

Community Engagement in Place-Based Social and Economic Development: A Case Study of The Wild Ramp Local Food Market

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Abstract

In 2012, local food activists in Huntington, West Virginia created The Wild Ramp: a non-profit local food market to serve the dietary needs of the community's low-income and low-access citizens, as well as the economic needs of area farmers and other working populations. What began as a senior project by a group of Marshall University students became a social movement toward sustainable economic development within this Appalachian community. The Wild Ramp provides a strong case for the power of grassroots activism and utilization of social capital in place-based economic development and community empowerment. The process was the work of a small-scale social movement from within Huntington, but intertwined with the growing local movement across the United States and the world. By exploring the sociological and economic forces embedded in The Wild Ramp's formation, and by collecting survey and interview data from community members, this research examines the ways that community values fostered the development of a local food market and the ways in which the community has gained social capital and empowerment from these efforts. Results from this research explaining the dynamics of social change may be beneficial to communities seeking place-based economic development strategies.

1. Introduction: The City of Huntington

Huntington, the largest metropolitan area in West Virginia, is located at the westernmost point of the state, bordering Ohio and Kentucky. It sits both on the floodplain of the Ohio River and in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, in the Western Allegheny Plateau ecoregion. The Huntington Tri-State area includes the cities of Ashland, Kentucky and Ironton, Ohio. This entire metropolitan area was identified in a 2006 CDC report as the fattest and least healthy area in the country, although Huntington bears the brunt of this designation.¹

Census data shows that the 2014 estimate of Huntington's population is 48,807. Huntington's population has been in a state of decline since the 1970s, when steel processing and coal mining industries began to recede from the region's economy. Demographically, the city is overwhelmingly white (86.9%). Less than a third of the adult population holds a bachelor's degree or higher, which is reflected in Huntington's median annual household income of \$28,673.² 2014 census data places the city's poverty rate at 31.2%, significantly higher than that of the state of West Virginia, at 18.3%, and the nation as a whole, at 14.8%.³⁴ The area's relatively low median annual income and high poverty rate have been acknowledged as major contributors to Huntington's "fattest city" designation. Huntington has also been identified as an urban food desert by the USDA: an area, usually consisting of a low-income population, in which healthy food is inaccessible and has instead been replaced with less healthy alternatives such as fast-food restaurants and convenience stores.⁵ These barriers to healthy options prompted the community's response: to facilitate a local food economy in the city of Huntington that would address the health needs of the region's population as well as the livelihoods of area farmers.

2. Motivators for Local Food Systems

As rural and urban communities alike seek to re-establish place-based relationships with their region's land, food, and economies, a growing interest in local food systems has emerged. Whether responding to food inequity, a need for economic revitalization, or an issue of public health, communities have increasingly turned to an assets-based model that "accentuates positive capability to jointly identify problems and activate solutions" and "promotes the self-esteem of individuals and communities."⁶ In Huntington, West Virginia the issue of public health was reframed in order to identify the region's strengths and health assets. Amidst a flurry of other health-related events and organizations, this community became invested in developing a stronger local food economy as a response to the structural barriers of accessing healthy food.

Community support of local food systems fosters a deeper sense of connection and responsibility to a particular locality. A community engaged in food citizenship furthers non-market relationships among producers and consumers, advancing a moral economy that conditions market forces toward socially valuable outcomes.⁷ Further research has shown that engaging in local agricultural production has distinctive effects on communities with regard to food equity, social inclusion, and experiential knowledge of the natural world. In this sense, the embedded relationships involved in direct-market sales of local food can have financial advantages for producers, and foster local pride and citizen participation for consumers.⁸

Research illuminates many motivators for the development of local food movements. An important factor in predicting consumer behavior is the perception of public benefits associated with sustainable products. In other words, consumers making purchasing choices often consider altruism or social activism in their decisions to consume local food. Research on local food consumers' willingness to pay has focused on the consequences of Perceived Consumer Effectiveness, the psychological concept that an individual's purchasing decisions have real-world significance. For consumers of local food, the perception is that their purchasing decisions will benefit regional farmers and contribute to a stronger local economy.⁹

Aside from community-minded social cohesion and a sense of altruism, there are other factors at play in the development of a local food economy, particularly in a low-income area. Several studies examine the impact of introducing a farmers market to an area previously considered an urban food desert. Because produce is scarce and expensive to purchase from convenience stores, residents of food deserts often pay more for groceries than do residents of non-food deserts. The introduction of a farmers market in an urban food desert has major impacts on access to healthy food items that had previously been unavailable, as well as decreasing the overall price of groceries in the area.¹⁰

Residents of neighborhoods without access to supermarkets tend to have poorer diets and higher rates of obesity, whereas those with access to supermarkets are healthier, suggesting that neighborhood characteristics and food access are significant predictors of health outcomes.¹¹ However, research on consumer motivations in food purchasing decisions showed that low-income grocery shoppers prioritized fruits and vegetables when given the option, and were willing to sacrifice other purchases to do so. One study found that the shopping experience itself was an important factor in buying fruits and vegetables. Interview subjects wanted more options for places to shop, easier access to stores, more attractive and easy-to-navigate stores, and more knowledgeable staff to help them make decisions about nutrition. Subjects also expressed a desire to buy local foods and give their money directly to local farmers instead of big grocery store companies, reinforcing previous data on social connectedness as a factor in food purchasing decisions even in low-income communities.¹² Another study found that consumers share overall positive attitudes toward local food in categories like health, environment, farmworker welfare, and quality of product. Eighty-six percent of survey respondents were willing to pay more for local food, but found that "availability may be a bigger hurdle to purchasing local food than cost."¹³

3. Community Engagement and Social Capital

Given the many examples of the importance of community engagement in local food movements, and that "evidence exists to demonstrate that communities which are more cohesive, characterized by strong social bonds and ties are more likely to maintain and sustain health even in the face of disadvantage," Huntington's success in this arena may be attributed to its realization of the community's potential for social capital development.¹⁴ As originally defined by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, social capital is "the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition."¹⁵ In other words, this form of capital is accrued through networks of relationships

among individuals in a society, which can enable mutually beneficial outcomes for the individuals, and society as a whole. As a resource, social capital can create access to various opportunities, including employment, financial resources, and health outcomes.

Like health, social capital can be considered a community asset, with three key features being relationships, social cohesion, and communication. Social cohesion is described as taking place by bonding groups of people closer together, bridging the gaps between different groups, and linking those at different levels of power. Research suggests that “[c]ommunities that exercise both bonding and bridging social capital can create an ‘entrepreneurial social infrastructure,’” in which, “networks of people with a shared purpose can work together to build social capital for their community.”¹⁶

Further research examines the linkages between conventional local food supply chain actors, including retailers and wholesalers, and local food producers. One such study revealed that retailers who source local food consider social interactions to be more vital to the success of their businesses than economic factors, although these are still a major consideration. They also found that local-sourcing retailers perceive “local” products primarily as being part of a community building effort, which supports the previous literature around the social motivators for fostering local food systems, and that relationship building between producers and retail suppliers is a key factor in creating a healthy food supply chain. The researchers determined that market access for local food is strongly based on linkages between local producers and supply chain actors, and recommend a significant focus on social interactions in local food markets.¹⁷

4. “Jamie Oliver’s Food Revolution”

In 2009, television chef and healthy eating advocate Jamie Oliver piloted a television show called “Jamie Oliver’s Food Revolution” in Huntington. The premise of the show was simple: Oliver came into Huntington to promote making healthy food choices and to help rectify a pattern of obesity that had been overtaking rural America for decades. The show was a controversial catalyst toward a renewed focus on healthful living in Huntington. Oliver’s approach to health promotion, which focused on individual eating behavior, left many of Huntington’s residents feeling antagonized. The goal of “Food Revolution” was to reform the county’s public school lunch system. In Episode 1 of “Food Revolution,” Huntington residents expressed that they felt chastised by Oliver, who repeatedly insinuated that obesity was a function of flawed personal choices rather than acknowledging structural barriers to serving fresh produce, such as the county’s low budget and strict USDA guidelines for public school lunches.¹⁸

An interview with one Huntington resident, Gail Patton, yielded several major contentions about Oliver’s presence in the town: he spotlighted the region in a negative way, focused solely on the introduction of unprocessed foods in school cafeterias, and in the end, was given credit for solving problems that Huntington had been addressing for years.¹⁹ Although the community was not and had never been ignorant to the health issues plaguing their town, the presence of the television show fueled a reactive movement from within the community. Oliver’s focus was misdirected and singular, pinpointing a need for individuals to consume more fresh foods without facilitating access to those foods within the context of Huntington’s socioeconomic atmosphere. The catchall hook of the TV show - essentially saving the nation’s fattest town from their own bad habits - ignored many of the structural barriers to wellness that citizens themselves were able to identify.

5. The Emergence of The Wild Ramp Market

Although Huntington’s concept for a local food market may have been catalyzed by its negative portrayal on “Jamie Oliver’s Food Revolution,” the city had been developing a response to its designation as “fattest city” since the 2006 CDC report was released. One early example of health activism was the non-profit organization Create Huntington. A major element of Create Huntington’s programming involves holding weekly Chat-N-Chews: forums for community discussion and strategizing about community projects that improve the standard of living in the city. These public forums constitute a major source of social networking for the Huntington community and played an integral part in developing the concept of The Wild Ramp.

When “Jamie Oliver’s Food Revolution” filmed in Huntington in 2009, they established a permanent teaching kitchen. Ebenezer Medical Outreach (EMO), another local nonprofit, operated Huntington’s Kitchen from 2009 to 2013. EMO seeks to provide free medical care to the community. The teaching kitchen is now operated by Cabell Huntington Hospital as an outreach program. EMO also formed Huntington’s Health Revolution, an operation whose mission is to promote physical activity, nutritious dietary choices, preventative screening and avoidance of risky

behaviors among Huntington-area citizens, and sponsored a Healthy Day in Huntington event in 2012. The community also established the Paul Ambrose Trail for Health (PATH), an extensive recreational bike and pedestrian trail system, as a further means of preventative health care.

The idea of providing the Huntington community with access to local food burgeoned around these many health related events and organizations, and was further fostered by a team of seniors at Marshall University as a capstone project. As they implemented various interest meetings and events in early 2012, the community envisioned opening a year-round, indoor local food market in a central location. This concept responded directly to the need for easily accessible healthy food options in Huntington, but its true focus was to further opportunities for economic development. The community came to a consensus that the majority of this market's profits should return to the growers themselves, further addressing the region's desire for a sustainable local food economy that would benefit both consumers and producers. The market's proposed model was based directly on that of Local Roots Market and Cafe - a food co-op located in Wooster, Ohio - from which the steering committee mirrored all of the proposed market's procedures and policies.

The capstone team utilized Create Huntington's Chat-N-Chew public forums, which were used as venues to network, discuss logistics, plan events, form focus groups, and foster community action. They also organized a two-day Heritage Farm event with the goal of gathering and networking with producers within a 150-mile radius of Huntington and community organizers in the area. The capstone team enlisted Anthony Flaccavento, the founder and President of SCALE, Inc. (Sequestering Carbon, Accelerating Local Economies), to consult and lead a discussion about local food systems, farming practices, and forming a producer association. The community organizers at the event also formed a Local Food Market Steering Committee to guide the process of developing the actual market.

In March of 2012, the Steering Committee created a Facebook page. The unique story of the Wild Ramp's rapid development and formation can be attributed in great part to the functions of its Facebook account. In the early stages of both the online presence and conceptualization of Huntington's local food market, the market's Facebook page was used as a forum for announcing events, like the Chat-N-Chews, and for informally surveying their constituency with online polls. Arguably the biggest event in the market's early social networking was the decision for its name, which was determined through a "Name the Market" contest on their Facebook page. "The Wild Ramp," which references a species of edible wild onion distinctly native to Appalachia, won the contest with 35% of the votes.

After public forums, focus groups, committee meetings, and online planning, organizers of The Wild Ramp identified a location for their indoor market in Huntington's Heritage Station, which met the community's criteria as a central and easily accessible spot in the city. Volunteers and committee members spent the month of June preparing the facility by tearing down walls, installing shelving units, painting, and creating signs. The Market Steering Committee also established a "Friends of the Market" program to supplement the non-profit with capital and volunteer membership. "Friends" are able to pay a yearly fee or donate a certain number of volunteer hours per month in exchange for various market privileges and discounts. The Wild Ramp had its official opening in July of 2012, less than six months after the planning stages began at the Create Huntington Chat-N-Chews. Since then, the market has been consistently growing. The market raised almost \$12,000 from 173 community backers with an online Kickstarter campaign and continued to facilitate community food events, workshops, and instructional classes.

After less than two years of operation, The Wild Ramp was chosen as the beneficiary of Huntington's "River to Rail" initiative. The initiative secured them a new location in the town's historic Central City Market building with subsidized rent and \$43,000 per year for five years from the City of Huntington and the West Virginia Department of Agriculture. As of 2015 the market reports raising \$1.2 million from grants, sales, and individual donations and returning over \$1 million to the local economy in the form of revenue to producers, over 75% of whom are located within 50 miles of Huntington. They also report an average of 500 hours of labor logged by community volunteers per month.

6. The Wild Ramp Business Model in West Virginia

In 2012, on behalf of the state's Food and Farm Coalition, researchers assembled a summary report of West Virginia's working local food system. This included an assessment of the major actors along the state's local food supply chain, as well as small case studies of local businesses within that system. According to the report's executive summary, "Drawing upon national, state, and local food systems literature; federal and state statistics and data; and extensive personal interviews, this report assesses West Virginia's local food system infrastructure and existing supply chains to identify opportunities and constraints."²⁰

Researchers reported many key findings, several of which are relevant to the case of The Wild Ramp. They determined, first and foremost, that there is significant demand for local food in West Virginia, and suggest that production and supply chains play an essential role in meeting this demand with the reciprocal supply. Furthermore, they report a growing number of new marketing outlets and supply chains in the state, including 93 farmers markets and 5 aggregate food hubs. Peters et al. suggest focusing on diversified business models to facilitate consumer access to local food, which includes offering a diversity of products, engaging in activities with a multitude of actors along the food supply chain, and extending production year-round. They also recommend further development of online and community-based retail stores, small food hubs, and other distribution channels to further facilitate West Virginia's local food supply chain.

The report also included a short case study of The Wild Ramp and its unique market model. As determined by a phone interview with one of the market's board members, the report states that "The store's founders hope to keep more food dollars in the community and to demonstrate to small-scale and beginning farmers that there is significant demand for local products, thereby encouraging increased local production."²¹ Furthermore, the researchers outlined The Wild Ramp's business model: producers from within a 250 mile radius supply the market with local produce, which is required to meet federal, state, and local food regulations. The producers set their own prices, brand and promote their own products, deliver to the store, and decide what will be done with unsold product themselves. According to The Wild Ramp website, producers pay an annual membership fee of \$50, as well as a \$15 monthly fee for shelf space in the store. Farmers receive revenue once a month from products sold. In the market's initial years, The Wild Ramp took 10% of all sales for market operation expenses. In keeping with Local Roots, the Ohio market after which The Wild Ramp was directly modeled, this increased to 15% of all sales in 2015. The market also performs marketing activities and utilizes the Cabell Huntington Hospital's teaching kitchen for community education and outreach. At the time of the report's publication, The Wild Ramp was fully operated by volunteers, although they have since instituted paid employees and management. It is clear that The Wild Ramp's non-profit, year-round market model addresses West Virginia's growing demand and subsequent supply of local product.

7. Methodology

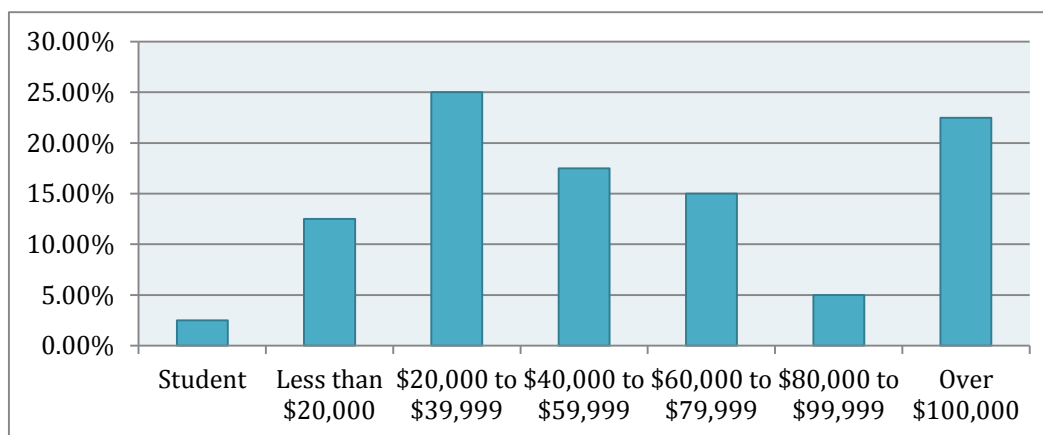
In order to assess the motivations and values of The Wild Ramp's shoppers, this study utilizes a consumer survey to address purchasing choices, level of commitment to The Wild Ramp, and degrees of social involvement in the market. The consumer surveys consisted of fourteen questions varying between multiple choice and free response. They were administered in-person at The Wild Ramp during business hours on Friday October 23, 2015 and Saturday October 24, 2015. Any customer over the age of 18 was eligible to participate in the study. In total, a sample size of 40 respondents was achieved. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods.

In addition to the consumer survey, a supplier interview guide was constructed in order to gain a sense of the benefits felt by farmers and other producers who supply goods to The Wild Ramp. Suppliers were asked about their farming or other operations, their business and social relationships with The Wild Ramp, and their perceptions of the market's success. The interviews also took place in-person at The Wild Ramp during business hours on Friday October 23, 2015 and Saturday October 24, 2015. Suppliers were sampled by convenience: all consenting suppliers who happened to be at the market during those days were interviewed. Interview results were analyzed using substantive interpretation of responses.

8. Survey Results

The average respondent identified as female, age 47, although ages ranged from 18 to 68 years old. Most respondents reported being college graduates. This finding departs from the demographics of Huntington as a whole, which reports less than one third of its population holding a Bachelor's degree or higher. Analysis of the respondents' reported annual household incomes shows a bimodal distribution, as demonstrated in Figure 1. The income levels most commonly reported were \$20,000-\$39,999/year and the range of over \$100,000/year. Given that Huntington's median annual income is approximately \$29,000, it's logical that most responses are distributed normally around that income range. The frequency of respondents making over \$100,000 is likely a function of the market's perceived quality and value, which may attract higher income clientele. It may also be an issue of the variable scales: *over* \$100,000 encompasses a vastly greater quantity of potential incomes than a range. Lastly, respondents overwhelmingly identified

as white, at 97.5%, with one respondent identifying as Native American. This is higher than Huntington's 86.9% white population statistic.



On average, survey respondents reported having shopped at The Wild Ramp about once a week, for two to three years on average. When asked about prices, most respondents said they perceive The Wild Ramp's products as being priced at their value, and report spending between \$20 and \$39 on a typical shopping trip. Lastly, respondents overwhelmingly selected fruits and vegetables (92.5%) and dairy and eggs (77.5%) as the products they typically buy. 47.5% of respondents indicated buying meat, 45% report buying gourmet goods, 42.5% reported buying artisan goods, 35% reported buying baked goods, and only 10% buy beverages.

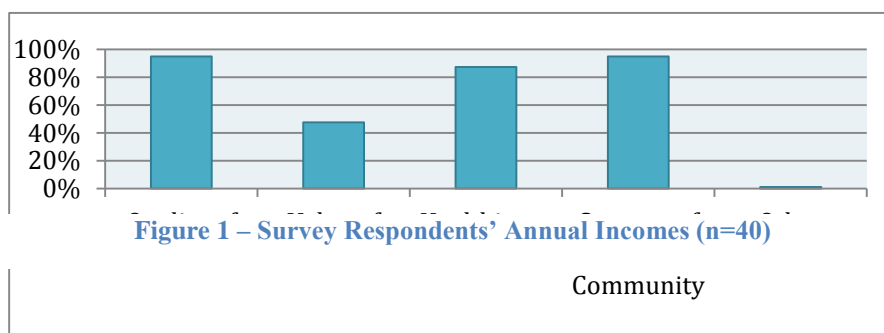


Figure 2 - "Why do you choose to purchase products from The Wild Ramp?" (n=40)

Questions regarding consumer motivations for shopping at The Wild Ramp and community engagement with the market yielded particularly compelling results (shown in Figure 2). When asked why they choose to purchase products from The Wild Ramp, 95% of respondents cited quality of the products and support of the local community as reasons. 87.5% of respondents also chose healthiness of the products, and 47.5% cited the value of products, indicating that the quality of local food and the perception that purchasing it supports the local community outweigh the perception of the healthiness of the products at the market. Furthermore, 85% of respondents reported gaining something additional from shopping at The Wild Ramp, and were then prompted to explain those additional gains. These free responses were all patterned around a sense of community support, social interactions, and gaining knowledge. For example, one respondent wrote, "Connection to my food, increased awareness of my area and what it has to offer. Community involvement, better local economy," and another responded, "Support of worthy and beneficial developments in our city's economic and cultural life." These responses show a clear connection between consumers'

motivations for shopping at The Wild Ramp and community wellbeing; data that supports previous research linking aspects of social cohesion to food purchasing choices.

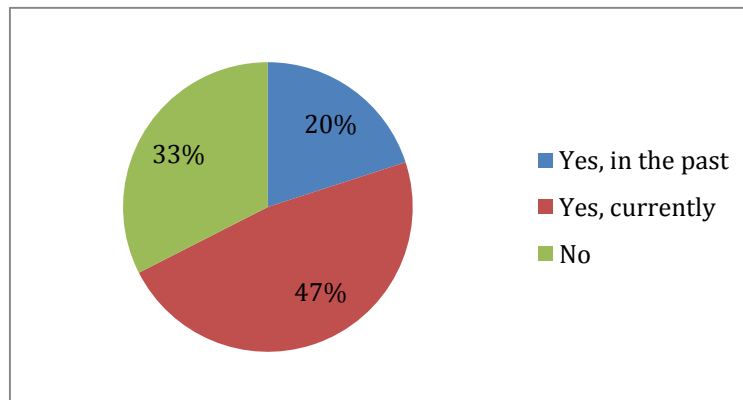


Figure 3 - "Do you believe you play or have played a role in The Wild Ramp's Development?" (n=40)

Because of The Wild Ramp's grassroots development and its reliance on volunteer labor, respondents were also asked whether they perceived themselves as having an influence on The Wild Ramp's development. As demonstrated in Figure 3, 67.5% of consumers answered "Yes," either currently or in the past. Respondents who answered "Yes" were filtered into a follow-up question asking how they were involved. 35% of respondents reported being active in The Wild Ramp's social media, 30% reported volunteering at the market, 27.5% reported contributing to fundraisers, and 7.5% reported attending Huntington's Chat-N-Chews or other public events.

9. Interview Results

A total of seven supplier interviews were conducted. Most suppliers self-identified as farmers or gardeners, with one interviewee identifying as a producer of a specific gourmet snack product. Four of the seven interviewees reported being in operation for fewer than 10 years. The other three reported being in operation for 20 years or more. Five of the seven suppliers communicated that they had first heard about The Wild Ramp through word of mouth: at local farmers markets, from friends who heard about it, or from the original group of people who started the market's development. One gardener said he read about the market in the newspaper. Another saw a post about the market on Facebook. Again, these results suggest that social capital had a strong influence on the development of The Wild Ramp's supplier base, given that most interviewees learned about the market through personal social networks or social media.

Five out of the seven suppliers sell their products through other venues, including local tailgate markets, private orders, and directly from the farm. Of those who sell their products elsewhere, most reported preferring to sell at The Wild Ramp over other venues for reasons of convenience, revenue, and a better understanding of market operations at The Wild Ramp as opposed to traditional retail markets. One farmer, who also supplied his products to local restaurants, told me that supplying to The Wild Ramp is "just less effort. You know, if I go to all the restaurants I've gotta wait for the chefs to be available so they can check everything, and it's just a huge pain to do all that. And then they normally want wholesale prices there, and here I can get retail" (Interview 6). With The Wild Ramp's current market model, suppliers are able to drop off their products at their own convenience, with 85% of the revenue being returned to them in the form of a monthly check.

All seven of the interviewees reported being positively impacted by their business relationship with The Wild Ramp. They all agreed that their business income had increased as a result of supplying to The Wild Ramp, although few were able to estimate a percentage increase. Several of the suppliers reported expanding or diversifying their operations. For example, one farmer proudly boasted that he now had 80 hens laying fresh eggs. Another extended an excited invitation to witness the high tunnel greenhouse he was building in his backyard, for which he hoped to get a grant from the West Virginia Department of Agriculture. "You need to see it, you really should," he urged, "Just once" (Interview 7).

Interviewees were also asked if they perceived any non-financial benefits from supplying goods to the market, to which five of the suppliers agreed they did. The supplier of the specific gourmet product reported having a “celebrity status,” being known around town for her popular snack item. Others reported meeting friends and learning new things, like the farmer who told me she was first introduced to the concept of non-GMO at the market and now uses non-GMO feed for her livestock. One farmer eloquently described The Wild Ramp as a “community gathering space for people who are progressive thinking in new food movements” (Interview 6). This same farmer told me The Wild Ramp had opened doors for him; gaining him recognition that aided in his being awarded a state grant for agricultural innovation.

When asked about their involvement in The Wild Ramp’s development, several suppliers listed specific ways they felt involved at the market. One interviewee cited involvement with The Wild Ramp’s social media, saying she participated in the “Name the Market” poll on Facebook. Another interviewee said he volunteered at the market. Yet another reported a desire to teach crafting workshops. One farmer couldn’t remember what he had done for the market, and called one of The Wild Ramp’s board members over to remind him. “Did I go to any of the Chat-N-Chews? Have I been involved in your development?” As it turns out, this farmer had made several in-kind donations to the market and had volunteered his time and skills; community-minded actions that, presumably, felt so second-nature he had forgotten he had done them. Without hesitation, all seven interviewees said they wanted to continue their relationship with The Wild Ramp in the future. For the most part, the interviews yielded the same general pattern. All the suppliers felt a beneficial business relationship with The Wild Ramp, which in itself would be a measure of the market’s success. One of the most compelling stories, however, lies within the perceived non-financial benefits many suppliers reported experiencing, and the palpable sense of community felt amongst both producers and consumers of the market.

10. Conclusion and Discussion

In Appalachia, a region still feeling the debilitating effects of historical economic disempowerment, there has been a strong community push toward revitalizing local business development. Many Appalachians firmly believe that restoring self-sufficient and prosperous local economies is the only hope for improvement. Such was the case in Huntington, West Virginia. Like many food deserts, Huntington is characterized as being low-income and in poor health. Riding the wave of a growing health movement, a group of community members chose to initiate a complementary response by reclaiming self-empowerment through local and nutritious food. Most significantly, they addressed issues otherwise overlooked by Huntington’s health movement: barriers to accessing healthy food items and the need for a local economy that would bolster and sustain Huntington’s working population.

While social and political awareness and resistance to globalized economic systems may have catalyzed the realization of the community’s needs, the process and operation of The Wild Ramp are also the result of Huntington’s sense of social involvement and connection to their location. This cultivation of social capital and community values is vital to the health of a local food system, to a vibrant community, and to dialogues that focus on public health as a community responsibility rather than individual behavior. A major driving force behind spending the time and money to purchase locally produced commodities is the perception of creating a broader public benefit from one’s buying choices. According to a community member who was involved in the market’s development, passion for Huntington’s local food movement seems to cross political and economic boundaries and age ranges; attracting constituents who normally would not find themselves occupying a shared social group.

Results from this research show that perceived benefits of shopping at The Wild Ramp include not only positive public health outcomes, but a sense of community development, belonging, and ownership in the market itself. In some ways, The Wild Ramp’s consumer behaviors are on par with the average behaviors of consumers in the United States. For example, survey respondents reported shopping at The Wild Ramp about once a week, and spending between \$20 and \$39 on each shopping trip; numbers which are consistent with the United States as a whole, according to the Food Marketing Institute.²² Survey data also suggest that The Wild Ramp’s consumers purchase produce more than any other food items, supporting the previous literature that consumers will make healthy choices when given the option. In many ways, though, The Wild Ramp is unique in its ability to mobilize community engagement, an element of the market model which is non-existent in most traditional grocery stores. Results of the survey clearly demonstrate that consumers perceive many social benefits of shopping at The Wild Ramp, such as supporting local farmers, engaging in social interactions, and gaining a sense of connection to local food. These benefits have prompted a sense of loyalty to the market. For example, the average consumer reported shopping at The Wild Ramp for two to three years - significant, given that the market had only been open three years at the time the survey was administered. Moreover, 67.5% of consumers indicated a personal investment in the market, whether through donating money, time,

or skills. The perception of social benefits and dedication to The Wild Ramp's development was true not only for consumers, but for local suppliers as well. Altogether, both the consumer survey and supplier interview data support the theory that social capital played a major role in The Wild Ramp's development and current success.

The Wild Ramp's social business model, which addresses a need within the community, utilizes these social networks to create mutually beneficial outcomes for both the market's customers and its suppliers. For these reasons, Huntington's local food market provides a powerful case for the influence of social connection and ethical consumption in the cultivation of community empowerment, which converged as the formation of one small local food market. Although this case presents the unique circumstances under which the Huntington community cultivated a local food movement, further research may be beneficial to other communities interested in replicating this process, particularly in addressing the needs of lower-income populations who may still be reluctant to shop at perceived "high-end" markets. The Wild Ramp's organizers attribute much of their rapid success to the momentum created by already-established health organizations in the community, which allowed them to draw upon a pre-existing pool of constituents who felt a personal stake in the community's health movement. One respondent wrote, "This is a community itself . . . Not a lot of projects have been successful in Huntington - it is so exciting to see one succeed." As with all place-based development strategies, The Wild Ramp's progress developed out of an emphasis on the unique needs, strengths, and existing social structures of a community with historical roots in subsistence and an eye toward progress.

11. Acknowledgements

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