food that's not edible, or even the just Reese redirect could be edible. Yeah, absolutely. So our composters and even some of our food rescue folks that are handling waste as well. Any any questions about those sectors or comments about those sectors? No,

**Participant 212** 04:08

No, I mean, uh, no, not really. Well, I guess if you have one question like so, most of them are going to be all like, we're trying to keep it local, right? Like all the local, you know, people that do the processing, and then the local producers at the local retail, sell the wholesalers, things like that, right?

**Interviewer 2** 04:27

Yeah, so we're gonna hone in on what's happening on the local level. Yeah. That's what we're gonna hone in on today. Yeah. So when you you look at these, you talked a bit about your role, where do you see yourself having the most expertise in these sectors?

**Participant 212** 04:46

are using Let's see here, oh, man, gosh, I mean, I I buy from producers, I buy from retail, I buy-I guess production, processing packaging, wholesale and retail, I guess I'm-I can-I'm involved with in for the five at least. Whether it's straight from the farm to the table production, we could do our own processing here, our own washing and of all the produce, and even buying wholesale resale from different local farmers. But I guess a little bit of, atleast four of the five anyways.

**Interviewer 2** 05:46

Okay. All right, you're engaged all across the board there. All right, we,

**Participant 212** 05:51

we used to do waste. Or they would drop off a five gallon bucket and we'd fill it up and they would pick it up every week, a couple five gallon buckets and they would the composters would do that. So we used to do that, but we haven't done that a few years.

**Interviewer 2** 06:07

Okay. All right. Great. Well, excellent. Thank you. Carissa, as you say, when you came on, it's been a year since we were together last. So Chris is gonna, for me it reconnect, you realize you with the mental modeling software that we use to help create your, your, your map, okay.

**Interviewer** 06:33

Awesome, so the process is going to be the same. But as it has been like a year, I'm just gonna do a little refresher. So as we build a map together, as you answer questions and share your knowledge and experience, I'll be drawing connections between concepts. And we really want to make sure that you, you know, have ownership over it, so you can jump in. Like, I wouldn't write it like that, I wouldn't word it like that, I wouldn't connect it like that, or sort of like, correct my work to make sure that it's you know, as as accurate as possible. Awesome. So as we're going through and connecting stuff, this is just gonna be like a little example, if I'm looking at the issue of traffic. And Rene, I'm going to meet you for a second because of the feedback. Because A, so I might say that the number of cars influences how much traffic there is. So I put a positive connection. And it's positive not because it's like good or bad, but because if one increases, the other one also increases. So more cars more traffic, whereas public transportation might be a negative connection. Because if there was more public transportation or a better public transportation system, there might be less traffic as more people are riding buses, or if it's a big city, they might have subways or something. So that's sort of positive blue arrow versus negative and orange arrow. And finally, I have to choose the strength of the connection. So whether it's weak, medium, or strong, and this is really sort of how impactful or influential is one thing on another, so the number of cars might be a strong impact, a strong relationship, because if for some reason, tomorrow, everyone decided not to drive the cars, we would have no traffic. Whereas public transportation might be more of a medium connection. Because it can be pretty influential. But it's not the end all be all, even if we had, you know, places with amazing public transportation system, or people who still really love driving their own cars, or they live or work somewhere that's weird. You know, to get to that's, it's not really convenient. So, you know, pretty influential, but maybe not a super strong relationship. A weak relationship might be something like the number of cyclists. So if we increase the number of people biking places, it would have some impact on traffic, but it's not a really like, realistic solution to traffic, you know, like people have to carry groceries or like move a couch or something. Like it's not gonna be a solution to the problem. And so yeah, this this sort of the decisions of the direction if it's positive or negative, and you know, how strong is the relationship? Do you have any questions about this process?

**Participant 212** 09:29

No, I think we're gonna

**Interviewer** 09:40

Oh [Interviewer 2]. You're still muted. Sorry.

**Interviewer 2** 09:46

All right. So so here's all the sectors that we introduced you to a moment ago. And there's one other concept that we'll talk about as we get into the conversation is the implications of racial equity. inequities on on the sector's. So with your experience he were looking at, you know, what do you see as connections between, you know, the work that you're doing, and across these different sectors in the food system? You started talking about that a little bit when we were going through it. So help us see how you see the connections? Oh,

**Participant 212** 10:25

I see, owning a deli-a business would help-would help the resalers- would help the wholesalers, would help the producers, I mean, even the retailers, and it would-my business operating would help these businesses stay in business. So not necessarily me like reselling, but buying from all these different sources, if I'm buying straight from the farm or from other wholesalers, you know, I think the value of all these helps me- I mean my business helps all these other businesses or other components of the-yeah, of the producers [laughter]. I think without businesses, we would have less of these, we would have less need for retailers and wholesalers and producers, that producers will produce less, so then the wholesalers wouldn't have as much to sell, and neither would the retailers, wouldn't have anything so. I think, yeah, I mean, without people like me or businesses without me, we wouldn't have really any of these guys, anything helping them, you wouldn't even have the composters that, you know, take advantage of all the scraps leftover from the restaurants.

**Interviewer 2** 12:16

And as [Interviewer] is going along the way we'll check in with you to see if we're getting your connections the way you see them.

**Participant 212** 12:23

Yeah. Yeah, it looks good. Yeah, stores, markets, and restaurants are probably the ones running or keeping all these other components busy, in business, producing, selling. So yeah, they all-you know, without the, you know, the restaurants, the markets in the stores,without these guys in business, we wouldn't have all the other components at all.

**Interviewer 2** 13:06

Okay, good. So as we're thinking about that, and as a restaurant, are there do you see-things that either support that or are barriers to these connections that you've made? Because you said that-that's a really excellent point that the restaurants are really-that the restaurants, stores, markets are really driving the existence of all these other localized aspects. So are there things that helpthat, or things that hinder that?

**Participant 212** 13:51

I think having connections with the actual producers, for the restaurants, brings you fresher, more like, yeah, just a more fresh aspect on food, rather than getting them from the retailers or even the wholesalers really. I think having a direct line with the producers or the restaurants would be probably the best way to go for restaurants, that way you're always guaranteed the freshest possible product and being able to, you know, for the restaurant service to their customers, you know, getting the freshest food possible, getting it right from the source.

**Interviewer 2** 14:55

Anything getting in the way of that, any barriers to that connection that you just talked about?

**Participant 212** 15:00

Maybe you don't know all the producers so getting to know him or having like somebody at like the Michigan State Agricultural introduce you to a lot of these farmers maybe in the area. So maybe challenges in knowing the places to go are the right people to talk to, to make that connection with the producers of the produce, you know. Yeah, different-how I'd say like-not farmers, but the people that helps you, introduces you to the different farms. So not so much the middleman but even, yeah, maybe I'm trying to think who would-who would be-like Edible Flint would be probably a good place to start. They probably know all the different producers are the different farms in the area that you can connect to as a restaurant. So different organizations maybe help you out, help restaurants out to bridge that gap between restaurants and the farms, so you can add that precious produce and precious food boxes.

**Interviewer 2** 16:32

Okay, good. Other things impacting the other connections you made?

**Participant 212** 16:43

Weather, I mean, weather, what's going on in the world [laughter], yeah I said weather, yeah, business - I mean, if your businesses aren't getting business, then they're not buying produce, so. Or inflation, like gas prices, I mean, like we're seeing now, in today's day, the price of gas going up, or just the price of everything going up, you know, starts slowing people buying stuff down, because everything's-the price of everything is going up. So like, yeah, to get the produce or food from the producers, you know it might-if I can get it right from them great, but if I have to go to a wholesaler or retailer, the price is going to automatically jump. So yeah that'd be another way to cut costs top. for a restaurant, if you're going straight to the producer, cutting out the middleman, and not having to pay any extra costs, and that way you could reflect the savings on your customers as well.

**Participant 212** 17:40

Great, excellent. You want to play anything back towards? Or ask about some of your connections?

**Interviewer** 18:21

So I'm always modeling. No, it's great. It's fantastic. I want to make sure I'm getting it-just modeling, like, drawing relationships between economics stuff is always just weird in this program, because it's not really well suited for how complicated and dynamic economics is. So it's like, how do we represent something accurately? And very simply? Yeah. So I think I've got sort of this connections between food freshness, you know, direct from the source, there's partnerships, and that can be, you know, there can be a challenge to make those connections and meet partners, but the people and there are people in organizations who can bridge sectors and can sort of help with that process. But you know, it's still a challenge. Something that's really important is the demand for customers, that's something that you know, drives this whole interconnected system, it can be influenced by inflation, and then the pieces I'm adding right now as a sort of food costs and how that can you know, drive back into business and drive back into demand from customers. I'm going to add a few connections and we'll see if you like it.

**Participant 212** 19:36

Okay.

**Interviewer** 19:37

So I'm thinking we're gonna add-it's starting to get messy which is bad visually but awesome from the research perspective, because the reality is that the system is really messy and complicated. Okay, I'm going to do it that way, and that makes no sense. but also... Food costs also are important for profits, which feeds back into, like, you can't survive, you can't make a profit off of what you [inaudible]. I'm just going to expand. Great, anything about this that you would change or add to?

**Participant 212** 20:53

No, I think it looks pretty good.

**Interviewer** 20:59

Now, if you don't mind me hopping in, I do have one question, have you ever heard of, you know, a lot of people in Flint who are doing value added processing? So, you know, taking raw ingredients and making products from them?

**Participant 212** 21:12

Um, I-not a whole lot. I mean, actually, no, I really don't, I mean, not selling like at the market level, you know, just doing it for, you know, for their own benefit, maybe or for their own family. But other than that, I really don't know many-I mean, I would think there would be a lot of people doing that, but not many that I know of. And, yeah, just an example, my aunt and uncle started a farm, you know, and they started canning all their leftover produce, and man, I swear to god, that was like, the best. Like, when I would take stuff out of those cans and make chili or tomato sauce, or spaghetti or something that was like the freshest-oh, man, it was the best chili, the best spaghetti I've ever had, you know, just taking those fresh ingredients that they can-you know, but I don't really know anybody that's doing it at a market to sell it, you know. It would be cool if they did.

**Interviewer 2** 22:44

Any other factors that are possibly influencing, because you made connections between your restaurants, as well as the wholesalers-anything there we want to take a look at, that's either supporting local or hindering, you know, local?

**Participant 212** 23:04

So, I know a while back, not too far back, there was companies that would, they were like, they would act like the middleman and they would go to different farms or different organic farms and get like a list of all their items that they sold or made or produced, and then they would take that list and go to all the different restaurants for them. And I don't remember what the names of them were, but at one-just a few years ago, there was quite a few of them that did that, that that would either do it for like-they would do all the meats or they would do all the produce or, and they would just represent like the Michigan based local farmers that either sold like the beef for the the produce. So that would be-they would act like the middleman basically between the producer and the restaurant, and for a while there, there was quite a few of them going around but I haven't I haven't seen them or heard of them in a couple of years. So I don't know if that slowed down or stopped or maybe because of COVID It kind of went on the back burner, just people with COVID matter of fact. So I think that that would actually help the farmers and the producers and the restaurants engage more getting more fresh food and you know they could be the go-to-guy to help the producers sell to the restaurants, and the restaurants get the freshest foods, and the produce they could possibly get so yeah facilitators, I like that.

**Interviewer 2** 25:06

Okay. Right. Yeah.

**Participant 212** 25:15

So that would help people that didn't know-so that would help the people that didn't know the farmers, or didn't know where to go, right to the source. That'd be just another another way to be a facilitator between the two.

**Interviewer 2** 25:33

All right, great. I'm wondering, you mentioned a couple of things. You talked about the impact of weather on this, just kind of looking at that one hanging out there by itself. Besides production, anything else tied to that, or is that primarily what you want?

**Participant 212** 25:59

Yeah, I mean, weather, the production I mean, it could possibility-you know, like, COVID could possibly be a part in it, too. You know, I mean, the more that that's going around, the less people are going to buy, the less the farmers are going to farm I guess, I mean, everything-seems like everything slows down when there's like a pandemic going around, even though the demand is there. They sure don't get much product out. You have less-oh, you have less workers for the farmers because of COVID. I think last year, wasn't a big part of this was COVID, it was COVID related? Last year, when we talked?

**Interviewer 2** 27:01

Yeah, I mean, even thinking about it now. I mean, a year later, what are you seeing as, you know, other impacts of COVID on the food system as you're looking at it?

**Participant 212** 27:10

A lot, I mean, really, farmers can't find help, I mean, they're gonna be-I don't know what they're going to be doing-but it's going to be hard for them to, you know, get their crop in and or even put a crop in the without help, and it seems like right now, especially right now, the last few-three, four months, it's been-people just don't want to work. They don't want to-and I know a lot of bigger companies have been resorting to hiring immigrants from other countries, bringing them in and hiring them and putting them on staff. So, and I know, dang well that there are jobs available all over this country and there's a ton of people not working, so for us to have to bring in immigrants in to work, when we have people that can work that just don't want to, I mean, that just doesn't settle well with me.

**Interviewer 2** 28:22

Okay, so the availability and tying that to willingness to work, that's what I heard. Okay, that's one on COVID impacts. Okay, while we're talking about impacts, let's also, because you're, you know, you're in Flint, so let's see what your thoughts are about, you know, what has happened relative to the water crisis and the impacts on the system?

**Participant 212** 28:55

Oh, well, you know, when the water crisis did happen, nobody was-everybody was afraid to obviously go to restaurants that used any kind of Flint water to make stuff for use, use water to make, or for their drinking, for their pop, or for anything, you know. So that took a toll on a lot of businesses when the Flint water crisis happened. And even to this day, you know, it still sticks in people's minds when you come to Flint, it's like I better stick with a bottle of water, I don't know where, you know, what you made if you used Flint water to make this or to make that or to use water with this or that, you know, it's just, they still have that, you know, thought process in their head about when we did have the Flint water crisis and how bad it was. I think it's getting better, but, you know, I think people still have that in their thought.

**Interviewer 2** 30:08

Okay. Are there any other major influences you think going on right now that are impacting the food system in Flint besides COVID and water, which is still around?

**Participant 212** 30:21

The war's probably going to impact a lot of stuff. I mean, if this, if this war keeps going, and it's gonna-it might hinder supply and it might, with the price of gas going up, it's gonna raise food costs, it's gonna raise a lot of stuff. Really, it's gonna be interesting to see how this pans out really. Hopefully it doesn't last too long, and gas prices don't go sky high. I'm sure, we'll be paying five bucks a gallon soon, or more.

**Interviewer 2** 31:05

Mm hmm. You mentioned earlier, yes, absolutely, you're already telling us, prices. You mentioned earlier, you know, just the importance of the restaurants, markets, and stores in kind of driving other activity. Are there are either barriers or factors that really helped contribute to that, you know, being able to be that force that engages and keeps everybody else, you know, productive in the local food system?

31:47

Customers, probably, would help. Having a good customer base and clientele for the restaurants, markets, and stores, obviously, the more customers that buy, that means the more the producers can produce themselves. So but yeah, if we-any more barriers...

**Interviewer 2** 32:16

Is there anything preventing that? I mean, you talked about, yes, customers are important, but is there anything helping or hindering that?

**Participant 212** 32:24

Yeah. Well, when it's sunny out, we get busy and when it's not sunny out, it's not busy. The impact of weather. I don't know, man, I mean, I'm just-I'm not sure.

**Interviewer 2** 32:55

No worries, you got it. So just, you hit on a couple of things around, they're such a driving force, just wondering, getting in the way or anything that helps that. So it may come-it may come back. I like to introduce, we talked about the fact that one of the things we're exploring is the impact of racial equity or inequity on the localized sectors of the food system. Can you speak a little bit about that? Are there things that you, that you would say that, you know, impact that the racial equity or inequity impacts the participation in the food system?

**Participant 212** 33:37

So refresh my memory here, when you're calling inequity or equity? You know, when I think equity, I'm thinking they have a stake in the involvement of it, and so what does inequity mean?

**Interviewer 2** 33:54

Yeah, if you think about the things that create disparities or create different kinds of outcomes, so either way there's something that's equitable and you know, whether it's [inaudible] your outcomes or inequity on the flip side of that coin, okay. Yeah.

**Participant 212** 34:16

I don't know man, I'm trying to you know, cuz I try to be you know, I'm very open to-and I am being employed you know, I love the city I love the people, so it's hard for me to-I don't know, you know, and I-

**Interviewer 2** 34:38

So beyond yourself, do you see any things that are, you know, have impact on the system at large and maybe not you personally but do you see your experience anything or have seen anything that?

**Participant 212** 34:53

Um, gosh, you know, like minority owned businesses maybe? Or them having a harder time maybe with I mean, being in business, man, maybe...

**Interviewer 2** 35:21

And I'll take a page out of [Interviewer]'s book is, you know, based on your experience. Yeah...

**Interviewer** 35:33

I can give an example if that will be helpful.

**Interviewer 2** 35:36

Sure.

**Participant 212** 35:37

Yeah. Example? Yeah. Yeah.

**Interviewer** 35:39

So I mean, it wouldn't be a racial inequity, but it would be like a gender inequity. Like, if I was starting a farm or trying to buy a restaurant, it might be harder for me to get like a loan from the government. Because, like, the agent, I was working with, like, didn't think that I was capable because I'm a woman, you know, so this system makes it harder for someone to start a business.

**Participant 212** 36:07

Right. So I was thinking that's where you guys were kind of going towards, but I see, you know, and I see a lot of minorities in general trying to start businesses and keeping businesses, but I think they may have a harder time, just what I see here, in Flint, a harder time getting the financing or getting the loans to move farther or to move their business along, or to get their plan in motion, I think it's a little bit harder for them. You know, maybe I guess, this is what I've seen and what I've experienced you know, with the grants that they provide, they try to help the minority and because, you know, Flint is, you know, what, 75% minority anyways, and so they try to, you know, they try to help everybody in, and they do try to help the minority in every way. And I've seen a lot of new businesses in downtown Flint and the farmer's market open up in minority owned, so there's got to be a connection there somewhere that they're getting help. I know, for one, Metro Community Development has helped me and it's helped a lot of minority businesses in the area, with loans and you know, just trying to keep their business or to start a business. So I know there's people out there, they're in different organizations that will help. And I just think that if they see a good business model and a good business plan, no matter what color or what race, age, whatever you are, if they see a good business plan, and somebody that's willing to put 120% into it, I don't think anybody will have a problem helping those people out. You know, it's not being able to see for themselves, what kind of person they are maybe that-or how hard a worker they are, that would hinder anything of getting help of any kind. If that makes any sense.

**Interviewer** 38:51

Hey, you're muted. Oh, sorry. No, [Interviewer 2] is muted. Sorry. Oh, she

**Participant 212** 38:56

Oh she was muted. Okay.

**Interviewer 2** 38:57

Yeah. There we go. All right. So thank you for that. Thank you for that, As we look at your-as we look at your map, [Participant 212], and we know that the Flint food system is where it is right now. What would you consider opportunities to change and improve the system, in looking at what your understanding is, what would you make changes in to actually improve the food system in Flint?

**Participant 212** 39:25

Maybe have, like one of those... the people that bridge the facilitators between the producers and the farms and the restaurants, or, you know, I think there might-there should be more of those maybe or that could help businesses get the connections they need to get the fresher produce and too-or the fresher food, I think maybe there should be more of those that to help businesses like that, to help them grow and to help them, you know. Cause you know, obviously it's-when you're opening a restaurant you want the freshest and the best food you possibly can and you got to get that from the source and it's like new businesses opening up, they don't know where to start. One of these-whether it's the city or it's a nonprofit in the area or whatever-that has the ability or the capability, or even the partnerships up with different producers that would help. You know, like, we call it for new businesses, information-oh my gosh, what's that word I'm thinking of, oh my gosh, like, oh my gosh. I can't think of the word. Yeah, just the the facilitators, the bridge. Yeah, it's like, when you open a business in Flint, like, say, just for an example, like, if you open one in downtown Flint, the city of Flint would come to you and they give you like a pamphlet, or maybe like helpful tools to help you learn like, where all the producers are in Flint, where all the urban gardens are, where are the you know, the names of the people that they can contact to get all this, you know, so maybe something like that, you know?

**Interviewer 2** 41:41

Okay, a resource. Yeah, it's a resource. Okay. That's great. Um, anything else? Because we've asked you a lot of questions about this. And especially when you think about it, did we miss asking you anything? Or is there anything this is kind of popping in that you would add to anything you've already shared?

**Participant 212** 42:11

No I think that's good. I mean, I think yeah, I think that summed it up pretty good.

**Interviewer 2** 42:17

Okay, wonderful. Well, we're glad that we were able to find a time that works well, to get to get you back in this conversation, we do deeply. Appreciate that.

**Participant 212** 42:28

TNo problem, hank you.

**Interviewer 2** 42:30

And the interview again, reminder is confidential. Feel free to follow up, you have to resist contact information. If you have any questions, concerns, or other things come to mind. And you're like, hey, I thought about this right after we got off, and you want to let us know. We're doing. So Chris is gonna give you a link to a survey. And you can either click the link or she's going to also send it to you via email. So you'll have it either way, whichever is most convenient for you. And we definitely appreciate your feedback on that. And a couple of questions in there. Ask if you know of anybody that you feel that we really should have in this conversation and you will refer we're going to be talking to people till the end of the month. That would be excellent. Well, so we are good to see you. And

**Participant 212** 43:23

yeah, good to see you. Thank you. Yeah,

**Interviewer 2** 43:25

let's stay connected. Alright, thanks a lot. Hey, take care. Alright, bye bye for now. Bye