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farmers, people, flint, wholesalers, farm, crops, food, hoop houses, year, producers, programs, market, connection, talked, small farmers, mm, grow, buy, farmers market, question

**SPEAKERS**

Participant 220, Participant 217, Interviewer, Interviewer 2

**Interviewer 2** 00:00

Great, wonderful. All right. So now we are recording and thank you for that your participation and voluntary, you can choose to answer, you know, if not to not answer any question or even withdraw from the research at any, any moment in time. If you do decide to do that, we basically use this recording and we keep it confidential within our research team. And we won't use it or share your name or any identifying information in the things that we publish the research results, you know, that we that we publish, be mindful, while I guess this won't apply, you're in your car by yourself. But be mindful if there's anybody near you, that can hear what you're saying so that you're competent, that you're mounting your confidentiality just as we are. Okay. I'm following this. If you have any questions, you have our contact information versus your main point there, just reach back out because Something may come up later, you know, and you say, hey, I want to share this. By all means, reach out. Your consent to participate is demonstrated by your continued involvement in the interview. You have any questions before we jump in? Nope. Okay, cool. Thanks. Alright. So the first question we have for you is how would you describe your role and or your expertise, your experience in the local food system.

**Participant 217** 01:28

I'm currently as co owner of the local grocer, small community, grocery store and deli and meal prep and catering and all things as well as a stall at the farmers market. Oh, we are now the only people that grow food to sell in the Flint Farmers Market inside at the moment. All the rest of resellers and then owner of a small 9.75 acre farm that grows all year round. With hoop houses and passive solar greenhouses.

**Interviewer 2** 02:16

Ah hoop houses in passive solar greenhouse.

**Participant 217** 02:20

That's it's the same thing. It's the same thing. Okay, okay.

**Interviewer 2** 02:24

Okay, so, all right, awesome. Awesome. Awesome. Thank you. Thank you for that. Um, we want to start out with some some definitions. So we talked about we're focused on five sectors, local sectors, so we'll share some definitions and walk through those first. Okay. All right, great. Cool. All right. So production, no surprise there, right. With these five sectors, so whether people are doing crops or livestock, all scales, Aaron from your from somebody's backyard, all the way up to gardens, like your firm, like you're saying I was of I've got a farm. And, and in raising livestock as well, potentially, we put the processing and the packaging together. So people who are taking those materials, washing them packing them, as well as those that are doing value added products. So the value added processors inside of that. The next sector, we're looking at the wholesalers, who are who are reselling, so they're gathering, you know, produce and goods, you know, from others, and then, you know, selling them so they're not the producers themselves. Then we have the retailers, folks like yourself, you fit many categories here, your grass, fed all of them. There you go. You got the grocery stores, the convenience stores, the farm stands, the farmers market, the caterers, the restaurants, but anywhere. So fitting in that category. And then of course, you know, in terms of waste, we can't eat all parts, and we don't eat everything. So what are we doing with that food? Are we composting it? Are we rescuing it, you know, and doing something else with it? So those are all the categories and I think you already answered this question, but we're going to ask it again. Anyway. In these categories, where would you see yourself having the most experience?

04:34

Actually, production is where I have the most experience. Okay. But we dabble in all of those, including capturing our, our waste and composting it back at the farm, as well. Hey,

**Interviewer 2** 04:51

great. All right. Well, this is gonna be cool. Chris is going to refresh your memory because it's been a year probably since we last time we did the mental model with You. So she's gonna take you through an exercise to refresh how this works.

**Interviewer** 05:05

So I'll just go through a quick example as sort of a refresher. And but overall, I just want to say that it's, it's very much going to be your map and we want you to have ownership over it, you know, even though I'm going to be the one, making the connections and adding the concepts based on what you tell us about the local food system and plan, definitely jump in and correct me on anything, you know, I wouldn't word it like that, I wouldn't connect it like that. Definitely do that. Because we want to make sure it's as accurate as possible to your understanding. So feel free to change it if you don't like how I've made it. So that's sort of high level. But the details really is that as we build out this, this map and start connecting concepts, there's really two key decisions we have to make. So if I'm looking at the issue of traffic, I might make a connection, that the number of cars impacts how much traffic there is. And I first have to decide if it's positive or negative. And that doesn't mean like good or bad. It just means if one goes up, does the other one also go up? Or does it go down. So for number of cars to traffic, if there are more cars, there's also more traffic. So it'll be a positive connection and a blue arrow. Public transportation might be more of a negative connection, because if there was more public transportation, or a better public transportation system, there'll be less traffic as people are taking the bus. Or if it's a big city, they're writing a subway or something like that. So we'll have an orange instead. And the last thing is how, you know, influential is this relationship, what's the strength of a relationship. So cars of traffic might be a really strong relationship, that if for some reason, tomorrow, everyone decided to stop driving cars, we probably wouldn't have a traffic issue. Whereas public transportation might be more of a medium connection, that it can be pretty influential, you know, but there's always gonna be those people who really love driving their own personal vehicles, or like live or work somewhere that's inconvenient to get through any other way. So that's more medium, and something that'd be a weak connection could be something like the number of cyclists that, you know, it can influence traffic a little bit if people bike for places, but it's not a realistic solution to a traffic problem, you know, you can't move a couch on a bike. So, you know, we're always gonna have to have some other kind of a way to address traffic. So any questions about this process? Awesome. Cool. So I'll just be checking in every so often saying like, this is what we talked about. And this is how I mapped it. Does that seem accurate? As we go through this conversation?

**Interviewer 2** 07:54

Alright. So now [Participant 217], this version has the the food sectors that we just talked about here. And also down in the left corner, the racial equity or inequity, which we'll bring into the conversation or you bring it in at any point. So what we'd like to do is just hear from you, how would you draw the connections between your involvement in the food system? So because like you said, you're connected in everything, just kind of talking to us about, you know, how you see the connections between the things that you have expertise around in the system?

**Participant 217** 08:31

Sure, well, I mean, as a producer, we both sell direct to consumer, so whether that's at the farmers market, or at our CSA, like our veggie box that happens in the summer, and we do work with another producer to do that-or people can buy from us at the market, direct to farm, and then we sell to restaurants in the before times, we'll see how that works out now. As well as you know, our farm sells to our retail outlet and to our kitchen. So those are some of the ways and then we take waste of things that don't sell at market or our, you know, the onion peels are whatever from the kitchen and take those back to the farm to compost. It's kind of our cycle. But then also as a retailer, we purchase from other producers, and other value added products, you know, we purchase from-people who make granola or people who make jam or people that make other products that are made locally that are [inaudible].

**Interviewer 2** 10:16

Okay awesome.

**Interviewer** 10:31

Now, how would you sort of rate the different strengths of some of these relationships between where producers end up sending their produce or their product? You know, do you think in Flint that it's mostly the market, mostly the restaurants, mostly the stores, or direct consumers? How do you think about those? How do those sort of differ, I guess?

**Participant 217** 10:50

I would say, now, a lot of people are doing more direct to consumers, but not necessarily the farmers market. I would say durrently, our farmers market is a weak growers market, for a lot of reasons. But a lot of-like the biggest concern is people haven't come to the market because of COVID. And will that regain the you know-people feeling comfortable enough to come to market this year, it will be a big test. But a lot more people were selling on Facebook marketplace or selling through CSA, or-it seemed to be a more direct relationship without having to sit at market for eight hours because that wasn't profitable.

**Interviewer 2** 11:29

So a shift to the online market?

**Participant 217** 11:34

Definitely. Like less contact, you can drop a box on my porch.

**Interviewer 2** 12:05

Okay, yeah, online market. Yeah. And delivery. So it was delivery and not necessarily pickups?

**Participant 217** 12:11

It was both pickups and delivery. I think that's generally where I was, you know, as I'm talking to other farmers, that's what people found successful.

**Interviewer 2** 12:25

Okay. Okay, more direct. As a result of-okay, other connections? COVID?

**Participant 217** 12:50

Let me think. So I mean, as a retailer we purchase from other producers. That was a little less this year than it has been in previous years. We also-it was a horrific farm year last year. There was a lot of challenges around climate change and wet insects, just general, like loss of crops this year. So that kind of made it a really rough year. So we had less produce and I think a lot of small farmers had less produce than in past years.

**Interviewer 2** 13:38

So in this case with climate change, you said it was wet, so the rain Uh oh, lost her. We'll wait for her to come back.

**Interviewer** 13:54

Yeah.

**Interviewer 2** 13:56

Weather, huh. Wow. crop loss.

**Participant 217** 14:03

Back on.

**Interviewer 2** 14:05

Awesome. So where we were, you were talking to us a bit about the fact that being impacted by climate change with losing crops, and then you also talked about this-that's where we were.

**Participant 217** 14:23

Oh, yeah. Re-living the nightmare growing season of last year. [laughter]

**Interviewer 2** 14:30

Yes. And so we got that growing season. So are you-just out of curiosity, is that something new that you're seeing, [Participant 217] in terms of the-?

**Participant 217** 14:51

Yeah, in fact, I'm working on a little project with Michigan Food and Farm Systems to document some of the small farmers' last year experiences. So we can start having a historical knowledge of climate change, particularly water and flooding issues, at times where we don't have water and flooding, and then looking to find creative solutions, or what are farmers doing creatively to mitigate it. So that'll be a really interesting thing to have.

**Interviewer 2** 15:32

Okay, excellent. So did you have money in addition to [inaudible]?

**Participant 217** 15:36

Oh, yeah, so we have a fairly wet farm that we deal with, in several ways. But because we're next to a creek and we are in a floodplain. But last year, unusually, we had water in some of our fields from late July through September, which we never have standing water in fields then. So we lost most of our fall crops because of that standing water.

**Interviewer 2** 16:06

Standing water. Okay, so climate is definitely a factor.

**Participant 217** 16:10

Yep. Yeah. Okay. Okay, so I'm glad we have those hoop houses. But also then that brings up how will other farmers who don't have access to capital to build hoop houses or haven't gotten into programs be able to grow vegetables in the years to come?

**Interviewer 2** 16:27

Mm hmm. Okay, so the lack of access to capital. Okay. Contributing to year round growing.

**Participant 217** 16:40

Well, even-to be honest, even growing, because if we hadn't had the hoop houses, then we would have lost a lot more crops. But because particularly high value crops, like tomatoes and peppers are very susceptible to bacterial and fungal infections that we can keep off with the hoop house-we can keep the rain at a minimum because of the hoop houses, so that's one of the few reasons we had that crop last year.

**Interviewer 2** 17:15

Mm hmm. Okay. Being able to protect your crops. So you made the connection, yes, the connection to the capital to be able to get the kind of equipment or structures you need to protect your crops.

**Participant 217** 17:27

Plus, our costs have gone up. Most of our supply costs have gone up at least 30% this coming growing season. Everything from fertilizer to the landscape cloth we use in our beds to keep weeds down, if you can get it, to some of the insect cloths that we keep insects off of so we don't have to spray chemicals and can grow organically, to fertilizers, to you know even some of the metal components we do use to build structures to keep bugs off and animals out and things like that. If you can get it. There's definitely been a shortage; last year, we couldn't get our weed cloth. I ordered it and six weeks later, they're like-we're gonna just refund your money because we can't even get it hmm. And these are all new problems on top of-

**Interviewer 2** 18:25

New problems okay. And climate related. So that was the trigger?

**Participant 217** 18:32

Climate and petroleum costs.

**Interviewer 2** 18:38

Ah, okay fuel costs, okay.

**Participant 217** 18:40

Because many of these products are used with petrol-are made with petroleum.

**Interviewer 2** 18:44

Petroleum, okay. Ah, okay. A lot there. Huh? Okay. So we talked about the retailers-do you deal with the-do you have any connections with the wholesalers, the resellers as well? know you're doing a lot with other folks direct producer, producer and to your store and between your farm?

**Participant 217** 19:21

Yeah, I mean, our farm does wholesale to other retail places, restaurants, retailer or you know, so we do do that. But then as a retailer we buy from wholesalers from with value added products and that's been a trip to you know, lack of supply of things and trying to find other suppliers who can get the items we needed, too like rising costs. Particularly of our containers, things we package things into. Just for example, like I used to buy bowls to put soup in, and I used to pay for the bowl itself not even the lid. It was $40 for a case of 250; that's now over $100 for those same bowls. And that's just one example of prices increasing. We change our-every time we come in we have to change prices because they've gone up for us, and we can't absorb it all anymore. When it was first starting, we tried not to raise prices, but we just can't do that.

**Interviewer 2** 20:41

Okay. Yeah. Okay, so a couple things you talked about with the wholesalers, you getting value added products from them, the challenge with the lack of supply, and then finding new suppliers as well, I thought I heard you say, too.

**Participant 217** 21:10

Yeah and almost every single wholesaler has upped their minimum biweekly, like what you have to spend to get a delivery from them. Some of our wholesalers, it would be like a $200 minimum or a $300 minimum. Now the minimums are $400 and $500.

**Interviewer 2** 21:32

Okay. Wow. Wow, okay. Yeah, those are definitely economics.

**Participant 217** 21:48

Yeah. Things that keep me up at night.

**Interviewer 2** 21:53

There you go. Uh huh. Yeah. So what-when you when you face something like that, [Participant 217], with the upped minimums, what does that effect, in terms of what you're doing, your retail?

**Participant 217** 22:12

Well, there's two-because we kind of have two base types of people we buy from. So they're the big aggregators that-and a lot of our-we used to buy from a lot more different wholesale resellers or wholesalers. But a lot of them have eaten each other up and become bigger companies by buying other companies, and so that kind of solved part of that problem. And so right now, we're mainly buying from two big wholesalers, and then a vegetable wholesaler, for the winter, filling in when we can't get stuff from farmers. And then a lot of individual companies, so I, you know, I buy my granola directly from Ali in Oaco. And I have probably about 15 to 20 of those that are smaller companies that don't have a place that they sell to, and I can buy direct from them, and I can buy a box at a time. So those are the two things, but sometimes I have to alternate weeks when I buy from the big wholesalers so that I can make the minimum and get what I need, which sometimes messes with supply issues on my end, if it's a popular product, and I need to refill it on my shelves,

**Interviewer 2** 23:50

Okay, so part of the challenge there is-I'm just trying to get that into what I want to say. So you've got some diversity of wholesalers in order to be able to meet your market demand, to meet the demand; to be able to have the proper supply you've got this diversity of wholesalers, in order to even meet the demand now. Okay. I'm just seeing if there's anything else. There's a lot there: climate, we've got the supply chain, we see the aggregation and who you're working from. On the retail side, any-you have some connections here because you are as a farmer, you're selling into restaurants and other places as well. Any factors there that you want to talk about that?

**Participant 217** 24:59

I mean, restaurants were closed for a long time, so we didn't have as many restaurants interested, or able to purchase last year. So that was a limiting factor in income last year. And there weren't-people weren't meeting-communities weren't meeting so we didn't have catering for the last two years and restaurants didn't have catering so they weren't purchasing our product, especially. Like we sell a lot of heirloom tomatoes-are a good market for us, and we definitely had a really reduced sales of that last year so that hurt us. It'll be-I mean-I don't know, catering seems to have taken a leap off the deep end this last week that people are starting to meet again, which is great, and hopefully that'll mean this summer might look-numbers might look a little better.

**Interviewer 2** 25:54

Mm hmm. Yeah. COVID had a big impact. Yeah, yeah. Yes. Okay. When you're looking at the system, I'm going to-[Interviewer], you have any questions on this before I switch? Okay. So we talked about not only the sectors itself, and this is great, there's a lot of really strong connections you have as a producer in this map, which is great to see. Wondering if one of the things we talked about is this concept here in the corner about the impacts of racial equity on participation in the local food system. So, in your experience, what are some of the ways that racial equity or racial inequity impacts participation in the food system?

**Participant 217** 26:48

So I could start with producers. I mean, just historically, but particularly in Flint-oh, there are, there are a lot of community gardeners and people who moved from the South who grow their own food, and so there's a value system around that here that has definitely carried through to the neighborhoods and has really helped with groups like Edible Flint, and supporting those community gardeners have been important. Where we see more of a-it's been a harder hoe to row, I guess, is to move people who are interested in becoming farmers from gardener to market farmer, and a lot of those barriers, I think, have to do with access to land. And that historically, the land bank wouldn't sell you property to farm on in the city of Flint, or even in the county. I mean, if we could get [Name] to talk to you, he has a long sorted tale about how we got our property and how many times he was denied the ability to purchase property, and finally, I had to come in and throw a big white lady fit to get us property, and that was really disappointing because I know that-I know many, many stories of people in the city of Flint who have tried to purchase property from the land bank, and have been denied for various reasons, but the underlying reason is racial inequity and racism, and institutional racism, and all of that. So I mean, if you don't-as a producer, and at first they would only let you actually rent property to farm on or to grow on-and we eventually got them to change their policy on that-that you could purchase property if you're going to farm as a reason to purchase so that was a positive change. I don't-I can't say that the land bank has improved in all of the ways that we'd like to see in terms of equal access to land, but I think it is-at least the policy is there. I think that there is a lot of issues around access to capital and programs for beginning farmers, I'm going to pause for just a second.

**Interviewer 2** 29:34

Okay, okay.

**Participant 217** 29:47

Moving sleeping children. I have also been involved in-we have a women farmers program here in Genesee County for supporting women farmers, and that has been a really-I know-I mean, we also have a few black women farmers, and it's been a really important support, I think. Because we've had a lot of workshops where it's women run, which is a completely different climate than male run workshops, and gone to each other's farms and create a support system that now is expanded to the state as a statewide group. And I think that is-I think having a support system, especially for learning something as hard as farming, and having affinity groups around that, is really important.

**Interviewer 2** 31:00

Yeah, that makes sense.

**Participant 217** 31:03

But a lot of people don't even know about some of the NRCS programs or through the Conservation District that you could apply for a hoop house and get funding and that if you ask them, they'll even pay for it up front. And a lot of those things just don't have-they don't have the media-public relations-to get that out to new farmers, unless you're told by somebody.

**Interviewer 2** 31:37

Okay, so access to the information.

**Participant 217** 31:40

Yep.

**Interviewer 2** 31:41

Access to information itself. Okay.

**Participant 217** 31:44

Well-and none of us have really that great of an experience getting farm numbers and accessing those programs. They're all really time consuming and difficult to make happen.

**Interviewer 2** 32:02

And the relationship between the farm number?

**Participant 217** 32:05

So in order to access any federal government program, you have to go to the Farm Service Agency and file for a farm number, and I have gone with other black farmers to get their farm number because they've been turned away before and acted as a technical assistant, because they make the program-or they make the signing up so difficult that people give up. And that's one of the things that I worked with Michigan Food and Farm systems, they've created like a checklist, this is what you need to go your farm number, and these are the documents you need to go in the door with, because we must have drove five times back and forth to the house to get other documents they didn't tell us we needed.

**Interviewer 2** 32:49

Mm hmm. Got it.

**Participant 217** 32:54

Yeah.

**Interviewer 2** 32:56

There's quite a bit there-you talk about-as we walk through it, access to land, access to capital, access to information, support system, awareness of programs. You talked about the processes being difficult and time consuming, are also barriers that you're seeing here. And you talked a couple times about a distinction from a racial standpoint that the black farmer is being turned away. And just because, primarily?

**Participant 217** 33:41

Well, there's several different underlying things, as there's a lot of discrimination against small farmers.

**Interviewer 2** 33:52

Okay, discrimination.

**Participant 217** 34:00

I mean, you have to sign a paperwork that says, I don't make a million dollars or more farming when you go apply for that number. So a lot of those offices are there to serve large commodity farmers. And that's-we are called small-we are called specialty farmers as vegetable farmers, and often dismissed as not real farmers.

**Interviewer 2** 34:31

Ah, so limited resources for small/specialty farmers, okay. In contrast to commodity farmers.

**Participant 217** 34:45

Right, a lot of those programs are available to pay you per acre, but I don't grow one acre of any one crop. I grow 55 different kinds of vegetables, all of which I rotate very often. One bed may-one 200 foot bed may have four different crops in a season.

**Interviewer 2** 35:09

Okay. So that's an inequity because of the pay structure, you're saying the structure?

**Participant 217** 35:17

Yep.

**Interviewer 2** 35:17

The structure for being able to get paid for what you grow, is in of itself a barrier?

**Participant 217** 35:26

Right. And so then I also don't have access to any of the insurance programs that if a soybean farmer loses an entire crop, he gets paid by acre for those crops that he lost. I don't have the same if I lose a crop, it's "oh well, try again next year."

**Interviewer 2** 35:48

[inaudible] So, scale has a lot to do with access to certain resources. Yeah, so that's the barrier-scale is a barrier. Okay.

**Participant 217** 36:05

But I mean, over 70% of our current farmers in the United States are over the age of 65, and we are not replacing those farmers at any scale. And many of those farmers were generational farmers, and they don't have a plan- a retirement plan or a succession plan. So we are not growing new farmers at a rate that can replace that food supply. So we need more small farmers who can eventually become medium sized farmers, even if they don't become big farmers. A lot of-I see a lot of our urban farmers-some of them have become bigger farmers, because-or small-you know, bigger small farmers-because they've gotten some land in the suburbs and gotten a little bit more acreage and built up the structure that they need. You know, there's also a disadvantage for being a first generation farmer like us, because we don't have a burn and a tractor, and all those things have to start from scratch. So the lack of generational wealth in that way is a limitation. But I think, there's also a perception in some cultures that farming isn't a desirable lifestyle.

**Interviewer 2** 37:31

Mm hmm. Yeah, there's-you hit a couple-you hit quite a few things there, is that one, just the available farmers-what's what I want to say? Like you said, we're not growing farmers, we're not building the industry. We're not building the production industry. You also talked about the land that-you've got to buy-people are buying land somewhere other than where they typically are, so that they have more access to land, so that's far. And that last thing, you just said- whole being first generation that you don't have existing resources. So as generational farmers, you've got stuff that other people before you had a first gen farmers are more resource constrained, right? Okay. Okay. Yeah, and no wealth, you said the wealth, as well. Okay. There's a lot there. Okay. I'm going to flip the question a little bit.

**Participant 217** 39:01

Sure.

**Interviewer 2** 39:03

So, are there ways that the food system contributes to racial inequity?

**Participant 217** 39:11

Yeah. I mean, I-and I think, you know, I continue to process this as I've worked in food, but I mean, as we know, with the USDA definition of food desert or access to good food or access to fast food versus healthy food, like, Flint's pretty textbook, in that respect. The mapping of where we have grocery stores, and where we don't and where the corner store versus the corner liquor store that has some loaves of bread and expired milk versus any healthy vegetables or healthy options. But we also have cultural foods and ways of eating that aren't always the healthiest. But I mean, I do see some shifts in who comes in our store and what they're looking to eat that are really-like, we get a lot of people in that want to-"I want to eat healthy, but I don't know how, and I don't know how to change my diet in a way that I like to eat." Or we see a lot of people who have been told that by their doctor that they have to change the way they eat. I had no idea that being a farmer at the farmers market, I would talk so much about diet and health, and who can go to the bathroom and who can't. That was kind of likr a missing piece for me as a farmer. But there's also limitations on how much people have to spend, and what is cheaper, and what federal programs subsidize, I mean, you can't even buy organic on WIC. So sometimes, if you're low income, then there's just-you're-you have limited income to eat healthy, and sometimes you have limited choices. Usually you have limited choices on what you can eat and access healthy. If you have to carry what you purchase on the bus, you're gonna buy what you can carry, and that might limit your choices. And I mean, there are just a tremendous amount of things weighing on people, especially now, than there were even a few years ago. And I don't-food is so much a comfort and a complicated health issue at the same time.

**Interviewer 2** 42:20

Mm hmm. Yeah, you unpacked a lot of stuff there and right there with that whole, how much money you have and the impact. You talked about the-you can't get to the healthiest food on WIC, the programs don't give you access to the healthier food, the transportation-which comes up-what can you carry? Yeah, that definitely comes up. Okay. I hear. So, you mentioned a couple of factors already. You talked about how climate affects the system. You talked a bit about COVID. How did you see or how do you perceive the water crisis-and you can add to COVID and climate if you have other things to add to those more specifically then you've already said, if you want to take a look at those again. Anything else on COVID you want to call out?

**Participant 217** 43:48

I feel like COVID has stalled everything in terms of like the food system. I think-I've had a fair amount of farmers that I know stopped farming for various reasons, so I think there are less farmers in our circle than there were-I knowthere are. I mean, it's hard enough, and then you add even more hard things on top of it, and marriages fail and you can't make payments, and you figure out what else you can do. So I think COVID has sort of stalled if people were going to start farming or some people who were farming are no longer farming. I think a lot of us have all just kind of kept our heads down and tried to survive the last couple of years and haven't really moved forward. We are just trying to keep our businesses intact and trying to pivot and that felt like pirouetting and just trying to stay fluid and keep our doors open. And I don't-I feel like I have less of a support system at the moment because all of us were just trying to get through. But the ones who-we have kept going are tightly trying to hold each other up. I don't know, I have really complicated feelings on the water crisis, because, we opened the week before the water crisis became official. So between the water crisis and COVID, I don't even know that we know what it is like to function in normal times in Flint as a business.

**Interviewer 2** 45:52

Okay, okay. Yeah,

**Participant 217** 45:55

So we were trying to continue to be Flint cheerleaders in order to have people not distrust a business that had just opened their doors in the beginning of a water crisis. And I mean, I'm kind of thankful we ended up buying farmland outside of the city limits, because it helped us have a trust in our food, because that was a big deal. And that's helped us continue to keep going during that time. And then we've just seemed to run up against really hard barriers to keep going. But I think that stalls-like, how can you do progressive work when we're all just keeping the hamster wheel cycling? And how can you help people change lifestyles and diets and things when we're all under tremendous amount of stress and isolated and just trying to survive? I'm hoping we can get back to it. But I don't know that we're going to pick up at the exact moment that we slowed. Yeah, that makes sense. Yeah, this is a lot like to-a lot of unknowns.

**Interviewer 2** 47:13

Yeah. Mhmm. A lot of unknowns right now. But you picked up on some really, really important things there in terms of people being able to trust in the food. So where it was grown is part of trust. You talked about your farm being outside, so there was an element of trust, because it wasn't in Flint, grown with water from Flint, because you were connecting it to the water crisis. Yeah, okay.

**Participant 217** 47:42

Mm hmm. But we're still Flint people, which helps keep trust in our store. You know there's so much mistrust of institutions and government in Flint because of the water crisis, and then continued through COVID, and, that all has just compounded the Flint psyche, and the general mistrust of people coming in and trying to do things here.

**Interviewer 2** 48:20

Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay. Well, as we look at that map, that beautiful map, that's your beautiful brain, [Participant 217]? As you take a scan at it, is there anything else that you feel that you would add to that that may have had an important influence on the system in Flint?

**Participant 217** 48:54

I'm not-I'm not quite sure how to say this. But I feel like there's a piece around the water crisis and the resulting emergency programs around the water crisis that ended up giving a lot of free food out to Flint residents that then devalued the purchasing of food. And that mentality still persists. There's this-we got a lot of free produce, and so when people look at the prices of the produce we sell at market, even if-whether it's organic or not, there's a perception that it's too much, and I worry that as I have to raise prices, because of my rising costs, I'm going to continue to get feedback. Although my prices are much less than places like Detroit, because I'm trying to feed my community, and that I kind of worry about that, and so-and then I worry about the institutions in Flint that service poverty and how that affects our economy. Because I feel like-having worked in the foundation world for 15 years, I come from a fairly valid place-analysis I feel-that there is this whole system of nonprofits that profit-that benefit from Flint people-from servicing Flint people, and that there is less motivation to help people out of those cycles of poverty. And because they all-they don't want to work themselves out of a job, and I think because we have such a robust foundation-

**Interviewer 2** 51:15

Oh, no, dropped again. Oh, my gosh. At that critical moment too, wow. Let's just see if she manages to come back. Wow. You want to pause the recording. Okay. Alright. So there were two things-influences you were telling us about right at the time that that happened, so there were two kind of distinct things. One was, how the water crisis brought in a lot more emergency food and created a devaluing of food, and people now looking at prices going, that's high price, right?

**Participant 217** 52:10

Yeah.

**Interviewer 2** 52:11

Yes, you said that one. And then the second one was an introduction around institutions that service poverty, and getting into the conversation about less motivation to actually get people out of the cycle of poverty. And you tied it to job security-you said they're not going to work themselves out of jobs.

**Participant 217** 52:39

Yep.

**Interviewer 2** 52:40

That's where we were. [laughter]

**Participant 217** 52:44

Well, that summed it right up for me.

**Interviewer 2** 52:48

Just giving you your words back. So those were two big influences. Okay. Okay, great. Thank you for that. Anything else you want to add? We got one question remaining for you. Anything-as you look at this that comes to mind that you would want to add, that you feel has influenced the system?

**Participant 217** 53:20

Sorry, I'm just scanning to see. I feel like I'm-there's a gap, or something.

**Interviewer** 53:28

And if you want, I can always focus in on something. I have some tricks up my sleeve like we can look at pecifically one concept.

**Participant 217** 53:38

Okay. Just seeing-oh, can you put it-there we go. I mean, I think it's so funny. I think a year ago this map would look completely different. But this is where I feel like it's at now. But I know we weren't talking emergency food, but I do think it affects a lot of what producers do, and since most emergency food distributors do not buy from local producers, it's an import from other places. It does-I mean, one of the-if you're talking about local food and how do we build more local food, we do not have enough producers to significantly influence the local food economy in Genesee County. So, there is a need for more producers, particularly if we want to bring the economy closer to home in that sense. But I think we need to do a lot of work, maybe at that beginning farmer stage in order to help people feel motivated to do something that's this hard. I mean, you need somebody to cry on when your woodchuck eats 100 heads of lettuce, you know?

**Interviewer 2** 55:33

[laughter] Yes. Mm hmm. Mm hmm. Gotcha. I think you wandered into the space of our last question, [Participant 217], thinking about things that could potentially improve the food system. So if there were leverage points or other types of change, that might improve the system, what kinds of things would you would you see? I think what you just said, pointed to that. You talked about working closer with beginning stage farmers, and that to bring the economy closer to home, you need more producers.

**Participant 217** 56:35

Yeah.

**Interviewer 2** 56:37

Other things that you think would change to help improve the system?

**Participant 217** 56:44

I mean-I'm kind of-we've been such in an emergency state the last couple of years. But some of the programming around valuing local-when we're concerned about cost, and we're concerned about how we get food, that becomes an extra layer that seems luxurious. But I do feel like we've kind of rolled back the clock on where we were with valuing locally grown, but I understand why. And I see the factors why. I mean, we saw a huge uptick in CSA purchases, the first year of COVID, and then less the second year and more interest in pre made food, like people were tired of cooking at home, and they want somebody else to cook for them. But they didn't want to go inside a restaurant. So that'll be interesting to see how that changes this year.

**Interviewer 2** 57:46

Mm hmm. Interesting to watch the changes, right? Yep. Mm hmm.

**Participant 217** 57:58

But I feel like we don't have all the factors to say, this is what we need to do. Because we're all still either dealing with our trauma from the last couple of years, or the economic fallout of it. So that we don't-it's really hard to-we're all recalculating, and because we don't know what the next six months or a year is going to bring, it's really hard to situate your business to be best suited for that, or to really encourage anybody to start something-some new business, I think that's a really hard place to be.

**Participant 220** 58:32

Mm hmm. What kind of changes could you see happening?

**Participant 217** 58:45

I mean, I, myself am having a little bit of trouble with the long view.

**Interviewer 2** 58:50

Gotcha.

**Participant 217** 58:51

I think because survival. I would love to see us in a position where we're buying from other farmers, but right now, I'm really concentrating on, how can I fill up my shelves, produce wise, snd where am I allocating my resources for growing, to be able to film you benefit my business at the moment? And maybe that's reflective and maybe it's not other people and their businesses too.

**Interviewer 2** 59:23

Mm. Hmm. Yes. Okay. Okay. I hear that loud and clear. Loud and clear. [Participant 217], thank you so much. Any parting thing that you want to add before we conclude the interview with you, this conversation with me today?

**Participant 217** 59:49

I don't, but it's interesting to see your brain visually.

**Interviewer 2** 59:55

It's beautiful in it. It's kind of cool. It is beautiful. Yes. Yeah. And thank you so much. You know, for one, all you do, and thank you certainly for what you did this evening to accommodate because we really, really value you and we value your voice, we really wanted to hear what you, you know, had to say about this. So, we deeply appreciate the the interview time. As we said before, the information will use it in our research, not referenced your name or you in the comments and things of that nature. But just all the impactful things that you shared, you know, will be a part of

**Participant 217** 1:00:34

what we can I get a copy of the map my map?

**Interviewer 2** 1:00:36

Oh, yes. Yep, you can have a copy of your map. Absolutely. Absolutely. Um, if anything else comes to mind that you want to share with us, you have Grace's emails primary contact us. You have, I think I called you, you have my phone, so spread out to us. One parting thing we do ask is you will complete the survey for us. And in that survey. Again, we're closing these down, we will interviews were coming to the conclusion, we are still you said that Franklin had interesting stories, if you can encourage him to chat with us, that will be a beautiful thing. Because we would love to hear his voice as well. But if you do think of anything else you want to share with us, by all means please reach out. And as we're finishing this round of research, but there's going to come some additional things in terms of starting to share out and talking with people, you know, and community. So there's a question in the, in the survey about, you know, staying engaged if you would like to, so just let us know, there. And again, thanks. And I look forward to next time I'm in Flint coming by and getting some yummy stuff. To look forward to

**Participant 217** 1:01:57

seeing you. Was there anything any connection that from people you've heard that, like, I should connect with? That are doing interesting things or that I might not know about?

**Interviewer 2** 1:02:10

Um, yeah, yeah. Let's, let's give some thought to that. I'm, certainly talk to the people, you know, at the Co Op, because you're you're used to sharing, you know, talking to people and sharing back and forth. Certainly, you know, the Co Op, you're already the co op with little Co Op. That's, uh huh. Because you you work back and forth, as you mentioned, a number of people, farmers and other folks, you know, just seeing what's going on, you know, with that, for sure. Because, you know, that's gonna be a big difference. I would definitely say that. Um, I would say that, as we're walking through this, and we talked about, you talked a lot about the things that could help producers that are gonna anchor producers in this work. We're, we're just starting to get into conversations with, you know, like the city, and things of that nature. So if we hear along the way, other things that we think would be helpful, we will certainly go back to you. Thank you. Yeah. Yeah. I'm curious. Just last quick question. I mean, much. Do you have much conversation with the folks in the public health space? About full?

**Participant 217** 1:03:31

Um, I have from time to time, time? Yeah. Nothing

**Interviewer 2** 1:03:37

recently or a couple of years. Okay. Okay. Only really tricky, because you talked about people talking, you feel like you talk about health a lot at the farmers market would be so I was just curious. Okay, but if we if we hear anything else that mommies will reach out? For sure. Sure. All right. Thanks. So much. Appreciate it.

**Participant 217** 1:03:59

Thank you. All right. All right.

**Interviewer 2** 1:04:01

Take care. Yep. Bye bye. Bye bye.