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# Food Security and Choice: Poughkeepsie Plenty Community Food Assessment

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# FOOD SECURITY AND CHOICE

## POUGHKEEPSIE PLENTY COMMUNITY FOOD ASSESSMENT

This document presents research undertaken from 2010 – 2012 related to the food system of the City of Poughkeepsie that focused on the situation of food security, how households choose food and what choices they have.

More than one in  
four households  
in the City of  
Poughkeepsie is  
food insecure,  
with reduced  
quality, variety or  
desirability of  
diets, or hunger.  
This level of food  
insecurity  
outpaces levels  
for the U.S. as a  
whole, all U.S.  
inner cities, and  
the U.S.  
Northeast region.

# FOOD SECURITY AND CHOICE

## POUGHKEEPSIE PLENTY COMMUNITY FOOD ASSESSMENT

Introduction .....	4
Executive Summary of Key Findings .....	5
Food Security in the City of Poughkeepsie.....	5
How Do City of Poughkeepsie Households Choose Food? .....	6
What Food Choices Do City of Poughkeepsie Households Have?.....	7
What Possibilities Exist for the Future? .....	11
Community Food Assessment Research.....	12
Key Concepts .....	12
Economic Context.....	14
Household Survey.....	17
Focus Groups.....	37
Field Research .....	58
Appendices.....	91

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## INTRODUCTION

This Community Food Assessment, undertaken to understand and *characterize* how people experience Poughkeepsie's food system, was conducted for a broader initiative called Poughkeepsie Plenty. Toward building the City's capacity to ensure the right for all to access sufficient and nutritious food and transforming Poughkeepsie into a city where everyone can secure, prepare, enjoy and benefit from healthy food, Poughkeepsie Plenty set out to:

- Create a research-based community food assessment
- Mobilize community participation and input to create an action plan (for *improving* the City's food system – not contained here) through community food forums and a city-wide action planning forum
- Establish a Community Food Coalition that facilitates and oversees the implementation of the action plan toward realizing our mission and vision by coordinating projects and monitoring and advocating for policy

This document presents the research undertaken from 2010 – 2012 related to the food system of the City of Poughkeepsie focused on the situation of food security, how households choose food and what choices they have.

The assessment was driven by two research questions:

1. How do residents access healthy food in the City of Poughkeepsie?
2. How do City of Poughkeepsie residents make decisions about what to eat and what constrains their choices?

To this end, we developed statistically significant, city-wide baseline measures (with  $\pm 5\%$  margin of error) for food security, food access and food preferences by administering a survey to a random sample of City of Poughkeepsie households.

We conducted seven focus group interviews with particular segments of the City's population at risk of food insecurity, in order to clarify and contextualize their concerns within the baseline measures for the City as a whole.

We conducted fieldwork, interviews, archival research and secondary data analysis to assess broader features of the City's food system. This additional research shed light on the points of food distribution (how residents get food), supporting infrastructure (how transportation and other physical elements of the City affect residents' food access) and institutional influences (how programs and policies shape what residents eat). This report presents the research undertaken and key findings.

## POUGHKEEPSIE PLENTY

The mission of Poughkeepsie Plenty is to build the City's capacity to ensure the right for all to access sufficient and nutritious food. Our vision is that Poughkeepsie will be transformed into a city where everyone can secure, prepare, enjoy and benefit from healthy food.

## COMMUNITY FOOD ASSESSMENT

According to the Community Food Security Coalition, a Community Food Assessment is "a powerful way to tell the story of what is happening with food in a community, and to mobilize efforts to improve the food system."

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

The key findings of the assessment research are summarized herein.

## Food Security in the City of Poughkeepsie

### MORE THAN ONE IN FOUR HOUSEHOLDS ARE FOOD INSECURE

Our survey research estimates that less than three quarters (73.2%) of the City's households are **food secure** by USDA standards. This means they have no food-access problems or limitations, or so few as to not affect their diets or food intake.

Another 15.8% can be characterized as food insecure without hunger. These households reported reducing the quality, variety, or desirability of their diets frequently over the last year, although with little or no indication of reducing overall food intake.

The remaining 11.0% qualify as food insecure with hunger. These households reported disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake frequently over the last year.

Taken together, the 26.8% rate of food insecurity in the City of Poughkeepsie is very high, outpacing levels for the U.S. as a whole, all U.S. inner cities, and the U.S. Northeast region.

### POVERTY AND FOOD INSECURITY ARE CORRELATED

The key factor causing food insecurity among City of Poughkeepsie households is poverty.

2008-10 American Community Survey data indicate the City's median family income is \$44,595 – about \$17,500 less than the U.S. figure.

Furthermore, 26.0% of City residents, and 41.0% of children under 18, live on incomes below the poverty level, which again exceed the national statistics (of 14.4% and 20.1%, respectively).

In this local context, we found a strong statistical correlation between household income and food security.

Less than half (46.8%) of City households earning \$15,000 or less, and just over two-thirds (68.2%) of households earning \$15,000-35,000, could be characterized as food secure.

Importantly, we identified no statistically significant correlations of either household size or the presence of children under 18 with food security.

This last finding underscores how food insecurity is experienced among a variety of City of Poughkeepsie households, from large families with many mouths to feed to elderly individuals living alone.

	FOOD INSECURE	
FOOD SECURE	WITH HUNGER	WITHOUT HUNGER
73.2%	11.0%	15.8%

In the City of Poughkeepsie, food security seems less connected to different food values or nutrition knowledge than to inequalities of material resources and geographical mobility.

## How Do City of Poughkeepsie Households Choose Food?

Despite local inequalities in socioeconomic conditions and food security, our surveys revealed wide consensus among City of Poughkeepsie households regarding what's important when choosing a store and buying certain foods.

### FOUR REASONS TO CHOOSE A STORE

Around 90% of households identified four reasons as important (i.e., either “very important” or “somewhat important”) when choosing a store for most of their food: the store in question “has healthy foods,” “has better prices on the food I want,” “is easy to get to,” and “is close to home or work.”

### TWO REASONS TO CHOOSE CERTAIN FOODS

When ranking reasons “other than low prices” why they buy certain foods, 87.1% and 77.0% of respondents rated “food that stays fresh longer” and “food that’s easy to prepare,” respectively, as important.

### CONSUMER SUB-GROUPS

There are significant consumer sub-groups within the City of Poughkeepsie.

Notably, two out of every five households (or 39.0%) ranked “the store accepts WIC/food stamps” as important.

One third (33.6%) said WIC/food-stamp acceptance was “very important,” while one half (49.4%) of households reported it was “not at all important,” when choosing a store. This issue was one of the strongest points of *divergence* in how City of Poughkeepsie residents make decisions about accessing food.

Over half (52.4%) of households identified “the store sells foods from my family background” as important (which indicates co-ethnic or co-religious identification with the store’s products or clientele).

### NO CORRELATION BETWEEN INCOME LEVEL AND NUTRITIONAL AWARENESS

Healthy food choices correspond to another consumer sub-group.

For instance, organic food was ranked as important when buying certain foods for almost half (45.4%) of City of Poughkeepsie households. A similar number (42.3%) reported they always look at food labels to decide if the food is nutritious or healthy.

Importantly, we found no statistically significant correlations between these two items and household income, despite the common myth that nutritional awareness is the province of higher socioeconomic groups. Households in any income bracket seem, for all intents and purposes, no more or less likely to make healthy food choices of these kinds.

In the City of Poughkeepsie, food security seems less connected to different food values or nutrition knowledge than to inequalities of material resources and geographical mobility.

## What Food Choices Do City of Poughkeepsie Households Have?

Inequalities of material resources and household access highlight how the City's food security situation is influenced, in a variety of ways, by the kinds and distribution of food retail and assistance found in and around the City of Poughkeepsie.

### **SUPERMARKETS AND GROCERY STORES**

Supermarkets and grocery stores are especially critical, since these retailers are most likely to contain the large volumes that offer variety in cost, quality, and desirability in the different food items that households seek.

Significantly, the City of Poughkeepsie has only two bona fide grocery stores — Associated Supermarket (opened in April 2011) and Casa Latina — both located at the eastern edge of city limits.

Of course, other grocery stores lie just over the City's borders. Yet convenient access to these markets as well as easy transport of goods from them cannot be assumed for large segments of the City's population.

In fact, the USDA has recently classified large areas of the City (specifically, two Census tracts covering most of the City's north side) as a "food desert," which it defines as areas with poverty levels of at least 20% that are located more than a mile away from a supermarket or large grocery store.

During focus group interviews, we heard that City of Poughkeepsie households across socioeconomic and linguistic divides recognize that no single supermarket generally satisfies all their household needs. The need to travel to multiple stores to cost-effectively buy goods as different as fresh produce, family-size packaged foods, and non-food necessities underscores the criticality of transportation in household shopping.

### **TRANSPORTATION**

A critical feature of the food system here is the fact that more than one quarter (26.8%, according to the 2008-10 American Community Survey) of City of

Poughkeepsie households don't have a private vehicle.

In this local context, our survey revealed statistically significant correlations between household modes of transportation and food security.

Less than one half (47.8%) of households who "usually" take the public bus, and less than one quarter (23.1%) of households who "usually" walk to grocery stores, qualify as food secure.

Additionally, fully one half (50.0%) of City of Poughkeepsie households who said it was "difficult" to get to a grocery store were food insecure.

Moreover, 81.5% of all the households who said it was "difficult" to get to a grocery store cited transportation as the main reason.

### **SMALLER RETAILERS**

With so few supermarkets located within or close to city limits, smaller retailers like corner stores, bodegas, dollar stores, and delicatessens dominate the food market sector in the City of Poughkeepsie.

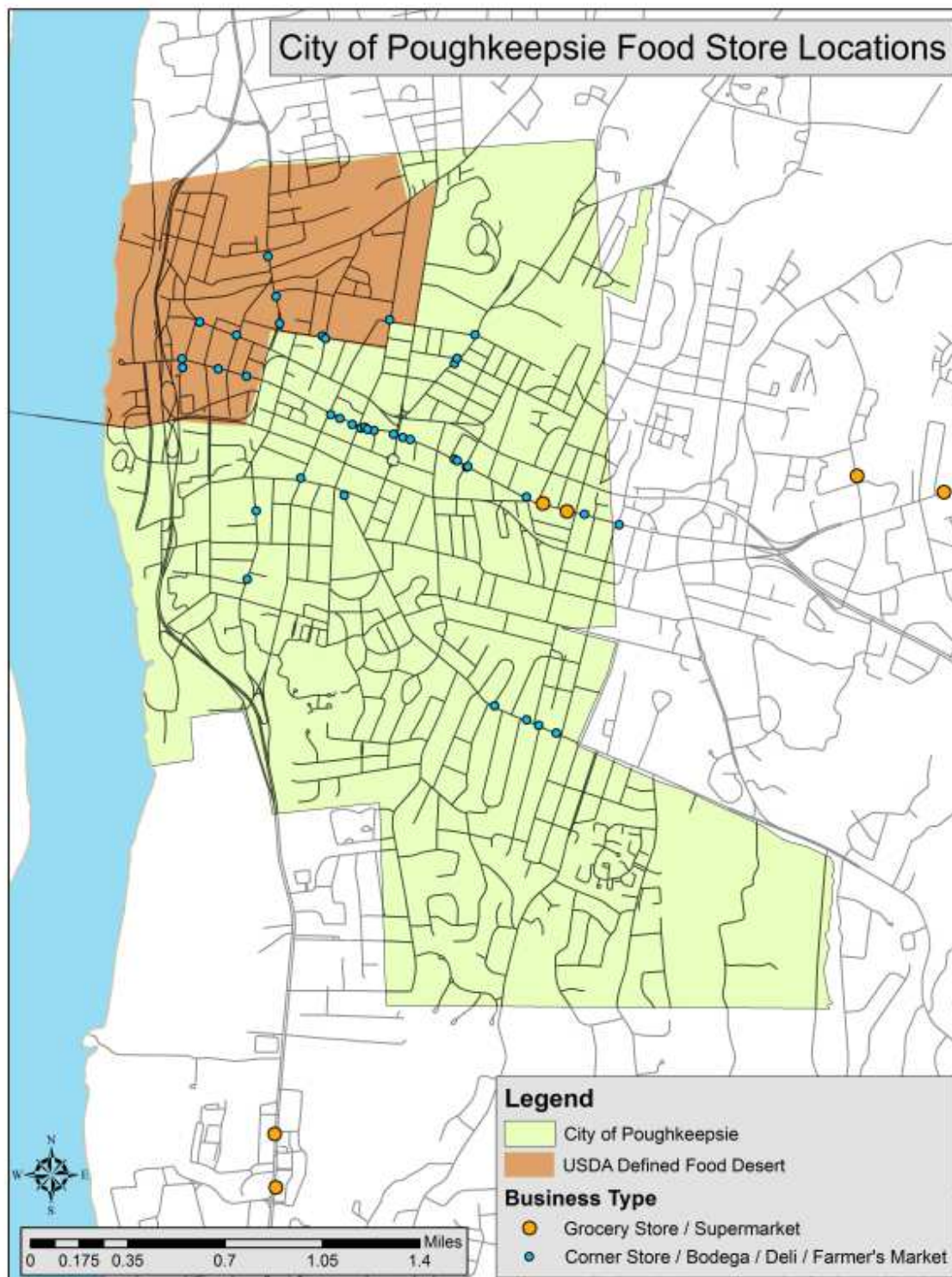
Overall, 9.6% of the City of Poughkeepsie households we surveyed reported they do not get most of their food from supermarkets or grocery stores.

In contrast to supermarkets, smaller food stores typically have reduced variety in food items, although some stores may carry ethnic foods or other specialty items that supermarkets sell less frequently.

Smaller food stores provide a valuable service to many City of Poughkeepsie households.



Some of these establishments sell fresh foods like produce or meats – 38% of the small food stores we observed sold produce of some kind. Their location is convenient to City of Poughkeepsie households, particularly along the Main Street corridor.



Smaller food stores also play an important role in **community connections**.

They often have strong community basis, particularly in relation to the City's Latin American, West Indian, and Middle Eastern immigrants. Ethnic entrepreneurs have contributed to the City's economic development and represent a potential source of local leadership with an economic interest in community well-being.

Smaller stores' concentration along Main Street means they support a measure of social order by offering "eyes on the street" with an interest in maintaining street side safety.

However, the relatively high rate of failure among smaller food stores (such as the Spicy Peppers produce store on Main Street, which went out of business during our research period) undermines food access among the many households who shop regularly at these establishments.

Smaller food stores' significant contribution to many residents' diets is indicated by our survey finding that almost one of every 20 households (4.4%) in the City of Poughkeepsie reported getting "most of their food" from these kinds of establishments. Likewise, one in five (19.9%) households report shopping "often" at smaller food stores.

#### **AFFORDABILITY**

In this landscape, the problem of food insecurity isn't necessarily the result of households finding no food markets whatsoever within city limits.

A more relevant question is how affordable are the foods that households can find at food markets, particularly in light of the correlation between food security and income.

Our comparison of average prices among Town of Poughkeepsie supermarkets and the smaller food

stores in the City of Poughkeepsie reveals no clear patterns.

On the one hand, a gallon of milk or a box of cereal costs on average more in the City's smaller stores than in Town supermarkets. On the other hand, the average loaf of bread costs less in the City—not taking into account the reduced variety of bread products sold in smaller food stores.

We also observed that about one in three (35%) of the City's smaller food stores accepted EBT and/or WIC benefits, another way that food is made affordable to low income residents.

#### **QUALITY AND NUTRITIONAL VALUE**

If the contribution of food unaffordability to the problem of food insecurity in the City of Poughkeepsie seems inconclusive, a more important factor is the quality and nutritional value of food sold in the City.

This issue is closely associated with the characteristics of smaller food stores, which typically emphasize snacks, soda, processed foods, and other items of questionable nutritional value.

In smaller stores where fresh foods are sold, these offerings are often limited. For instance, while 38% of the small food stores we observed sold produce of some kind, only two sold heads of lettuce.

Some focus group informants reported that produce in these stores sometimes remained on shelves past peak freshness.

#### **RESTAURANTS**

Retail food markets aren't the only outlets through which City of Poughkeepsie households obtain their foods.

There are also the many restaurants in and just outside the City, a high number of which serve fast

food, take-out food, and other cuisines or styles of food that are priced to fit lower-income budgets.

Restaurants' significant contribution to many residents' diets is indicated by our survey finding that more than one out of every 20 households (5.4%) in the City of Poughkeepsie reported getting "most of their food" from these food outlets. Likewise, more than one in four (27.3%) households reported "often" eating out or getting food from restaurants.

From focus group interviews, we have anecdotal evidence that two types of households are most likely to eat primarily from restaurants:

1. Households where someone works at restaurants and brings back food to share with the rest of the household, and
2. Non-family households that prefer to spend earnings eating out or bringing home take-out food.

Our study didn't look in further detail at how restaurants influence the nutritional intake of City residents, but we note that the Dutchess County Department of Health's 2007 Trans Fat Survey estimated that almost half (44%) of City restaurants prepared foods containing trans fats, which may contribute to weight gain and to health problems like heart disease and diabetes.

#### **FARMERS' MARKET**

At least one seasonal outlet in the City focuses on fresh food retail: the Poughkeepsie Farmers' Market. A stated aim of the market is to provide locally-produced, fresh and nutritious foods to the community.

The chief produce vendor is the Poughkeepsie Farm Project, a non-profit organization that manages the market (which also spearheaded the Poughkeepsie Plenty initiative).

The fresh produce vendors have enjoyed the strongest sales amongst the vendors, in part because they are able to receive forms of public assistance that have steadily increased as a percentage of the market's overall produce sales – from 26.1% in 2009 to 34.4% in 2011.

The market's experience reinforces assessment findings that many low income residents value and seek out high quality fresh food, which can be difficult to access in the City of Poughkeepsie.

During the course of the assessment, the market relocated from a vacant lot on Main Street to a City park several blocks away, increasing its proximity to high density neighborhoods and shifting from operating at lunchtime to a more convenient time in the late afternoon and early evening.

#### **FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS**

In addition to the market, there are many other ways City of Poughkeepsie residents get food from food assistance programs or use these programs to subsidize their retail food purchases.

Almost certainly, the most widely-used food assistance program is the City's schools.

The Poughkeepsie City School District reported that, in the 2010-11 school year, 63% of its students were eligible for free lunches, and another 11% were eligible for reduced-price lunches (or 49.2% of school age children in all City households, according to our survey).

Considering that eligibility for these programs is based on low household incomes, this statistic suggests that three of every four students (74%) face some form of food insecurity due to their household's socioeconomic situation.

Furthermore, the City of Poughkeepsie contains 12 food pantries and free meal services at last count.

About half of these establishments are organized by City churches, with hours limited to specific days of the week. Others are operated by non-profit groups like Dutchess Outreach and the Salvation Army. These establishments are typically open five or more days of the week.

Still other non-profits provide free or donated meals in three emergency shelters in and around

the City, for domestic abuse victims (Grace Smith House), runaway youth and the homeless (Hudson River Housing).

Several of the food programs operated by non-profits are supported by donations of fresh produce from the Poughkeepsie Farm Project, which also provides subsidized shares of fresh produce to low-income families.

## What Possibilities Exist for the Future?

### COMMUNITY ASSETS TO BUILD ON

While the City of Poughkeepsie faces a daunting food security situation with roots in several elements – from the population's socioeconomic conditions, to the food market landscape, to the public transportation system – we also identify several community assets to build upon in future efforts to improve the food system.

The rich foundation of non-profit organizations, educational institutions, and dedicated community leaders has been long recognized as a valuable community asset in the City. Organizations currently at work on food justice issues, such as the Poughkeepsie Farm Project and Dutchess Outreach, are hardly the only groups with a stake in food security.

In this report, we have further suggested the potential leadership and affinity of smaller food store proprietors in the broader effort to reform and enhance the food system.

We think it important also to note the assets provided by residential groups themselves, such as ethnic communities of which there are several in the City of Poughkeepsie. The grassroots formation of a ride-sharing system (the *raite*) by Latino immigrants is an excellent example of a social capital strategy based in residential networks to ameliorate challenges specific to the City's food system. So too we can take heed of ethnic traditions that these groups might share: culinary education, gardening practices, and general traditions of neighborly outreach.

## COMMUNITY FOOD ASSESSMENT RESEARCH

In the rest of this document, we review the research conducted for the Poughkeepsie Plenty Community Food Assessment. Having discussed key findings in the Executive Summary, above, here we present the findings and analysis in more extended form to document the substantial research that was carried out on behalf of the community food assessment.

### Key Concepts

The principles and methodology of the Poughkeepsie Plenty Community Food Assessment were guided by two key concepts. The first is the **food system**, or the organized chain of activities that follow the food people eat from farm to table to landfill. Food systems can be conceived of involving at least seven domains through which food is transformed on route to its final destination:

- **Production.** Exemplified by agriculture and farming, this domain is where food originates. Issues here involve the ways food production is organized: industrialized, alternative, organic, local, etc.
- **Processing.** Much of the food in our food system is further processed from its raw form to take the form that people obtain. Issues here entail food products' pre-preparation (with consequences for consumer convenience and nutrition), packaging, and marketing.
- **Transportation.** As suggested by the idea of "food miles," food usually travel long distances before consumers find it. Issues here include the geographical scale of consumer markets that farmers and food businesses reach, and the impact of transportation infrastructure on low prices and environmental sustainability.
- **Distribution.** This refers to the different settings in which consumers can access food products — most often through retail markets, but also schools and institutions, emergency providers, and even backyard or community gardens.
- **Consumption.** This domain highlights how households obtain, prepare and eat food. Various household characteristics are relevant here: money for food purchases, transportation to stores and other food providers, cooking skills, nutritional awareness, dietary and cultural preferences for certain foods, etc.
- **Waste.** Uneaten food and product packaging end up in the waste stream. Issues here include landfill capacity, composting, recycling infrastructure for packaging and food by-products (like cooking oil), and other destinations for unused food (such as food made informally available for "dumpster diving").
- **Policy:** Whereas the prior six domains can be understood as comprising a linear chain of food transformation, policy can be thought of as intervening at various points in and between links of this chain. Policymakers can promote a variety of social goods or harms through subsidy, penalization, support or inaction, such as corporate profit, hunger prevention, small-farm viability, environmental sustainability, etc.

In an era of agribusiness and global food production, food systems necessarily extend across city limits. In emphasizing the City of Poughkeepsie's *urban food system*, the Poughkeepsie Plenty Community Food Assessment calls attention specifically to the local aspects of distribution, consumption, and policy. These

provide the conceptual foundation for answering one of the questions we focused on, namely, how do people *experience* Poughkeepsie's food system.

The second key concept guiding the community food assessment is **food security**, which the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines as:

**Access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life.**

Food security includes at a minimum:

- The ready availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods
- Assured ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways (that is, without resorting to emergency food supplies, scavenging, stealing, or other coping strategies)

Conversely, the USDA defines food insecurity as “limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways.”<sup>1</sup> Figure 1 illustrates how this issue can be understood in terms of three household conditions.

**Figure 1: Three conditions of household food security**

Food secure	Food insecure...	
	...without hunger	...with hunger
No food-access problems or limitations, or so few as to not affect diets or food intake.	Reduced quality, variety, or desirability of diet. Little or no indication of reduced food intake.	Multiple indications of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake.
Least severe health/nutrition risks <-----> Most severe health/nutrition risks		

The concepts of food systems and food security informed the methodology of the Poughkeepsie Plenty community food system insofar as they point to different levels of analysis. Food security, as defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), is a household issue<sup>2</sup> that is best studied using methods that record

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, “Food Security in the United States: Measuring Household Food Security,” ERS/USDA Briefing Room, <http://www.ers.usda.gov/Briefing/FoodSecurity/measurement.htm> (accessed December 22, 2010). It should be noted that, while relying on USDA methods used to assess households' food security that have remained unchanged, this report employs a set of descriptive labels that the USDA used prior to introducing new language in 2006. The newer labels are as follows:

Food Insecurity

- Very low food security (old label=Food insecurity with hunger): Reports of multiple indications of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake.
- Low food security (old label=Food insecurity without hunger): reports of reduced quality, variety, or desirability of diet. Little or no indication of reduced food intake.

Food Security

- Marginal food security (old label=Food security): one or two reported indications – typically of anxiety over food sufficiency or shortage of food in the house. Little or no indication of changes in diets or food intake.
- High food security (old label=Food security): no reported indications of food access problems or limitations.

For the newer labels, see USDA Economic Research Services, “Definitions of Food Security,” <http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/definitions-of-food-security.aspx> (accessed October 5, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> “Food insecurity...is a household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food” distinct from hunger as “an individual-level physiological condition that may result from food insecurity.” USDA Economic Research Services,



information on household characteristics, behavior, and preferences — in our research, survey questionnaires and focus group interviews. By contrast, an urban food system involves city-wide issues of market conditions, physical layout, and public infrastructure that households aren't necessarily suited to observe effectively. To study these city-wide phenomena, we gathered city-level data by conducting fieldwork, secondary data analysis, and archival research.

These two levels of analysis also guide the organization of this report. First, we discuss food security, access and choices in the City of Poughkeepsie by sharing the findings of our survey and focus group research. Then, we address the food system context as illuminated by our fieldwork, secondary data analysis, and archival research.

## Economic Context

The state of food security in the City of Poughkeepsie should be understood, first, in broad economic context. When we started surveying households toward the end of 2010, the United States was two years into a severe economic downturn that resulted in lost jobs and economic insecurity for far too many. In September 2010, 4.9 million Americans received food stamp benefits, a record enrollment in the federal government's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.<sup>3</sup> The downturn shrunk the already stressed safety net that Americans had previously relied upon, as governments across all levels cut or reallocated spending on social programs. Of particular relevance to this report, in 2010 the County Executive of Dutchess County identified a \$40 million gap in the county 2011 budget; in part to pay for mandated programs like Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, the county planned to cut spending and workforces in the county's Departments of Health and Social Services, among others.<sup>4</sup> Government budget cuts in turn have affected the funding that non-profit service providers rely on.

If the current moment is a particularly extreme period in which to examine food security, it only exacerbates the economic distress and socioeconomic inequalities that have characterized the City of Poughkeepsie over much of the last five decades. This report isn't the setting to review the history of Poughkeepsie's urban crisis, only to note its primary impacts on the City's social landscape. Historically, inequality within Dutchess County (of which the City of Poughkeepsie is county seat) has registered most heavily upon the City, as population exodus to the Town of Poughkeepsie and other suburban environs has left the City with a smaller population and a higher concentration of non-white, lower-income, and less educated residents. The most recent federal data, which come from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2008-10 American Community Survey 3-year estimates, indicate an unemployment rate in the City of 11.3%—a full 2.3% higher than the national rate. The City's median family income is \$44,595— about \$17,500 less than the U.S. figure. 26.0% of City residents, and 41.0% of children under 18, live off incomes below the poverty level, which again exceed the national statistics (of 14.4% and 20.1%, respectively). Below, Figure 2 presents poverty rates for different categories of residents. Within the City itself, these socioeconomic and demographic characteristics are concentrated in the City's northern neighborhoods, although such generalizations must be interpreted with care, as household facing economic insecurity can be found across all ten Census tracts of the City. Such regional inequality also manifests in the

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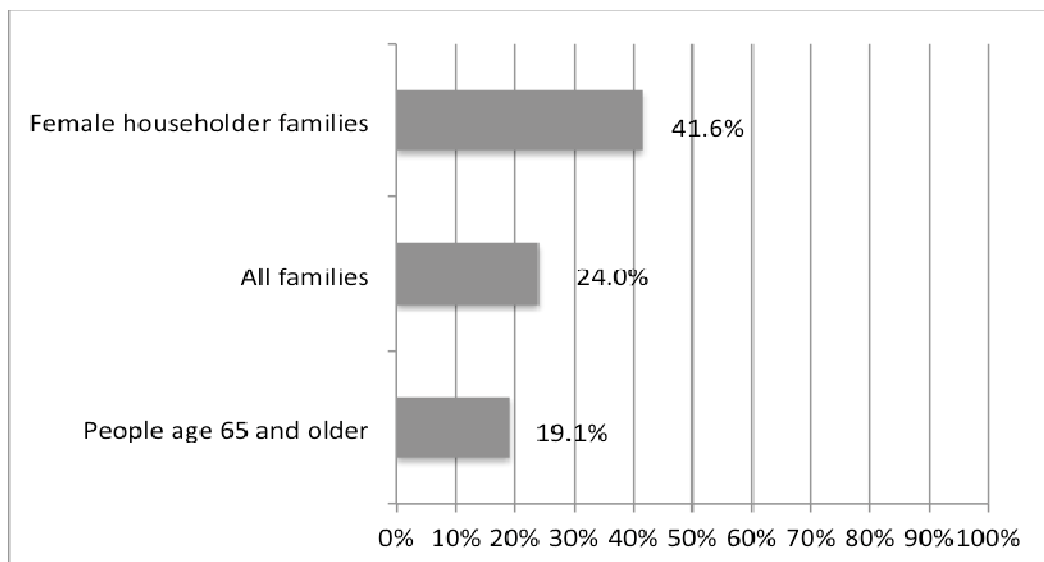
"Definitions of Food Security," <http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/definitions-of-food-security.aspx> (accessed October 5, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> Food Research and Action Center, "September 2010," <http://frac.org/reports-and-resources/snapfood-stamp-program-participation-data-2009/> (accessed December 22, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> William R. Steinhaus, "County Trying to Close \$40 Million Budget Gap for Next Year Budget," Dutchess County News Release, October 6, 2010, <http://www.co.dutchess.ny.us/CountyGov/Departments/CountyExecutive/18994.htm>

state of commercial development (or *underdevelopment*) in the City. Most importantly for the community food assessment, the City didn't have a large supermarket between 1992 and 2011.

**Figure 2: Poverty rates in the City of Poughkeepsie**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2008-10 American Community Survey 3-year estimates

The City of Poughkeepsie is home to different ethnic groups and many foreign-born immigrants. For several decades, a substantial population of West Indians has resided here, introducing ethnic and national distinctions among the City's Black population. Meanwhile, the size of the City's Latino population has grown noticeably over the last twenty years, comprising 19.5% of City residents according to the 2008-10 American Community Survey. Of this group, 4.3% of City residents identify as Puerto Rican; a Spanish-speaking population hailing from U.S. territory, this group has lived in and around the New York City metropolitan region since at least the mid-20th century. More recently, a sizeable number of Spanish-speaking immigrants from Latin America, particularly Mexico, have migrated to the City and throughout the surrounding Mid-Hudson Valley. The 2008-10 American Community Survey indicates that 10.8% of the City's population identifies as Mexican, and another 4.3% as Cuban or other Latino/Hispanic. Separately, 11.8% of residents primarily speak Spanish at home; of them, half (50.1%, or 5.9% of all City residents over 5 years old) report they speak English less than "very well." Another 6.1% of City residents over 5 years old primarily speak another language of Indo-European, Asian, or other origin at home.

Although the causal connections are many and sometimes complex, these contexts clearly impact the food security of City residents. In a 2008 telephone survey of randomly-sampled Dutchess County residents, 26% of respondents from the City of Poughkeepsie reported difficulty accessing healthy food, a rate well in excess of what residents of other municipalities in the county reported. The survey further found:



More than half of those who reported difficulty buying healthy foods indicated that such foods are too expensive...About a fifth of Hispanic and non-Hispanic black respondents [in the larger Dutchess County] reported difficulty buying healthy food; by comparison, 10% of non-Hispanic white respondents experienced such difficulty.<sup>5</sup>

Another indicator of the socioeconomic obstacles to food security comes from the City's public schools. In the City's school district, 63% of students in 2010-11 were entitled to receive free lunches, and another 11% were eligible for reduced-price lunches.<sup>6</sup>

Hunger is only one manifestation of food insecurity; health problems associated with consumption of non-nutritional foods is another. We can infer the extent of these problems for the City using county data, making some assumptions that the concentration of food insecurity within the City of Poughkeepsie will parallel the just discussed patterns for socioeconomic precariousness. As of 2008, 27.6% of county adults were considered obese (4.5% higher than the obesity rate for New York state), and 9.7% of county adults had diabetes (almost two percent higher than for the entire state).<sup>7</sup> Low insurance rates and inaccessibility of healthcare contribute to the severity of these problems. In the 2008 county survey previously mentioned, 22% of City residents said they don't have health insurance coverage for themselves; this rate is twice that for the county and one-third higher than the national rate. Additionally, 34% of City residents reported forgoing necessary healthcare services in the past year.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Center for Governmental Research, "Dutchess County ICA Community Health Survey Final Report" (March 2009), pg. 43.

<sup>6</sup> The New York State District Report Card, Accountability and Overview Report 2010-11, District: Poughkeepsie City School District

<sup>7</sup> Dutchess County Department of Health, "Health and Well-Being of Children, Families, and Adults in Dutchess County: Select Indicators" (May 2010), pg. 65.

<sup>8</sup> Center for Governmental Research, "Dutchess County ICA Community Health Survey Final Report" (March 2009), pp. 30, 23.

## Household Survey

Against the backdrop of such information about local food security, the Poughkeepsie Plenty Community Food Assessment surveyed a random sample of City of Poughkeepsie households between October 2010 and April 2012 to gauge:

1. The extent of food security across the City
2. The levels of access households have to grocery stores, other food retail and food assistance
3. The criteria households use when choosing food retailers to shop at and food products to buy

Because we randomly sampled households, we were able to project the response patterns we observed to all City of Poughkeepsie households with a  $\pm 5\%$  margin of error. This means that when a particular statistic reflects, for instance, 15% of households from our sample, we can infer with 95% confidence that this statistic corresponds to a range of 10-20% (the 15% statistic  $\pm$  the 5% margin of error) of all 12,400 households (as measured by the 2010 Census) in the City of Poughkeepsie. The reader should keep in mind that when we describe our survey results in terms of all City households, these findings were derived from this random sampling methodology and imply the  $\pm 5\%$  margin of error. See Appendix A for the survey instrument we used.

### FOOD SECURITY

One of the most important findings from the Poughkeepsie Plenty household survey is the extent of food security we discovered in the City of Poughkeepsie.

To gauge food security, our survey incorporated questions from the USDA's Household Food Security Scale, which asks respondents questions about their households' *financial ability* to meet their nutritional basic needs. Accordingly, these questions don't inquire directly into household members' physical well-being, although extensive research documents a strong relationship between magnitudes of food insecurity and nutritional ill health, with hunger and malnutrition being the most severe consequences.

Following a protocol developed by researchers at the Center for Disease Control, our survey asked six brief questions that comprise a six-item scale for food security; see Figure 3. Based on the number of affirmative answers that respondents give, the scale categorizes their households as either food secure (answering 0-1 questions affirmatively), food insecure without hunger (2-4 affirmatives), and food insecure with hunger (5-6 affirmatives). The virtue of the scale is that it measures food insecurity conservatively. Although many households might face occasional situations that would yield an affirmative answer on any one food security question, they must give at least two affirmative answers, indicating longer or less episodic circumstances of financial constraints, for the scale to count them as food insecure.

**Figure 3: Questions on the six-item USDA Household Food Security Scale**

1. In the last 12 months, did you or others in your household ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food? [*If "yes," ask question #2*]
2. How often did this happen? [*Affirmative answers: "almost every month" and "some months but not every month"*]
3. In the last 12 months, did you or others in your household ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn't enough money for food?
4. In the last 12 months, were you or others ever hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food?
5. Please tell me whether this statement was often, sometimes, or never true for you or other members of the household in the past 12 months: "The food that we bought just didn't last, and we didn't have money to get more." [*Affirmative answers: "often true" and "sometimes true"*]
6. Please tell me whether this statement was often, sometimes, or never true for you or other members of the household in the past 12 months: "We couldn't afford to eat balanced meals." [*Affirmative answers: "often true" and "sometimes true"*]

Source: Stephen J. Blumberg, Karil Bialostosky, William L. Hamilton and Ronnette R. Briefel, "The Effectiveness of a Short Form of the Household Food Security Scale," *American Journal of Public Health* 89 (1999): 1231-4.

### ***How widespread is food insecurity in Poughkeepsie?***

As Table 1 indicates, **26.8% of households in the City of Poughkeepsie are food insecure by USDA standards.** 41.1% of these food insecure households count as food insecure with hunger. Put differently, **11.0% of all City of Poughkeepsie households qualify as hungry by USDA standards.** For specific magnitudes of food insecurity, see Table 2.

**Table 1: Household food security in the Poughkeepsie Plenty survey**

Food secure	Food insecure	
	without hunger	with hunger
73.2%	15.8%	11.0%

N=354

**Table 2: Magnitudes of household food security scores in survey**

Scores on 6-item scale	Number of respondents	Percent of respondents	
0	226	63.8%	<i>Food secure</i>
1	33	9.3%	
2	23	6.5%	<i>Food insecure without hunger</i>
3	14	4.0%	
4	19	4.0%	
5	21	5.9%	<i>Food insecure with hunger</i>
6	18	5.1%	
Total	354	100	

As a point of comparison, Poughkeepsie's levels of household food insecurity outpace those for the nation as a whole, for all inner cities (i.e., metropolitan principal cities), and for the Northeast region, according to the latest USDA data. See Table 3.

**Table 3: Comparison figures for U.S. household food security in 2010**

Comparison unit	Food security	Food insecurity	
		without hunger	with hunger
U.S.	85.5%	9.1%	5.4%
Metropolitan principal cities	83.0%	10.7%	6.3%
Northeast	87.6%	7.7%	4.7%
<i>City of Poughkeepsie</i>	73.2%	11.0%	15.8%

Sources: United States Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, *Household Food Security in the United States in 2010*, Economic Research Report No. 125, September 2011, pg. 11 and *this Poughkeepsie Plenty Community Food Assessment*.

### ***Which groups are at special risk of food insecurity?***

Our survey data show several factors to be significantly correlated with the distribution of household food security. We cross-tabulated household food security scores with 12 factors (for a discussion of our techniques, see the section, "Survey Methodology"). Here we review all the crosstabulations that proved to be statistically significant (at the  $p < 0.05$  level), starting with three group characteristics. We remind the reader that correlation

is not causation; the effect of these factors might be explained by third variables not captured in these bivariate correlations.

The first statistically significant factor is **household income**. The correlation between household income and food security is perhaps unsurprising if we recall that the food security questions specifically asked about households' financial ability to meet nutritional basic needs. City households' distribution into five annual household income brackets is significantly correlated with households' experience of food security, with lower brackets being more likely to report food insecurity. As Table 4 indicates, less than half (46.8%) of all households in the lowest bracket are food secure. Almost a quarter of them (22.8%) are hungry by USDA criteria.

(Note that the total of respondents reported in Table 4 is smaller than in the prior tables because a substantial proportion of survey respondents either declined to report their income level or gave an answer we couldn't code; see Table 23, later in this report. Smaller discrepancies can be seen in our other cross-tabulations for the same reason.)

**Table 4: Household food security by income level**

Household income	Food security	Food insecurity		Total
		without hunger	with hunger	
\$15,000 or less	46.8% (37)	30.4% (24)	22.8% (18)	100.0% (79)
\$15,001-\$34,000	68.2% (58)	15.3% (13)	16.5% (14)	100.0% (85)
\$35,000-\$49,000	70.7% (29)	17.1% (7)	12.2% (5)	100.0% (41)
\$50,000-\$99,000	91.7% (55)	8.3% (5)	0.0% (0)	100.0% (60)
\$100,000 or more	100.0% (36)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	100.0% (36)
Total	71.4% (215)	16.3% (49)	12.3% (37)	100.0% (301)

p=0.000

**Race** is also correlated with food security. If we eliminate the two smallest racial categories from our survey (Asian/Pacific Islander and Native American, which combined counted for only 6 respondents to our survey), we find that White and mixed-race households are more likely to be food secure than Black households. See Table 5. We suspect that much of the correlation between race and food security may be explained by the unobserved relationship of household income with race.

**Table 5: Household food security by race of household**

Race	Food security	Food insecurity		Total
		without hunger	with hunger	
White	79.3% (130)	11.6% (19)	9.2% (15)	100.0% (164)
Black	62.1% (64)	24.3% (25)	13.6% (14)	100.0% (103)
More than one race	78.0% (39)	16.0% (8)	6.0% (3)	100.0% (50)
Total	73.5% (233)	16.4% (52)	10.1% (32)	100.0% (317)

p=0.027

**Hispanic** ethnicity is also correlated with food insecurity. As Table 6 indicates, Hispanic households are more likely to be food insecure than White or mixed Hispanic/non-Hispanic households. We interpret these figures with caution, since a small number of Hispanic households participated in our random survey sample. Furthermore, as with race, this apparent correlation may be explained by the unobserved relationship of household income with Hispanic ethnicity.

**Table 6: Household food security by Hispanic ethnicity**

Ethnicity	Food security	Food insecurity		Total
		without hunger	with hunger	
Non-Hispanic	74.8% (228)	16.4% (50)	8.9% (27)	100.0% (305)
Hispanic	52.2% (12)	13.0% (3)	34.8% (8)	100.0% (23)
Mixed	75.0% (15)	10.0% (2)	15.0% (3)	100.0% (20)
Total	73.3% (255)	15.8% (55)	10.9% (38)	100.0% (348)

p=0.01

Group characteristics that aren't significantly correlated with food security in the City of Poughkeepsie deserve mention. *Household size* has no bearing upon food security. Also, households with *children under 18* are no more or less at risk of food insecurity than households without children under 18. These two insignificant correlations underscore how food insecurity is experienced among a wide range of Poughkeepsie households, from large families with many mouths to feed to elderly individuals living alone.

### How does transportation affect food security?

Food security isn't just affected by household demographics. Although a household's income certainly affects its transportation options, not having access to a car is less of an impediment when large, full-service grocery stores are located within walking distance for all. This isn't the case in the City of Poughkeepsie, which had no such store within city limits when we began conducting our survey. In April 2011, the City finally acquired an Associated Supermarket, which is located across the street from Casa Latina, the Hispanic goods retailer that previously counted as the City's only grocery store (and a small one at that). Importantly, both of these stores are found at the City's eastern end—a mile away from the City's central business district, even farther from many residential neighborhoods. This is a highly important feature of the City's food system, when we take into account the USDA's definition of a food desert:

- A *low income census tract*, having either: 1) a poverty rate of 20 percent or higher, or 2) a median family income at or below 80 percent of the area's median family income
- Where at least 500 people and/or at least 33 percent of the census tract's population residing of residents has *low access* – more than one mile in urban areas – from a supermarket or large grocery store.<sup>9</sup>

Our survey asked respondents about the transportation they "usually" used to get to grocery stores and supermarkets, which we defined for the Poughkeepsie area as Associated Supermarket (for surveys conducted after April 2011), Stop & Shop, Super Stop & Shop, Price Chopper, Adams Fairacre Farms, Casa Latina, and Mother Earth's Storehouse. We found that **driving a car** significantly increases the likelihood of a household's food security. Note that our survey question doesn't assume households which "usually drive a car" necessarily *own* this car; it's possible some of them borrow a car from family, friends or neighbors. As Table 7 shows, more than three-fourths (78.2%) of households that usually drive a car to the grocery store are food secure.

**Table 7: Household food security by driving a car**

Do you usually drive a car to a grocery store?	Food insecurity			Total
	Food security	without hunger	with hunger	
Yes	78.2% (215)	13.1% (36)	8.7% (24)	100.0% (275)
No	54.6% (42)	26.0% (20)	19.5% (15)	100.0% (77)
Total	73.0% (257)	15.9% (56)	11.1% (39)	100.0% (352)

p=0.000

As this implies, households that don't usually drive a car to the grocery store are at greater risk of being food insecure. In fact, two alternate transportation options are significantly correlated with food insecurity. Table 8

<sup>9</sup> USDA Economic Research Services, "Definition of a Food Desert," <http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-desert-locator/documentation.aspx> (accessed October 5, 2012).

shows that more than three-fourths of households (76.9%) that usually **walk to a grocery store** are food insecure, with their numbers split equally between with/without hunger.

**Table 8: Household food security by walking**

Do you usually walk to a grocery store?	Food security	Food insecurity		Total
		without hunger	with hunger	
Yes	23.1% (3)	38.5% (5)	38.5% (5)	100.0% (13)
No	74.9% (254)	15.0% (51)	10.0% (34)	100.0% (339)
Total	73.0% (257)	15.9% (56)	11.1% (39)	100.0% (352)

p=0.000

Primary dependence on **public transportation** is similarly correlated with food insecurity. More than half (52.2%) of all households that usually take public transportation to a grocery store are food insecure, with their numbers split equally between with/without hunger. See Table 9.

**Table 9: Household food security by public transportation**

Do you usually take public transportation to a grocery store?	Food security	Food insecurity		Total
		without hunger	with hunger	
Yes	47.8% (11)	26.1% (6)	26.1% (6)	100.0% (23)
No	74.8% (246)	15.2% (50)	10.0% (33)	100.0% (329)
Total	73.0% (257)	15.9% (56)	11.1% (39)	100.0% (352)

p=0.009

Two methods of transportation have no significant relationship to food insecurity: *taking a taxi* and *getting a ride from someone else*. (We didn't find enough responses to our survey's last two transportation options—*have food delivered to home* and *other*—to analyze.)

The survey asked respondents **how easy it is to get to a grocery store**, in general, for them. Not surprisingly, their answers are significantly correlated to their households' food security status. Table 10, below, groups the four responses to this question ("very easy," "somewhat easy," "somewhat difficult" and "very difficult"—these



are reported later in Table 15) into generic easy/difficult categories. Households that find it difficult to get to a grocery store were more likely to be food insecure than households that find it easy.

**Table 10: Household food security by ease in getting to a grocery store**

How easy is it for you to get to a grocery store?	Food security	Food insecurity		Total
		without hunger	with hunger	
Difficult	50.0% (15)	26.7% (8)	23.3% (7)	100.0% (30)
Easy	75.2% (242)	14.9% (48)	9.9% (32)	100.0% (322)
Total	73.0% (257)	15.9% (56)	11.1% (39)	100.0% (352)

p=0.009

We now report our findings on other questions we asked in our survey. With two exceptions noted below, we haven't correlated these patterns with other factors.

#### **PARTICIPATION IN FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS**

A variety of social programs and public benefits exist to help people at risk get the food they need. Although people don't always know about such opportunities or realize they're eligible to participate in them, a substantial number of City residents told us they use them. As Table 11 shows, over one quarter (28.3%) of City of Poughkeepsie households had received food stamp benefits in the 12 months since we surveyed them.

**Table 11: Food program participation in the last 12 months**

Activity	Get food stamp benefits	Children receive free or reduced-cost food at a day-care center or Head Start program	Children ages 5-18 receive free or reduced-cost meals at school	Women or children get food through the WIC program	Receive any delivered meals from community programs like “Meals on Wheels”	Go to a community program or senior center to eat prepared meals	Get emergency food supplies from church, food pantry, or food bank
Yes	28.3%	18.1%	49.2%	24.0%	5.1%	4.8%	16.8%
No	71.5%	81.9%	47.7%	76.0%	94.9%	95.2%	83.2%
Don't know/refused	0.3%	0.00%	3.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
No. of responses	354	127	128	129	352	352	352

Some food assistance programs are designated for children and mothers, two groups especially vulnerable to the effects of food insecurity. Although 61.7% of the households we surveyed didn't have children in their households (see Table 22), among the rest about a half (49.2%) had children in public grade schools who received free or reduced-cost meals in the past 12 months, and almost a fifth had preschool-aged children who received free or reduced-cost food at a day-care center or Head Start program.

Our survey asked about participation in WIC, the federal Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children. Of those households we surveyed with women or children in their household, almost one quarter (24.0%) included someone who had participated in WIC over the past 12 months.

Among other forms of participation in food assistance programs, about one in six (16.8%) households include someone who received emergency food supplies from a church, food pantry or food bank. 5.1% of households include someone who had received meals delivered to the home through community programs like Meals on Wheels in the past 12 months, while 4.8% include someone who had traveled to a community program or senior center to eat prepared meals in that same period.

#### **ACCESS TO GROCERY STORES AND OTHER FOOD ESTABLISHMENTS**

The Poughkeepsie Plenty household survey provides one of the first systematic looks into where City of Poughkeepsie households buy most of their food and, separately, how often and easily residents get to supermarkets and grocery stores. This distinction between *establishments where respondents get most of their food* and *supermarkets/grocery stores* allows us to determine if some residents *don't* get most of their household's food from those retailers that generally provide the widest range and variety of food products—namely, supermarkets and grocery stores. In fact, about one in ten (9.6%) City households fall in this category.

A caveat: during the 18 months that we conducted the Poughkeepsie Plenty household survey, a major change in the local food system occurred with the arrival of Associated Supermarket, the City's first large supermarket in two decades. It's possible some survey respondents might give different answers to the following set of questions before and after the supermarket arrived, and that this change might be obscured in the next four tables (our sample is roughly split between respondents who took the survey before vs. after Associated Supermarket opened). However, we note that the new grocery store is located at the eastern end of the City, which remains farther away from most City households than what the USDA considers a "walkable" distance in urban environments.

We asked respondents how often they go to three different categories of food establishments, first *without* ranking these categories in terms of comparative frequency; see Table 12. It's hard to interpret what "often" means in terms of going to grocery stores versus corner stores versus restaurants, but the responses nonetheless suggest how people's daily rounds might involve different kinds of food establishments.

**Table 12: How often do you shop at...?**

How often	Supermarket or grocery store	Corner stores, delis, bodegas, warehouse clubs, produce stores, bakeries	Get food from restaurant, fast-food place, or get take-out food
Often	77.0%	19.9%	27.3%
Sometimes	16.6%	33.4%	38.8%
Rarely	3.9%	30.9%	25.8%
Never	2.3%	15.5%	7.3%
Don't know/refused	0.3%	0.3%	0.8%
No. of responses	356	356	356

Table 12 indicates that more than three fourths of City of Poughkeepsie households (77.0%) often go to a supermarket or grocery store; more than a quarter (27.3%) often go to restaurants, fast food places, or get take-out food; and a fifth (19.9%) often go to corner stores, delis, bodegas, warehouse clubs, produce stands, or bakeries. Furthermore, almost one in six (15.5%) households report "never" going to corner stores, delis, bodegas, warehouse clubs, produce stores, or bakeries for food. Likewise, 7.3% indicate never going to a restaurant, a fast-food place, or getting take-out food. These findings highlight stark contrasts in the dietary and consumption profiles of Poughkeepsie's households.

When respondents were asked to identify where they get most of their food, supermarkets and grocery stores moved to the top for 90.4% of households, as Table 13 shows. The corollary is maybe more significant: **9.6% of households don't get most of their food from supermarkets or grocery stores.**

**Table 13: Of these three kinds of places, where do you get most of the food that you eat?**

Type of establishment	Responses
Supermarkets and grocery stores	90.4%
Corner stores, delis, bodegas, warehouse clubs, produce stands, bakeries	4.4%
Restaurants, fast food places, take-out food	5.4%
Other	5.6%
Don't know/refused	0.6%
No. of responses	342

A set of questions asked respondents specifically about grocery stores and supermarkets, which the survey defined for the Poughkeepsie area as Associated Supermarket (for surveys conducted after April 2011), Stop & Shop, Super Stop & Shop, Price Chopper, Adams Fairacre Farms, Casa Latina, and Mother Earth's Storehouse. As Table 14 indicates, almost nine of every ten households (89.1%) usually use a car to travel to a grocery store; most drive themselves (in a car owned by themselves or someone else), while a small fraction get a ride from someone else. Only one in fifteen (6.6%) households usually take public transportation to get to a grocery store.

**Table 14: How do you usually get to a grocery store?**

Form of transportation	Responses
Walk	3.8%
Take public transportation	6.6%
Take a taxi	3.8%
Drive a car	80.1%
Get ride from someone else	9.0%
Have food delivered to home	0.3%
Other	3.2%
Don't know/refused	0.3%
No. of responses	346

Importantly, the 2008-10 American Community Survey reports that 26.8% of the City's *occupied housing units* (a proxy for *households*, our unit of analysis in the survey) have no vehicle. This may mean our sample over-counted households with cars, assuming the remaining 73.2% of households with cars would usually drive them to the grocery store. However, it's possible that households without cars prioritize finding a way to access someone else's car without "getting a ride" from them (e.g., they borrow someone else's car). A supporting fact here is that public transportation isn't regarded uniformly well across the county. For instance, a 2007 Dyson

Foundation and Marist College study found that 26% of randomly-sampled Dutchess County residents rated their local public transportation as “poor,” and another 31% rated it as just “fair.”<sup>10</sup>

Access to a grocery store doesn’t appear to be a significant obstacle for the majority of City of Poughkeepsie households. As Table 15 shows, it’s “very easy” to get to a grocery store for almost three-quarters (73.8%) of them, and “somewhat easy” for about a fifth (18.2%).

**Table 15: How easy is it for you to get to a grocery store?**

Level of difficulty	Responses
Very easy	73.8%
Somewhat easy	18.2%
Somewhat difficult	5.2%
Very difficult	2.6%
DK/refused	0.3%
No. of responses	347

Among households where it’s either “somewhat difficult” or “very difficult” to get to a grocery store, about four in five (81.5%) indicate this difficulty was due to transportation issues; see Table 16. Stated differently, **6.4% of all City of Poughkeepsie households report that transportation issues make it difficult for them to get to a grocery store.**

**Table 16: If it’s difficult to get to a grocery store, why?**

Reason cited	Responses
Transportation issues	81.5%
Language issues	0.0%
Physically difficult	22.2%
Child care	7.4%
Other	18.5%
Don’t know/refused	0.0%
No. of responses	27

<sup>10</sup> Dyson Foundation and the Marist College Institute for Public Opinion, “Many Voices, One Valley 2007,” <http://www.manyvoicesonevalley.org/assets/Many-Voices-One-Valley-2007.pdf> (accessed October 2010).

#### PREFERENCES IN CHOOSING STORES AND FOODS

Our survey asked respondents to rate various reasons for choosing the store where they “usually buy most of the food” that people in their household eat. We remind the reader that this is *not* a supermarket or grocery store for 9.6% of Poughkeepsie households (see Table 13).

Four reasons stand out as important for most respondents: the store in question “has healthy foods,” “has better prices on the food I want,” “is easy to get to,” and “is close to home or work.” These reasons were either “very important” or “somewhat important” for about 90% of households. See Table 17.

**Table 17: Importance of reasons for choosing store for most of your food**

Level of importance	The store is close to home or work	The store is easy to get to	Better prices on the food I want	The store has healthy foods	The store sells foods from my family background	The staff understands my needs	The store accepts WIC/food stamps
Very important	61.5%	66.7%	66.9%	65.7%	29.7%	34.4%	33.6%
Somewhat important	28.4%	22.6%	25.0%	27.5%	22.7%	33.8%	5.4%
Not too important	6.7%	6.8%	5.9%	3.7%	28.3%	18.3%	7.9%
Not at all important	3.1%	3.1%	2.0%	2.5%	17.9%	12.7%	49.4%
Don't know/refused	0.3%	0.9%	0.3%	0.6%	1.4%	0.9%	3.7%
No. of responses	356	354	356	356	357	355	354

The survey also asked about two reasons that point to households' cultural or ethnic needs, dietary or otherwise: “the store sells foods from my family background” (which indicates co-ethnic or co-religious identification with the store’s products or clientele) and “the staff understands my needs” (which indicates comfort with store or staff’s cultural perspective, although conceivably it could also pertain to carrying special-order products or even accepting personal checks). These factors were important to 52.4 and 68.2% of City of Poughkeepsie households, respectively.

Finally, it was important to 39.0% of households that “the store accepts WIC/food stamps.” We noted that, compared to the more even distribution of other factors' rankings in Table 16, 83% of respondents found the subject of WIC/food stamps either “very important” or “not at all important.” This polarized response pattern underscores how food insecurity is a chief concern for a specific subset of City of Poughkeepsie households that may reorient all other reasons for choosing a store.

The survey asked respondents to use the same scale and rank reasons why they “buy certain foods other than low prices.” Table 18 shows that two factors related to maximizing food’s utility were ranked highest; 87.1% and

77.0% of respondents rated “food that stays fresh longer” and “food that’s easy to prepare,” respectively, as important.

**Table 18: Importance of reasons for buying certain foods**

Level of importance	Food from your family's background	Food that's easy to prepare	Food that stays fresh longer	Brand name foods	Organic food
Very important	26.6%	41.9%	59.0%	14.0%	18.6%
Somewhat important	22.9%	35.1%	28.1%	34.0%	26.8%
Not too important	28.5%	16.9%	9.0%	33.4%	28.5%
Not at all important	21.8%	6.2%	3.9%	18.5%	24.9%
Don't know/ Refused	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.1%
No. of responses	354	356	356	356	354

Less influential in respondents’ food purchases were priorities for particular kinds of foods: “brand name foods” and “organic foods” (both important for 48% and 45%, respectively) and “food from your family’s background” (important for 48%). These patterns suggest that while City households may seek out different food types or have different dietary preferences, drawing out the value of food in terms of freshness and convenience is important for most.

Because organic foods can be more expensive than non-organic items, it's often thought that buying organic foods is correlated with income. To test that hypothesis, we crosstabulated the response to the "organic foods" item reported in Table 18 with household income. **We found no statistically significant relationship in the City of Poughkeepsie between household income and the importance of organic foods;** households in higher brackets are, for all intents and purposes, no more or less likely to rank organic foods as important than households in lower brackets.

The survey’s most direct measure of the attention that households give to their food’s nutritional value was our question about whether respondents “look at the food labels to decide if the food is nutritious or healthy”; see Table 19. The most common response, “sometimes,” covers a wide spectrum of consumer behavior. Furthermore, from this question we can’t assume that respondents share similar ideas about “nutritious or healthy” food; nor did our survey seek to test respondents’ knowledge of what counts as a nutritious diet. Still, it’s noteworthy that the primary shopper in over two-fifths (42.3%) of households said they *always* look, and that almost one in seven (13.0%) said they *never* look.

**Table 19: Do you look at the food labels to decide if the food is nutritious or healthy?**

How often	Response
Always	42.3%
Sometimes	44.4%
Never	13.0%
DK/refused	0.3%
No. of responses	345

It's often thought that that reading food labels is influenced not just by nutritional education, but by overall education levels in general. To test the influence of the latter, we cross-tabulated the responses reported in Table 19 with household income, the closest proxy to education in our survey. **We found no statistically significant relationship between reading food labels and income;** households in any income bracket are, for all intents and purposes, no more or less likely to look at the food labels to decide if the food is nutritious or healthy.

#### QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER ANALYSIS

The statistics we have presented and correlations we have calculated between household characteristics and food security are hardly the last word in causal analysis. These calculations don't control for the influence of third variables, and multi-stage regression analyses can provide a finer level of statistical precision and interpretive accuracy.

Through analysis of sets of survey responses, it may also be possible to gain more nuanced understandings of changes over the course of the research or geographical variability within the City to provide insight on questions like:

1. Have access to grocery stores and other factors affecting household food security and food choices changed since the April 2011 establishment of Associated Supermarket, the City's only large grocery store?
2. Are there geographical patterns to the rates and causes of food security as well as the kinds of decisions households make when choosing stores and buying food?

Further, regression analysis would allow us to determine the accuracy of our hypotheses that much of the apparent correlation between race or ethnicity and food security may be explained by the unobserved relationship of household income with these variables.

It would also be useful to observe the correlation between food insecurity and participation in social programs and public benefits.



## **SURVEY METHODOLOGY**

The Poughkeepsie Plenty household survey was designed as a face-to-face structured interview to be conducted at households' residences. Social researchers recognize that sending people out to "pound the pavements" and knock on the door at sampled addresses yields some of the worst survey response rates possible, particularly in urban environments where concerns about answering the door to strangers can run high. However, we pursued this research design because any other strategy would invalidate our observations about our target population: *all* households in the City of Poughkeepsie. If we conducted a phone survey, we would necessarily miss all households without a phone, a group that is likely associated with socioeconomic characteristics (low income, unstable housing tenure, etc.) related to food insecurity. Furthermore, if we chose to focus on households especially at risk of food insecurity (for instance, by surveying users of emergency food providers), we would lose the random sampling design that makes it possible to get a baseline measure of food security and other characteristics for the whole City.

### ***Determination of sample size***

Our survey was conducted using random sampling methods or, the more technically accurate term, probability sampling methods, which means (1) every member of the target population (i.e., all City households) has a specific chance of being included in the sample, and (2) the results from the sample can be generalized to that population with a specific degree of confidence. We determined the size of our random sample based on estimations from household data from the 2000 U.S. Census Bureau decennial census. From these data, a sample size of 373 households was determined to be a sample size sufficiently large to represent all households in the City of Poughkeepsie with a 5% margin of error, a 95% confidence interval, and a 50% response distribution.

By the survey's end, our sample contained a total of 1,500 random addresses that were provided by the Dutchess County Division of Planning and Development.

### ***Survey protocol***

Survey administration began in October 2010 and ended in April 2012. The first phase of survey administration consisted of 500 random addresses with two attempts made to administer the survey (either due to no one being home or the need to reschedule). Due to a high incidence of non-responses, two additional waves of 500 addresses were drawn, with the number of visiting attempts increased to three in the second wave, and to four by the third and final wave. Accordingly, non-response addresses from the first and second samples were revisited up to two more times by the third and final wave. We mailed all 1,500 addresses an advance courtesy letter informing them of the nature of the project and of the possibility of an upcoming survey visit. The interval between the letter and the actual visit by a survey administrator ranged from a few weeks to almost 18 months, depending upon which wave households were original sampled in.

Table 20 reports our survey administrators' results, including a final response rate of 23.9%. We stopped 14 short of our ideal 373 completed surveys because we ran into a halt in the supply of volunteer administrators, and because the response distribution on key indicators was advantageously skewed beyond the 50% level assumed in our initial sample estimations.

**Table 20: Response rate for Poughkeepsie Plenty survey**

	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
<b>Total Addresses</b>	<b>1,500</b>	100%
Unusable Addresses	188	12.5%
Non-Responses	598	39.9%
Refusals	313	20.9%
Surveys Completed	359	<b>23.9%</b>

Note: Unusable addresses predominantly consisted of vacant properties, followed by returned mail and inappropriate type of occupant (i.e. assisted living facilities and commercial establishments).

### *Survey design*

Questions were close-ended, either multiple choice or “select one of many” answers. The majority of questions gave the respondent the opportunity to provide an answer not included in the predetermined choices. Both the survey and the letter of introduction were developed in English and Spanish.

### *Survey administration and recruitment*

Surveys were conducted from October 2010 through April 2012 during daytime hours (10 am-5 pm), on both weekdays and weekends. Prior to going into the field, all administrators were familiarized with the nature of the project, the survey instrument, and the protocol for survey administration. Administrators visited the sampled addresses in pairs and asked to speak with “the person who does most of the planning or preparing of meals in this household.” (Note: 67% of our survey respondents were women.) Administrators used a scripted introduction, assuring respondents of the study's confidentiality and informing them they were free to decline any questions they didn't want to answer. Interviews were conducted face-to-face, with one administrator asking the questions and the other recording responses in writing. Response cards were provided to respondents to facilitate conveying repetitive choices (e.g. Often, Sometimes, Never). Each survey took approximately 10 minutes to complete.

A few bilingual survey administrators were available to give Spanish-speaking households the survey in their native language. More often, English-speaking interviewers gave Spanish-speaking respondents a scripted verbal instruction in Spanish (Can I leave a survey with you? You can mail this for free when you have finished it. Thank you!), then gave them a Spanish-language survey, a cover letter in Spanish, and a stamped addressed envelope.

Vassar College students comprised the majority of survey administrators over the 18 months of the survey, particularly in five “survey weekend” initiatives held that deployed large numbers of administrators, ranging from eight to 30. Other administrators included interns from the Dutchess County Department of Health and the Poughkeepsie Farm Project, Marist College students, Cornell Cooperative Extension employees (who had special access to senior citizen apartments in the sample), and adult volunteers solicited by the community food assessment.

### **Data entry and analysis**

Project staff entered the survey results in a Microsoft Access database provided by the Dutchess County Department of Health who analyzed the data using Stata/IC 10.0 and Microsoft Access. Following data cleaning, the final number of usable surveys was 357. In addition to descriptive statistics, a number of independent variables were examined in the context of the Food Security Scale as defined by the USDA (*Guide to Measuring Household Food Security, 2000*). Chi square analysis was used to determine if there were statistically significant relationships between certain variables (e.g. food security and income); significance was set at  $p < 0.05$ . While chi square identifies independence versus dependence/association, it does not quantify the strength of an association.

### **Study limitations**

The Poughkeepsie Plenty household sample was not stratified for variables such as race, ethnicity, gender, and income. Therefore, when these variables are addressed in the analysis, we can't determine with a specific degree of confidence whether the distributions are representative of the actual population or an incidental under/over representation (e.g. higher percentage of females versus males). However, some basic comparisons of our sample's characteristics with the latest Census figures for the City of Poughkeepsie are suggestive.

Table 21 shows that the average size of the households we surveyed was 2.70. (From the standard deviation we calculated, we estimate that 95% of City households range from 1 to 6.02 members, and 99% from 1 to 7.68.)

We note that by comparison, the U.S. Census Bureau's 2010 decennial survey reports the City's average household size to be smaller, 2.41. This suggests that our sample modestly overestimates the typical size of City households.

**Table 21: Including yourself, how many people live in this household?**

Mean	Std. Dev.
2.70	1.66
No. of respondents	353

As Table 22 shows, more than a third (38.3%) of our surveyed households included children under the ages of 18. By comparison, the U.S. Census Bureau reports that in 2010, just 30.2% of City of Poughkeepsie households have children under 18. This suggests that our sample slightly overestimates the proportion of households with children.

**Table 22: Are there children under age 18 living in your household?**

Children under age 18	Responses
Yes	38.3%
No	61.7%
No. of respondents	355

As Table 23 shows, about one in seven (14.7%) respondents refused to identify their annual household income. Eliminating that subgroup, more than one quarter (26.3%) of respondents indicated their households earned \$15,000 or less a year; a slightly larger proportion (28.2%) indicated their households annually earned \$15,001-\$35,000; almost a seventh (13.6%) indicated their households earned \$35,001-\$50,000 a year; a fifth (19.9%) indicated their households annually earned \$50,001-\$100,000; and an eighth (12.0%) indicated their households annually earned more than \$100,000 a year.

**Table 23: What annual income level does your household fit into?**

Annual household income	Responses
\$15,000 or less	22.4%
\$15,001-\$35,000	24.1%
\$35,001-\$50,000	11.6%
\$50,000-\$99,999	17.0%
\$100,000 or more	10.2%
Don't know/refused	14.7%
No. of respondents	353

By way of comparison, the 2008-10 American Community Survey estimates that 26.7% of City of Poughkeepsie households earned \$15,000 or less a year; 19.5% of households annually earned \$15,001-\$35,000; 13.0% of households earned \$35,001-\$50,000 a year; 27.5% of households annually earned \$50,001-\$100,000; and 13.3% of households annually earned more than \$100,000 a year. These figures suggest our sample roughly captures the household income distribution estimated by the U.S. Census Bureau, with perhaps some over counting in the \$15,001-\$35,000 category and corresponding undercounting in the \$50,001-\$100,000 category.

(For reference, the 2008-10 American Community Survey reports that 26.0% of the City's population has income below the poverty level. That figure grows to 41.0% for the population under 18 years old, and 44.9% for the population under 5 years old.)

As Table 24 indicates, almost a half of survey respondents primarily identified their household's race as White, and almost a third identified as Black. These demographics roughly correspond to the 2010 decennial census, which found that 50.9% of City of Poughkeepsie *residents* (and not households, our survey's unit of analysis) identified as White and 33.5% as Black.

**Table 24: What race do you consider your household to belong to?**

Race of household	Responses
White	49.5%
Black	31.1%
Asian/Pacific Islander	0.9%
Native American	0.9%
Other	0.0%
More than one race	15.1%
Don't know/refused	2.4%
No. of respondents	331

As Table 25 shows, the overwhelming majority of respondents (86.9%) did *not* consider their household to be of Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin, while a small fraction did, and another comparably small fraction considered their household to be mixed Hispanic and non-Hispanic. By contrast, the 2010 decennial census reports that 80.5% of City of Poughkeepsie *residents* (i.e., not households) don't identify as Hispanic or Latino.

**Table 25: Do you consider your household to be of Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin?**

Hispanic/Latino/Spanish	Responses
Yes	6.6%
No	86.9%
Mixed: Hispanic and non-Hispanic	5.7%
Don't know/refused	0.9%
No. of respondents	351

Since the survey was administered in English, households with a primary language other than English were likely under-represented. As mentioned earlier, our Spanish-speaking resources were limited. To mitigate the likely under-representation of Spanish-speaking households, we conducted four Spanish-language focus groups. The household survey instrument was not strictly adhered to in these interviews, which would have been inappropriate given the group nature of focus groups as well as the sensitive nature of some survey questions. Therefore it is not possible to include the focus group data in the survey analysis. Nonetheless, we garnered insights into the ways that the dietary/shopping decisions and behaviors documented in our survey findings may or may not reflect the City's Spanish-speaking population.

Another study limitation is the intrinsic bias that self-reported responses carry. Respondents may under-report undesirable behaviors and may over-report desirable behaviors. Ability to recall information, dynamics between interviewer and interviewee, survey content and cultural bias may also affect responses.

## Focus Groups

In the spring of 2011, the Poughkeepsie Plenty Community Food Assessment conducted seven focus group interviews. With this method we had two goals. First, we wanted to gather commentary and elaboration on the closed-ended questions administered in the household survey. In this case, focus group interviews, with their prompts for open-ended discussion, *triangulate* and *complement* the findings generated by the survey. See Appendix B for our focus group interview schedule.

Second, we sought to compensate for the underrepresentation of Spanish-speaking respondents in the household survey's randomly sampled respondent pool. Here, focus group interviews offer a *substitute* for the household survey method, and not an ideal one. However, survey researchers have long acknowledged the disinclination of immigrant groups to participate in door-to-door surveys and the barriers to participation posed by survey administrators who speak only English as common problems in survey research far beyond its manifestation in the Poughkeepsie Plenty community food assessment. Accordingly, social science recognizes focus group interviews as an acceptable surrogate, if ultimately one that's "unscientific" (as a basis for statistical generalizations).

From March 27 to May 16, 2011, we convened seven focus groups comprised of at least 56 total participants.<sup>11</sup> See Table 26 for the list of sponsoring organizations and other information regarding these focus groups. We didn't tally participants' gender in three of these groups, but on the whole men represented a small minority of people present — about less than 10% of the focus group population.

**Table 26: Spring 2011 focus groups (with color coded legend)**

Sponsoring organization	Date	Targeted population	Language
St. Mary's Parish (1)	March 27, 2011	Spanish-speaking congregation	Spanish
St. Mary's Parish (2)	March 27, 2011	Spanish-speaking congregation	Spanish
Christ Episcopal Church	May 1, 2011	Spanish-speaking congregation	Spanish
Bread of Life Church	May 7, 2011	Emergency kitchen users/employees	English
Interfaith Towers	May 10, 2011	Senior citizens living independently	English
Fall Kill Community Garden	May 11, 2011	Community gardeners	English
Hudson River Healthcare	May 16, 2011	Young mothers using non-profit health services	Spanish

Table 26 provides a color code for each focus group so that the reader can attribute quotations in this report to their originating focus group. We chose not to tape record the interviews, which means the focus group quotations in this report represent our note takers' *paraphrasing and summary of participants' remarks* unless quotation marks are shown (when note takers were confident they captured the exact statement). Generally, each quotation is preceded by a number, which corresponds to the identifying number our note takers assigned to attribute specific remarks to participants who otherwise remained anonymous. When we show consecutive remarks from the same focus group, spaces between each statement indicate that we later grouped together remarks on the same topic, while no spaces between each statement indicate an actual exchange between participants from an interview excerpt.

<sup>11</sup> The number of participants is inexact because in some cases focus groups were held outside or in other open settings where participants wandered in and out during the proceedings.

### SPANISH LANGUAGE FOCUS GROUPS

In the spring of 2011, we conducted four focus groups in Spanish to reach the Latino community in Poughkeepsie. Three came from Spanish-language congregations at St. Mary's Parish (the source of two different focus groups) and Christ Episcopal Church. The last convened young mothers who used health services at Hudson River Healthcare's branch in the Family Partnership Center. As we discuss below, the four groups cover a socioeconomic spectrum sufficiently broad that participants didn't share the same experience or evaluation of food security.

Significantly, what we heard in the Spanish-language focus groups didn't differ drastically from the patterns of food priorities and preferences that we've observed in the household survey, where Spanish-speaking residents were underrepresented. The biggest difference is that Spanish-speaking participants place a greater importance on obtaining food from their family background, i.e., Latino foods, than respondents in the household survey do. Yet like general survey respondents, Latino participants prefer doing their shopping at big supermarkets over the smaller stores within city limits that often specialize in Latino foods. This may be a testament, among other things, to how well the supermarkets provide ethnic products—a trend we see continuing with the new Associated Supermarket.

### *Access to grocery stores and other food establishments*

At the onset, we note that half of our Spanish-language focus groups (the two conducted at St. Mary's Church) were convened before the new Associated Supermarket opened in the City of Poughkeepsie. While participants in the other two groups (Christ Episcopal Church, Hudson River Healthcare) had the benefit of either visiting or hearing about the City's new supermarket, participants' answers indicate they very much still think about, and plan their grocery shopping in relation to, the big supermarkets outside city limits.

**Supermarkets:** The great majority of Spanish-speaking participants report they do most of their shopping at the supermarkets outside of city limits. We can't tell from the responses which ones were most popular, but Price Chopper, Stop & Shop, Adams, Walmart and Sam's Club (the latter two located in other towns) were all frequently cited by name. A small fraction of participants said they go to Latin stores often if not primarily; Casa Latina (in the City of Poughkeepsie) was the most-cited example, but one respondent (in the Hudson River Healthcare focus group) mentioned La Poblana, on Main Street in the City of Poughkeepsie.

Spanish-speaking participants didn't necessarily report patronizing any one grocery store exclusively, instead suggesting that no single store served any one household's needs. For instance:

4 I go to the nearby stores when I don't have a car and my husband is at work. I go to Casa Latina and buy the basics. I feel like if I buy everything I need there, I spend more. At Adams I can buy everything I need with 100 dollars: meat, vegetables...

Participants overwhelmingly cited price first, then quality and variety, as the reasons they preferred shopping at supermarkets or in big box stores in other towns over stores nearby. For instance:

7 "The main reason is price. And quality. Sometimes, the bodegas sell products that have already expired. At supermarkets, on the other hand, they always have good quality products and it is rare to find expired goods."

Fruit is fresher  
and goods are  
less expensive at  
larger  
supermarkets.

“I avoid shopping  
in smaller shops  
or bodegas  
because they  
usually do not  
have what I’m  
looking for and  
sometimes they  
don’t have variety  
of products.”

5 It’s not in supermarket’s interest to sell products that are close to expiring. If you buy a product that has already expired, you will have a hard time returning it to the bodega, since they sometimes don’t even give you a receipt. There’s better customer service at large supermarkets.

2 Fruit is fresher and goods are less expensive at larger supermarkets. The quality of the product makes up for the fact that supermarkets are located farther away.

3 Shampoo, hand soap, dish soap, bottled water, sugar, salt and flour for me are the basics. When it comes to what I need in my kitchen, I go to Adams. There, I find vegetables and meat at better prices than at Casa Latina. I don’t find the same variety in vegetables at Casa Latina as in Adams, which is important to me because I eat a lot of vegetables. I can’t find fresh vegetables at Stop & Shop either. I don’t know if it’s whether I get there too early or too late.

As for particular stores, Price Chopper and Stop & Shop were typically associated with general savings and special sales. Adams was frequently cited as particularly attractive for its fresh foods, particularly in contrast to Casa Latina but also Stop & Shop. Walmart and especially Sam's Club were cited for their bulk volumes. Latin market stores were cited, not surprisingly, for their Latin products.

Perhaps most participants reported going to a given supermarket or big box store infrequently — at most once a week, as occasionally as every 2-3 months — which suggests they gave their shopping trips considerable thought before going out. Relatedly, although our transcripts weren't full of these, a couple of participants made statements that indicate their close attention to prices.<sup>12</sup> For example:

4 I buy everything I need even for the whole month. I go to Sam’s Club about once every three months and buy things in bulk. For example, the ketchup bottles are sold three for six dollars, and they last long because they are big. You can buy six pieces of chicken for six dollars; you go to a smaller store and chicken costs seven dollars. I think there’s a big difference between going to a small store and a large one.

**Bodegas and other small food stores in the City:** Spanish-speaking participants regularly noted that they didn't prefer patronizing smaller stores for their food needs. E.g.,

4 “I avoid shopping in smaller shops or bodegas because they usually do not have what I’m looking for and sometimes they don’t have variety of products.”

5 Does not go to smaller stores because they are more expensive.

2 You spend more money shopping at local stores because there are no savings opportunities.

<sup>12</sup> Social scientists have observed that working-class and poor householders generally pay close attention to the cost of their consumer expenditures. See, for instance, *Making Ends Meet: How Single Mothers Survive Welfare and Low-Wage Work* (Russell Sage Foundation, 1997) by sociologists Kathryn Edin and Laura Lein, who used interviews to study the spending strategies of over 400 single mothers (white, black and Latino).



These were cited, however, as "good in case of emergency." Additionally, participants attested to the convenience of these stores' proximity in certain contexts, particularly when transportation is difficult to arrange (see Transportation to Supermarkets, below). For instance:

4 I go to the nearby stores when I don't have a car and my husband is at work.

Taking our invitation to speculate about Latinos in household situations different than their own, several participants who belonged to two-parent households referred to immigrant men who lived in the U.S. as effectively single, whether unmarried or just unaccompanied by their families. For example:

3 "If you don't have a car and you live alone, then it's not convenient for you to go too far, so you go to the smaller store. But if you have a family and you have to save money, it's much more convenient to go to the large supermarkets with better prices."

6 Most men here are alone. They don't have families; they come home and there is no food for them so they order something or pick up something at a fast food place. As soon as they have their wives at home they can start eating healthier and more balanced meals.

The ability of employees at bodegas and other downtown food stores to speak Spanish was also mentioned as a reason to patronize these retailers.

3 Language barriers can sometimes be a problem. Especially for people who don't speak English.

8 Sometimes that intimidates us and that's why we go to the local stores. Or the new supermarket [Associated] they just opened, where they also speak Spanish.

**Restaurants and fast-food places:** Going out to eat was not a frequent option for our Spanish-speaking participants. Focus group participants generally considered it a luxury and indicated concern about its nutritional value. For example:

6, 7 "We do not eat at restaurants because the quality of the food is not good at all." The food is not necessarily hygienic and we only go there when we do not have time/energy to cook at home.

3 Eating at restaurants is a luxury I cannot afford every week. I prefer avoiding fast food places too, I don't want my kids to eat there and on average I go there once every three months.

As for when Spanish-speaking families might go out to eat, our participants cited reasons that are probably familiar to English-speaking householders:

2 On Sundays, we always visit a different place to eat the buffet, for example. Now with the good weather we sometimes have a barbecue at home. It's good for recreation and to get out of the routine.

8 A lot of people work long hours and don't have time to cook at home. So they go to fast food places to avoid cooking.

3 We don't usually eat at Taco Bell or McDonalds. I do visit a Chinese restaurant and I ask them to cook me vegetables. My children choose the hamburger.

### *Transportation to supermarkets*

Because our interview questions for focus group participants (of any language) didn't include anything about personal characteristics, we have no real idea how many of our Spanish-speaking participants have their own car or truck. It's safe to assume this figure is probably on par roughly with the frequently cited statistic from the 2008-10 American Community Survey that 26.8% of all occupied housing units (a proxy for households) in the City of Poughkeepsie have no private vehicle. Certainly, our focus group participants are familiar with the difficulties of grocery store access and public transportation that the Poughkeepsie Plenty Community Food Assessment has identified as a key problem for local food security.

**Use of private vehicle:** Typically, one or two participants in our Spanish-speaking focus groups established for the group that Latinos in Poughkeepsie often don't have cars. For many who do have a car, other household members who work outside the home may take them for the day. Not surprisingly, these conditions make shopping a burden. We've already discussed one consequence: Spanish-language participants mentioned frequently reducing the number of trips they made to supermarkets and planning carefully the most economical use of their grocery dollars. E.g.,

5 [Answering a question about how long a normal shopping trip takes] Choosing items is fairly quick, paying is also quick, but sometimes the problem is that the person who's picking you up takes about half an hour. It can take about an hour and a half before you get back home.

That said, many of our focus group participants mentioned owning their own cars and reported having no serious problems getting to supermarkets. We think these participants might represent a particular profile, however, that may not be typical for Poughkeepsie's Latinos in general. Especially in our three church focus groups, female participants tended to be of middle age and (at least among those who answered our questions most frequently) somewhat established among their peers in their status as matriarchal heads of their households. A few of these participants were storeowners; others were secure enough economically to bring food to church potlucks. Roughly speaking, these participants represented a "middle class" profile among Poughkeepsie's Latino immigrants, with access to a private car being a typical trait.

A related factor here is that we heard occasional reference to the fact that immigrants' family units were often extended; outside of their own nuclear family, participants might have parents, siblings, or grown children who lived nearby in their own households. Drawing on these family ties can make access to a privately owned car a little easier to come by.

[Summary of comments] People take a taxi or call their children with vehicles to take them to the store.

5 Or you go in groups.

3 [Why she doesn't take the bus] Because I can get my husband or my brother to drive me.

**Municipal buses:** Some focus group participants mentioned taking the bus to the supermarkets outside of the City. A minority indicated they had figured out the bus systems' sufficiently to make it an effective transportation strategy:

5 Takes the bus, says it's easier now that they have extended the bus routes and schedules.

Sometimes

people take the

bus to the store

and take a taxi

back (because of

the limit of [4]

shopping bags in

buses). Hispanics

don't use the bus

system very

much.

6 For those people who use the bus system on a daily basis, it is easier to use. \$1.75 for a bus ride makes sense as opposed to 6 to 7 dollars for a taxi fare.

However, the majority opinion was that municipal buses weren't very useful for Poughkeepsie's Latinos. Language barriers might play a role here; finding out how the bus works is more difficult without a decent reading ability in English, particularly when fellow co-ethnics use other modes of transportation:

5 Pays the taxi because she travels in large groups and doesn't know how to use the bus. A lot of people know how to navigate the public transport system but others don't. When you have a car, you don't think about the bus schedule. Some people use it but there are still many who don't know how to navigate the system.

5 The taxi provides easier access and takes less time because you don't have to make other stops. Also, if you take the bus you have to walk and some people go with their children.

1 The public transport system is terrible. It's not on time, or it just doesn't come. Which makes sense because it's such a small City.

**Formal and community taxis:** We got the sense that participants who had to find other means of transportation besides a private vehicle didn't stick to just one method. Taxis were often mentioned as more convenient than buses, but it sounded like many participants used both under different circumstances.

4 Gets a taxi or takes the bus that goes to the Galleria.

[Summary of comments] Sometimes people take the bus to the store and take a taxi back (because of the limit of [4] shopping bags in buses). Hispanics don't use the bus system very much.

Usually people take a taxi and sometimes several Hispanic families can arrange to go together. There is a lot of solidarity in the community. Most families don't have cars.

An important discovery we made from our Spanish-speaking focus groups is that the "taxis" that local Latinos use aren't necessarily the ones driven by English-speaking drivers (either native-born or from the West Indies) that constitute the formal taxi sector in Poughkeepsie. Latinos can also access *raite*, an informal system of taxis driven by co-ethnic entrepreneurs. The system is explained in this conversation from our Hudson River Healthcare focus group:

7 I sometimes walk to Casa Latina or Stop & Shop. At Stop & Shop I buy veggies, fruit. Some people also use *raite* or taxis.

3 *Raite* are people in the community who give "rides," they say "Listen, you need transport, I'll charge you five dollars to go to Stop & Shop." That's what we do here in Poughkeepsie.

2 It's better than taxis because there is no language barrier and it's cheaper.

3 Sometimes it's more expensive because taxis have a limit on their meter.

2 Yeah, but at least sometimes it's people you already know.

Although we heard the term *raite* in at least a couple of our Spanish-language focus groups, we suspect the *raite* system is most important for lower-income and more recent Latino immigrant households.

### *Preferences in choosing foods*

One question that we asked our focus groups followed a question from the household survey fairly closely: "What are the primary factors *besides price* that determine what kinds of food you purchase?" In the responses our focus group participants gave, it's impossible for us to gauge the comparative importance of the various factors. However, participants in all four Spanish-language focus groups gave considerable attention to ethnic foods, either as an explicit priority or in the examples of meals they served. Consider these different references:

4 "Picante, frijoles y tortillas" are things I always have at home. The most important thing for me is that they sell these products.

[Summary of comments] They do buy food of their own ethnic background.

[Unidentified response to "How important are foods from your family background?"] Very, one of the most important factors.

2 [Responding to question about ease of food preparation] Not so much, we care more about food that's from our background and that corresponds to what we're used to. For example, my family doesn't like frozen pizzas or other kinds of frozen foods.

[In reference to a question about how long a normal shopping trip takes]

3 For me it's even longer because I have to compare prices and look for sales. That is the reason I like Adams, because I like to compare prices. For example, sometimes the generic brands are cheaper, as in the case of beans.

5 I look at the quality of the bean. I make sure it's soft like it is in my country.

Participants also discussed at length the importance of fresh foods:

1 She makes sure that the food is fresh. Organic doesn't make a difference.

7 The availability of fresh produce is another important factor.

The "freshness" of food turned out to be a complex, multidimensional idea in our focus groups. Often it was articulated through specific contrast to the food that many participants encounter in the U.S.

7 "Here in the U.S., you will never get truly fresh food because everything comes frozen. It's not like in Mexico where everything is fresh. Here the chicken is frozen for God knows how long and you can't know how fresh the food is."

[In response to a question about whether it's important that foods be organic and/or local]

7 Well, for me it is, because recently there have been a lot of programs about the amount of chemicals in the food and I want to eat fresh and healthy. My son had an allergy, and so I realized. I prefer to eat mostly beans.

2 That's what's difficult for us. We have no problems feeding our children until they go to school and start eating unhealthy meals. They want hamburgers, macaroni and cheese, and don't want anything to do with our vegetables anymore.

3 I generally don't agree with what the government feeds our children. I see nothing healthy about bland eggs with ketchup or macaroni and cheese. It must be the way we were raised or our Latin culture. But I just don't like it. It's a big problem for mothers at home. I have a 15 year old brother who used to eat everything up until he was five. From then onwards he refuses to eat *nopales con frijoles* or any of that.

In other cases, participants invoked (without our prompting) the spirit of our survey statement, "food that stays fresh longer." At least one conversation positioned "freshness" in this sense against the idea that food without preservatives (another possible meaning of "fresh food") might not last long:

2 I have trouble with the vegetables at Adams, they go bad too quickly.

3 I can't find fresh vegetables anywhere else!

8 They go bad too quickly.

2 At Stop & Shop, on the other hand, they last longer, but that's because they have more preservatives, so I don't know which is better! I know Adams is fresh but it's no good for me.

8 You often don't have enough time to cook things before they go bad.

In the opposite direction, we heard conversation about Latinos' preferences for cooking from whole ingredients as opposed to using canned ingredients:

2 But, certainly, Latinos almost don't use canned goods. We have the belief that something isn't right.

8 We prefer fresh foods.

3 That is where the health issue comes in, cans have a lot of preservatives and other additives, so we know something isn't right. They have more sodium and potassium than when you make things from scratch.

2 See, that is also cultural. Because it's not that we know much about additives, and yet we understand that it's not right.

3 They don't taste the same either...

2 To achieve the Latin flavor you have to make things using natural products.

Separate from the discussion of food's freshness, brand-name foods and organic foods were mentioned as relatively unimportant, at least for their dollar value.

2 Doesn't care about brands. Rice is rice. A recognized brand versus a 'great value' generic product is the same. Even though organic food is healthier, there is little difference between that and normal food. In the end it's all food. "If you want to be healthy you have to pay more."

3 It's the same thing. Rice is rice, tortilla is tortilla.

6 Brands don't matter. It's not so much that brand-name goods are expensive but that they aren't always high quality. Brands don't matter unless it's a Latin brand, in that case the brand indicates that it's a high quality product (e.g. Goya).

Organic food is not important.

2 Organic products are very expensive.

8 Agrees.

### *Preferences in choosing stores*

Only two of our Spanish-language focus groups were asked about the primary factors in determining where they shop for food. The reason their answers focused upon, however, was also mentioned in the other two focus groups – convenience in terms of time:

6 The most important factor is time. Price doesn't actually matter that much, it's 'whatever.'

5 It's mostly about time, not price. For that reason I prefer to go to the supermarket in one go.

6 Time is important because you also have to attend to your family, children.

5 Latinos don't eat breakfast a lot but it's not because of money but because of lack of time and having to go to work.

6 Work won't let us eat proper meals, there is not enough time.

The young participants believe that time and money are the most important factors. If there is time, you eat oats with almonds and you take the time to prepare it. Otherwise, then, no breakfast.

In one or two cases participants identified time as a factor that led them to shop smaller stores located in the City. Consider this statement in conjunction with a prior preference in favor of stores where staff speak Spanish and are thus less "intimidat[ing]":

3 Sometimes you choose to go where you feel you are getting good service, where things go quicker. The time factor sometimes makes me go to smaller stores because I know there will be less people there.

Yet while the priority that Spanish-language participants assign to stores that allow for time-efficient shopping might seem to work in favor of the City's smaller food stores, we note a continuing attraction to the savings and variety that supermarkets provide.

[Responding to question about desirable changes in the Poughkeepsie food system]

3 Personally, I think it would be good if grocery stores like Stop & Shop started selling Latin products. That way, I wouldn't have to be going from one place to another. They don't have things like *nopales*, for example, which I buy at Casa Latina. It would save me a lot of money, time and trips.

8 Agrees.

### *Skipping meals, food not lasting*

Regarding our questions about whether they observed people skipping meals or not having enough food to last, our respondents answered differently depending on their social situation. Again, in the church-based focus groups we saw discussion indicating participants came from (or were presenting themselves before the others as) a Latino middle class. Thus, some participants in these groups stated these manifestations of food insecurity weren't really issues for Poughkeepsie's Latinos:

2 We don't see that in the Latino community

There is a consensus that WIC and food stamps don't matter [where choosing stores are concerned].

By contrast, Spanish-speaking participants from the Hudson River Healthcare recognized these as problems that weigh upon people they know:

The first thing we  
Latinos think  
about is food.  
First we worry  
about food and  
then something  
else... "For us,  
food is a big  
priority."

"Back in Mexico,  
we weren't used  
to eating what we  
eat here. Most  
people end up  
getting used to...  
bad and cheap  
food."

[Responding to question about coping strategies people use when food runs out]

8 Some people go to food programs at the churches and use the money they have to pay for bills.

3 My grandmother is one of them; she goes to Trinity Church where she gets food. They get a lot of things. Once a month they give them meat, also tomatoes, onions, vegetables...

8 I used to go there as well.

2 I used to go there, too, when I first came. They used to give me a lot of food, but a lot of it was canned. I wasn't used to that so I had to find someone else to give to, or sometimes I would throw it away...

8 Yeah, they gave me a lot of cans, too.

2 Now, I know how to use canned foods in the kitchen.

8 They can be good to make salads.

Considering that our focus group interview schedule didn't attempt to systematically survey the participants individually about their own experience with skipping meals or not having enough food to last, we don't have much basis to conclude more than the fact that Poughkeepsie's Latino community is economically diverse. While all our Spanish-speaking participants testified to the centrality of paid employment in their families' lives (and, by implication, in the primary reason for their families' migration to the U.S.), some face more economic risk than others. It was especially helpful to convene a group of participants who use the health services provided by Hudson River Healthcare; by design this non-profit serves Spanish-speaking residents whose social and linguistic circumstances place them at special risk of health and food insecurity.

### *More or less at risk of food insecurity?*

This is a good opportunity to discuss our Spanish-speaking participants' responses to our competing hypotheses about Latinos and food insecurity. Are they "good buyers" of food, i.e. particularly conscientious about prioritizing buying and providing food in their family finances? Or are they especially at risk for food insecurity because of their economic and social prospects that await them as non-English-speaking immigrants?

We presented these competing hypotheses (discussed further in Community Contexts, later) to three of our Spanish-speaking focus groups. To begin, participants in these groups confirmed the centrality of food in the family life and cultural values of Poughkeepsie's recently immigrated Latinos.

5 "I do believe that Latinos are good buyers. We like parties and for this reason, even in bad times, we always find a way to throw a good party. Sometimes the food we eat is not the healthiest, like tortillas or meats (*Laughter*). Sometimes we will forgo a doctor's appointment or avoid buying a pair of shoes that we want. Food is a priority for us, in fact, I sometimes think that we eat too much. In Mexico, we would not eat certain things because they were expensive (yoghurt, muffins, milk). But this is a place where we can buy all of that and for this reason we buy it in large amounts. For us, food is a big priority."

- 1 The first thing we Latinos think about is food. First we worry about food and then something else. Even if it's a Mexican product, you buy it. "And not on credit, in cash!"
- 4 "Prices rise and wages stay the same."
- 1 Even then we focus on having the product we like. Because we would rather eat well than buy a pair of shoes, for example.

All three focus groups recognized the special burdens placed by the current economy on this family and cultural priority. In some ways, this doesn't contradict the value of good buying so much as test its priority in family finances when income and resources become scarce.

- 2 You also have to take the economy into account.
- 7 A lot of it depends on the family's work situation. In my case, for example, I don't have a job and I have three children. I would like to buy products from Mexico because I know how they were produced, but...
- 8 Sometimes the money isn't enough.
- [Question: So would you say that people in the community often run out of food money?]
- 2 It's most prevalent during the winter when the men aren't working.
- 8 And those who are, work shorter hours. You have to manage your food money well.

5 It's not so much that they don't have money, it's that they would rather save it for the future. They take advantage of WIC so that they can use the money for other things.

General consensus that generally prices are high due to the economy. It is harder to buy the same amount of food with the same amount of money. There are a lot of bills to pay and the money is not enough. Not everyone is in the same situation. Some can buy fresh food and others can't. There are differences within the community.

5 Believes that in general there is a lack of organization within the Latino community because we have to limit ourselves in some areas to accommodate other needs (e.g. rent).

Yet all three recognize the differences in food type and quality, as well as lifestyle and environmental factors, here in the U.S. that undermine the traditional cultural priority they assign to eating well. They describe the problems of poor health, being overweight, and nutritionally imbalanced eating in great detail:

2 "Back in Mexico, we weren't used to eating what we eat here. Over there a hot dog is an expensive thing, and over here you can get a pack of 50 for a pretty low price. That's why we eat them. Most people don't know how to have a balanced diet and so they end up getting used to bad and cheap food."

5 People in the U.S. get less exercise. They order food and watch TV. In Mexico you burn a lot of calories (the bathroom is far away, you have to feed the animals). Over here we don't get as much physical activity. Sometimes we go to the doctor and they tell us our children are overweight, which bothers us because our conception of being healthy is related to being a little bit chubby. You see a skinny kid and you think he's not healthy, when in reality, he might be healthier than your son.

2 Back home in Mexico, McDonalds is not as common as here. People eat on the street a lot here. When people come here it's easy to eat pizza, fast food, etc. But then you get used to it and things get easier.



I think it'd be cool  
to have an  
international  
market for all the  
immigrants in  
Poughkeepsie.  
  
I grew up in  
Poughkeepsie,  
and there used to  
be grocery stores  
all over, this was  
before all the  
malls happened.  
  
Then for the  
longest time,  
there was just no  
grocery store in  
Poughkeepsie.

7 Well, ten years ago, the economic situation was better and you could buy more with less money. Then, we would eat a lot, and yet you hardly got any exercise. Back home, jobs were more physically demanding.  
8 And there were no cars! You would walk everywhere and get a lot of exercise, so there weren't as many health problems. Where I am from, we don't eat fatty foods.  
7 Yeah, yum!  
2 Because vegetables are right there to be picked! You can tell the difference when children come the U.S., they gain weight immediately. And we feed them whatever they want.  
3 agrees  
8 Or you ask them: "Where do you want to go today?"

#### **SOCIAL SERVICE USERS**

In the spring of 2011, we conducted two focus groups that allow us to isolate the perspectives of local populations at risk for economic insecurity and food security, as demonstrated by their official participation in social service programs. One group consists of users and/or employees of the food kitchen at the Bread of Life Church. The other group overlaps with our Spanish-language focus group: the young mothers who are served by Hudson River Healthcare. Thus, the population in this section crosses the language divide, and our discussion below emphasizes the common predicaments faced by social-service users in either language group.

#### ***Access to grocery stores and other food establishments***

At the onset, we note that both focus groups were interviewed after the opening of the Associated Supermarket in the City of Poughkeepsie, although clearly participants are still oriented toward the supermarkets outside the City.

**Supermarkets:** Most of the participants in this category reported they do most of their shopping at supermarkets. Stop & Shop, Adams, Casa Latina (in the City of Poughkeepsie), Sam's Club (in another town), Mother Earth's (in the south section of the Town of Poughkeepsie) and La Poblanita (on Main Street in the City of Poughkeepsie) were mentioned by name.

2 I have been to the new Associated, but it seems slow...I tend to shop at Stop & Shop because the produce is fresh. The prices are high.

Interestingly, at least one participant from the English-speaking group mentioned patronizing the Latino ethnic market Casa Latina some of the time. Despite local perceptions that English-speaking residents don't patronize stores targeted toward Latinos, we sense at least a willingness of native-born residents in this category to cross the Spanish-language barrier.

3 Produce at Casa Latina is cheap, but not very fresh. I really like Casa Latina, but the produce is better at Stop & Shop.

2 At Associated, 90% of the items, I'd say, are catered towards Mexican and Caribbean customers. I think it'd be cool to have an international market for all the immigrants in Poughkeepsie.

3 I think it's great that stores are catering to immigrant communities.

When selecting a supermarket, a key criterion for social-service users is whether the store accepts WIC and food stamps. Most participants in both focus groups indicated this was a major consideration, and they seemed aware of which stores did or didn't accept these forms of payment.

1 I get most of my food from River Church.

2 I have food stamps but don't have a car, so that influences where I shop. I shop mostly at Stop & Shop, and Mother Earth's because they take food stamps.

[In response to question about importance of the store accepting WIC or food stamps]

2, 3, 5 and 8 agree that it is very important.

2 Instead of waiting for your husband to come, you can go to the store.

8 Some stores don't accept them.

3 Adams doesn't accept WIC checks or food stamps.

**Bodegas and other small food stores in the City:** Participants in the social-service focus groups regularly noted that they didn't prefer patronizing smaller stores for their food needs because they were too expensive. One participant had criticism for Spicy Peppers, a Main Street produce store.

2 I grew up in Poughkeepsie, and there used to be grocery stores all over, this was before all the malls happened. Then for the longest time, there was just no grocery store in Poughkeepsie- neglect. They were better than a bodega, though. More like a market. Bodegas- prices are higher, but produce isn't so good. Spicy Peppers store- vendor was trying to charge me tax on my vegetables. I went in there once and the vegetables were rotten; the owner accused me of stealing. The owner is horrible- weighing stuff incorrectly on the scales, etc.

2 The second category (bodegas, etc) includes gas stations.

4 I buy everything I need even for the whole month. I go to Sam's Club about once every three months and buy things in bulk. For example, the ketchup bottles are sold three for six dollars, and they last long because they are big. You can buy six pieces of chicken for six dollars; you go to a smaller store and chicken costs seven dollars. I think there's a big difference between going to a small store and a large one.

**The farmers' market:** In the course of conversation with the Bread of Life focus group, our facilitators asked whether participants shopped at the City's farmers' market. Two participants there indicated they did, although it wasn't clear whether vendors' acceptance of WIC/food stamps there was a key consideration.

1 I go to the farmers' market pretty often- get Jamaican food, and some fruits and vegetables.

3 The farmers' market- I didn't know it was [going to be relocated] actually. I'm going to check it out. But moving it to the Walkway- that would be getting at a different audience, the people visiting the Walkway, not the people in Poughkeepsie.

Here we might add a brief remark made in a Spanish-speaking focus group that isn't included in this section (the Christ Episcopal Church group):

- 1 Farmers' markets are good but expensive.
- 2 They are expensive so people only go when they have WIC.

### *Transportation to supermarkets*

The economic resources of people who use social-service programs are such that this population is perhaps the least likely to own a private vehicle, and thus the most vulnerable to food insecurity risks created by the long distances to most supermarkets and the inconveniences of the municipal bus systems. Presumably the opening of Associated Supermarket, the first supermarket located within City limits in recent history, will lessen these risks, particularly if that store accepts WIC and food stamps. However, as the last section documents, participants in these two focus groups have identified several stores outside the City as fulfilling particular food needs, so the question of transportation to these establishments is still quite relevant.

This is still speculative, considering we only have two focus group interviews in this category to analyze, but it may be that the at-risk population in the City of Poughkeepsie has different levels of transportation risk based on their ethnic/linguistic status. Specifically, in the section on Spanish-language focus groups we discussed the community taxi system, or *raite*, that local Latinos can use to take them to the supermarkets. This system was identified and explained to us in the Hudson River Healthcare focus group, which is also included in the two focus groups in this section. By contrast, we heard of no comparable community taxi system serving the City's English-speaking ethnic groups, either native- or foreign-born.<sup>13</sup>

Consequently, participants from the Bread of Life Church focus group demonstrated great familiarity with the City's municipal bus systems, and they reported frequent if not exclusive use of the buses to get to the supermarkets and other destinations outside of city limits.

- 1 Sales and buses are really important in terms of where I shop.
- 2 I have food stamps but don't have a car, so that influences where I shop.

Reliance on the municipal buses in turn restricts the times participants could go shopping, the locations they can travel to, and the amount of groceries they can bring back with them.

- 1 On Saturdays, the buses stop running at 3PM. Actually there are a couple of buses that don't run on Saturdays- the shopper's special.
2. I think the north side bus doesn't run on Saturday- that's what it says on the schedule. I think a lot of people just get on the bus within that time frame.
- 2 I like to go to Mother Earth's from time to time because there are some things there I like, but taking the bus there is difficult- not convenient.

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<sup>13</sup> Social scientists might view the *raite* system serving Poughkeepsie's Latinos as an example of how social capital among ethnic groups can help serve group needs, create entrepreneurial opportunity, and drive local economic development as a result. It's worth remembering that Poughkeepsie saw this kind of activity among its West Indian population; social capital was almost certainly the means by which West Indians came to occupy an ethnic niche in the city's formal taxi sector.

3 My mother-in-law lives off of Creek Road. The bus schedule to the mall from there is so bad- taking it down to Main/Market, and wait for the next bus for 45 minutes or an hour.

3 Getting on the bus with bags is difficult.

2 There's a four bag limit on the bus. The bus driver is nasty and intimidating. A lot of people just don't want to deal with him. He's mean- goes out of his way to be nasty, so some just don't take the bus because of that. Also bus stops aren't well marked- hardly any signs for a bus.

#### **ELDERLY RESIDENTS**

We convened one focus group with elderly residents of the City. This was at the Interfaith Towers, a large senior citizen residential building where residents live independently, which includes doing their own shopping and cooking their own meals. 9 residents participated in our focus group—8 women and 1 man—although the transcripts indicate some didn't say much in the discussion.

#### ***Access to grocery stores and other food establishments***

**Supermarkets:** Although Interfaith Towers has its own "Pantry store with special selections designed to meet the needs of all our residents" (according to the building's website), none of our elderly participants relied exclusively on this on-site facility. Three participants indicated they shop primarily at Price Chopper, while another shops mostly at Walmart. The draw of these supermarkets has been cited fairly frequently across all our focus groups, although this focus group debated which supermarket was better:

6,8,9 All agree that they go to supermarkets because the prices are lower, there is more variety, and you can get household items as well.

You can also use coupons at supermarkets.

6 Goes to Walmart because prices at Stop & Shop and Price Chopper are outrageous.

Adams is so expensive and the quality has really gone downhill recently.  
Stop & Shop used to have the best vegetables and fruits but not anymore.

8 Haven't gone to Associated yet, but hear it mostly only carries Spanish and Indian food.

**Bodegas and other small food stores in the City:** Few elderly participants expressed any preference for the small food stores in the downtown area, except to note their convenient proximity.

9 Doesn't go to the bodegas because they have 'garbage food'.

However if need be you can actually walk to the delis.

**Delivered meals, subsidized food:** Our elderly focus group has another option for obtaining food that we have yet to encounter in this report: they can get meals delivered to them by Meals on Wheels or other community programs. Many of our participants had done just that in recent memory, but we didn't hear many positive remarks about this option.

Social Security is very little and we usually run out of money by the end of the month.

Some in the group have used Meals on Wheels, but 8 says it's not very good quality. 6 Has used it on occasion, but general consensus is that it's not very appetizing. "Sometimes the gravy isn't even warm."

Here we might mention the very brief discussion about the City's farmers' market. We're not sure what to make of these comments:

The Farmers' Market is too expensive and is really bad quality. They give us the really bad quality vegetables to us Senior Citizens.

### *Transportation to supermarkets*

**Use of private vehicle:** Our focus group participants faced transportation obstacles that are unique to the elderly population. Affording the costs of a private vehicle aren't to be taken for granted on fixed incomes, particularly when insurance rates are higher for older people. Nor is driving a vehicle always preferable, at least for long distances. While several of our elderly participants reported owning their own car, driving themselves wasn't necessarily how they got to the supermarkets.

8 Uses the bus.  
5,6,7 All own their own car (but sometimes someone else drives it for them).  
2 Gets driven by a friend.

**Municipal buses:** As noted above, at least two of our participants indicated using the bus to get to the supermarket. However, we heard familiar complaints about the bus system.

6 Goes to Walmart usually on the bus, but others in group complain that you can get stuck there and it takes forever.

Note that this participant (6) owns a car, but that's not how this person gets to Walmart, his/her primary supermarket.

On the bus though all the drivers are pretty strict on the 4 bag limit. One of the bus drivers is a 'real creep'.

### *Preferences in choosing foods and stores*

We heard a wide range of factors besides price that determined the kinds of foods our elderly focus group participants bought. For example:

6 Says quality is really important.  
2 Freshness is also important.

6 If there is something nice I want to eat (hamburger, fettuccini alfredo) then I'll just go out to eat.  
9 Organic is also important to consider.

It's worth noting the unique disincentives for single-living residents to cook fresh food for themselves. These issues are probably common to single-living residents of any age (recall the discussion about single men by our Spanish-language focus groups):

6 Says that honestly if it doesn't microwave and reheat well then she doesn't cook it.

7,8 Regret that because if they are only cooking for one they end up throwing away a lot of leftovers.

As for how they choose stores, the only factor that elderly participants cited was whether they accepted coupons:

7 Use coupons a lot.

"Oh no, I don't use no food stamps."

Accepting coupons is really important.

Adams only started accepting food stamps in July 2010.

### *Skipping meals, food not lasting*

The question of whether having to cut the size of meals or skip meals was a problem for our elderly participants or their neighbors generated very little response.

General consensus, never have had to skip meals – not an issue for us.

7 Sometimes I skip a meal just because I'm not hungry.

Yet this focus group responded substantially to another question adapted from the USDA's household food security scale: whether they had enough money to make their food last through the month. Their comments underscore how living on fixed incomes is a central issue for elderly residents:

Social Security is very little and we usually run out of money by the end of the month.

In turn, this constraint colors a wide range of financial considerations that go into buying food, preparing meals, and maintaining a healthy diet:

8 Look for sales when shopping.

2 Just work to get through shopping efficiently in one run, because I can't walk very well.

Just get what I need.

5 Hard to budget money because the prices are always changing from month to month.

The prices in Poughkeepsie are a lot higher than other areas.

1 There is a vacant store by Marist that used to be a grocery store; would be really useful and provide competition for other supermarkets.

### **COMMUNITY GARDENERS**

Our final focus group brought together nine members of the Fall Kill Partnership Gardens, a community garden in the City of Poughkeepsie. We know almost nothing about their social circumstances except that they

included three men and six women, and they appear to range in age from young adult up. Instead we consider this group as a kind of think tank. As the transcripts will show, the participants share a common thoughtfulness and advocacy of sustainable agriculture that made for an especially substantial conversation.

### ***Access to grocery stores and other food establishments***

Four of the nine participants in this focus group who answered our question about where they tend to shop for food reported going to the large supermarkets. Adams and Stop & Shop were cited by name. One respondent indicated they also get food from restaurants a lot. As for why they chose supermarkets, they cited greater choice and the efficiency in shopping trips that permitted. In contrast to our previous focus groups, there appeared to be no mention of supermarkets' lower prices.

3 More choices at grocery store.

“Allegedly impending Save-A-Lot”

4 I live 5 blocks from here and don't have a car, goes with a friend/parents and we buy mass amounts of food at once.

To date, none of the participants has made the new Associated Supermarket part of their primary grocery circuit, although several of them have checked it out:

1 Lots of foot traffic, families, at Associated.

Good 5-6 families walking around there.

**Use of private vehicle:** All the community gardener focus group participants reported they typically took private vehicles to supermarkets, if not always their own (i.e., they got a ride). They also had lots of critical comments about why the municipal bus system doesn't work for grocery shopping. This conversation began when one participant (4) who lives downtown without a car yet reported he/she preferred walking to supermarkets in the town to taking the bus:

On public transportation:

4, 9 Don't take it (4 prefers walking)

3, 9 With time it takes you might as well walk

8 Not aware of some of the lines

**Municipal buses:** The focus group's remarks about the ineffectiveness and constraints of the municipal bus systems cover some of the same territory found in official assessments of these systems.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, two participants made references suggesting familiarity with these technical reports and/or government jobs or other channels to executive officials and government reports.

5 Bus service has to periodically readjust to meet people's needs and City hasn't done that

Loop and City don't coordinate services

Review depends on money for constant review

2 Meeting with City administrator: operates at loss, not enough riders (Catch-22 because people don't take it because of inefficiency)

3 Can't cover everybody's needs; territoriality

<sup>14</sup> For instance, see Poughkeepsie-Dutchess County Transportation Council, *Second Revised Interim Report: Route Diagnostics Analysis Poughkeepsie City Bus* (2007).

- County offered to take over City system
- 9 Works in county, City interest in maintaining control over public transport to preserve jobs/unions in the City that could be endangered thru consolidation w/ county
- 4 Uses Loop bus for food
- 9 No "Loop" anymore (though still named that) because it no longer makes a loop (not efficient enough)
  - Housing study: whole City of Poughkeepsie didn't have density per square mile for fixed route bus system
- 3 Nobody on the evening Loop buses
- 2 Maybe there should be a special "food loop bus" to connect dense neighborhoods with food outlets
- 1 Food and Laundromats
- 3 Only two or three block walk to nearest Laundromats though

### *Preferences in choosing foods*

In responding to our question about the primary factors besides price that determine the kinds of food they buy, our community garden focus group emphasized many dimensions of food's nutritional value and the sustainability of its origins.

- 5 How long food lasts is very important, buys perishables by meal/daily
- Other factors:
  - 5 Low sodium food
  - 1, 3 Low fat
  - 4 Avoids additives, high fructose corn syrup
  - 9, 6 Local
  - 9 Used to be concerned with organic, but local is pretty good

Some participants noted the difficulty of satisfying all these shopping objectives at any one food destination in the area:

- 3 Difficulty b/c we are choosy shoppers (try to be local/organic/etc.) impossible to accomplish all of those things in one venue BJs list, Stop & Shop list, Price Chopper list, Hannaford list (each has its own merits)

- 1 Not ideal because if you travel to find local/fresh you leave carbon footprint

Packaging is troubling also, which is "greener" glass/plastic? Etc.

- 6 Practices of reducing packaging and waste not available in Poughkeepsie

### *Preferences in choosing stores*

Advocacy of economic sustainability and social justice surfaced in the community gardener focus group's comments about the stores they patronized. On the one hand, they recognized personal considerations of convenience:

- 1, 3 Close to home or work or other regularly visited places (i.e. near daughters' gymnastics practice)
- 4 Casa Latina - great and close but expensive, Associated less expensive but not first choice, often walks there and buys meal ingredients as needed

Diff. of opinion on prices of food at specific stores:

- 6, 1 Overall prices at Stop & Shop are higher than other places for things we like to buy



	<p>5 Being educated consumer extremely important in choosing stores After 6 pm no bus service so that influences options</p>
Hunger is definitely an issue in the City .	<p>On the other hand, their comments suggest the choice of store is motivated by reducing the carbon footprint created by travelling to and financially supporting the big chains outside city limits. Notably, the community garden focus group had one of the most substantial discussion of the new Associated Supermarket of any of our focus groups.</p>
A lot of people have their own gardens, some donate produce to emergency food shelters.	<p>5 Corporate factors influence store availability/locations 5 Going to be interesting to see how Associated survives Grand Union (formerly located at site where Associated is) failed there already 5 Main Street's unsavory reputation, people may not want to walk there 7, 8 Convenience major factor for Associated, not ties to location (with previous grocery store) 6 Formerly couldn't find orange juice anywhere on Main Street, now with full scale grocery store it will be easier to find basics 6 Poughkeepsie Journal says people thought Associated was overpriced 1, 6, 8 Associated has great selection of rice, decent produce, fresh</p> <p><b>The farmers' market:</b> The Fall Kill Community Garden brings together a group of do-it-yourself food producers who share the spirit of agricultural sustainability epitomized by the farmers' market movement. In more than one case, the participants in this focus group have direct ties to the City's farmers' market. In this context, they had a lot to say about the local farmers' market, quite a lot of it critical.</p>
I've cut back because I've noticed rising prices ...	<p>5 No year round farmers' market There could be funds/resources for this if we focused on food issues (rather than lesser City issues) Concerned that farmers' market is moving, "No idea where the hell that is," no parking 1 Moving farmers' market for tourists, not for convenience of people in the City 9 Farmers' market has become place for people to get lunch for people that work in the City, not a grocery shopping farmers' market So many farmers' markets' and farmers are getting spread thin Farmers can't go any more places/extend more hours because farmers' markets are so popular</p>
"If I'm feeling it in my food budget, people living from paycheck to paycheck must feel it so much more"	<p>5 Why not spread out the hours and have it in the evening also, after work Best produce because they come from all over the valley 4 Even if farmers' market was open all day, wouldn't change amount/type of people that shop there 6 Wishes there was more info about what produce is available (not just PFP), even if it wasn't available in the City itself "People are unaware of farms nearby that they could source specific items at I work at Sprout Creek, we've been around 20 years and people don't know where we are or what we sell." It would be nice to have a list of local places that sell specific items. Really important where my meat is being sourced from. Adams doesn't identify where meat comes from. 9 But butcher will tell you. 1 Some of that info is on PFP website</p>

- 3 PFP continues to refine/redirect City outreach
- 5 Disconnect between farmers and consumers
  - 3 Would go to Main Street farmers' market often for lunch; Arlington market is too far, but does go longer into evening.
- 5 No local slaughterhouses, supposed to be building one near here (received grant)
  - 9 "Never gonna happen," meat guys said "we'll believe it when we see it."
  - 6 There are small local slaughterhouses, but problem is getting an appointment.
  - 1 Restaurant fad of "nose to tail" cooking with local meat and using everything, problem is you have to make appointment with house year ahead of time because of lack of local slaughterhouses.

### *Food insecurity in Poughkeepsie*

This focus group used our question about whether they or their neighbors have cut the size or skipped meals as an opportunity to discuss Poughkeepsie's problems of food insecurity more generally. Many of the evaluations and proposed solutions they offered suggest how they see these issues through the lens of agricultural sustainability versus the industrial processing of food products.

- 5 Hunger definitely an issue in the City
  - Lot of people have their own gardens, some donate produce to emergency food shelters
  - Inconvenient because of seasonality
- 9 "Splurges" on food, not clothing/etc. but has cut back because noticed rising prices
  - Can't get out of Adams for under \$40-45; noticeable change over the years
  - "If I'm feeling it in my food budget, people living from paycheck to paycheck must feel it so much more"
- 1 Children with free/reduced price meal in school shows how much families are lacking
  - Some kids think food is so disgusting that though they qualify they don't take it.
  - Some schools are using local/fresh foods, but not Poughkeepsie.
  - Food service was allowed to sell "healthy" snacks to children that are basically junk food (children wasted money on unhealthy snacks).
- 3 Children with free/reduced price meal highest rates of any place in Hudson Valley.
- 5 Disconnect in way food gets to the table
  - Nice to have healthy food but it has to taste good otherwise kids won't eat it
  - Wouldn't be any/much support to get kids better food because people don't want to pay the money
  - Must be continued education process to change perspectives on food

Focus group research confirms survey findings that households' decisions about what to eat and how to access food hinge upon external, food system level factors not under their control.

## Field Research

The rest of this report addresses issues pertaining to systemic features of Poughkeepsie's food system. Most of this research was conducted in the fall of 2010, with some updating on the City's food retail establishments and food assistance programs in 2012. While some of the details presented here (for instance, on the location of the City's farmers' market) may have changed since this research was conducted, the importance of this section is the overall picture drawn of the City's food system.

### FOOD RETAIL IN POUGHKEEPSIE

Two critical community factors for households' food security are:

1. The *availability* of commercial food retailers and
2. The *affordability* of foods sold there.

In regards to the first factor, an important question is whether the City of Poughkeepsie can be considered a *food desert*, which the USDA defines as:

- A *low income census tract*, having either: 1) a poverty rate of 20 percent or higher, or 2) a median family income at or below 80 percent of the area's median family income
- Where at least 500 people and/or at least 33 percent of the census tract's population residing of residents has *low access* – more than one mile in urban areas – from a supermarket or large grocery store.<sup>15</sup>

This definition highlights two additional dimensions, the first being type of food retail establishment. Large grocery stores and supermarkets are the gold standard of commercial food access. Their large inventories and wide product choice make it likelier that residents will find the foods they prefer at prices they can afford. The second dimension is accessible distance, which, in urban areas like Poughkeepsie, is typically understood as *walkable* distance.<sup>16</sup>

### *Poughkeepsie: a food desert?*

Below, Figure 4 contains a map of all food retail establishments in the City of Poughkeepsie as well as large supermarkets in the neighboring Town of Poughkeepsie. The map also shows two Census tracts in the northwestern portion of the city that the USDA has identified as food deserts according to the above definition. For City residents, the three closest supermarkets are Stop & Shop, Adams Fairacre Farms and (after April 2011) Associated Supermarket. The first two are located in the Town of Poughkeepsie at least half a mile from virtually any point within city limits; two more Town supermarkets to the south, Price Chopper and Stop & Shop's second "Super" store, are separated 1-2 miles from the City by a pedestrian-unfriendly stretch of Route 9. Within the

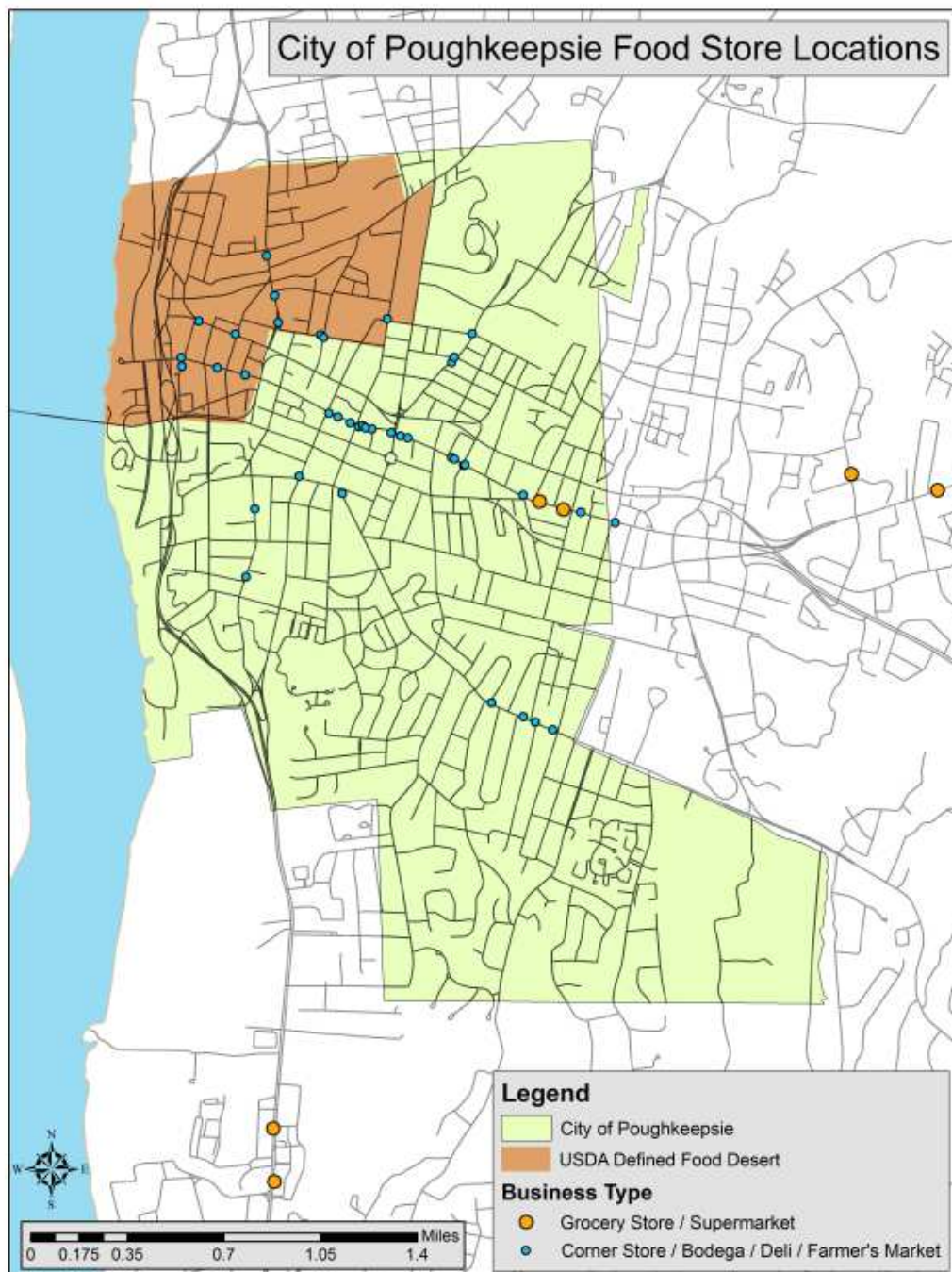
<sup>15</sup> USDA Economic Research Services, "Definition of a Food Desert," <http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-desert-locator/documentation.aspx> (accessed October 5, 2012).

<sup>16</sup> There's some debate among food security analysts over the distances considered to be "walkable." Most commentators agree it varies whether the residential area in question is urban, suburban or rural. For urban areas like Poughkeepsie, the USDA defines low access from a supermarket or large grocery store as being more than 1 mile. However, some would argue that .25 mile might be a better measure of walkable distance that accounts for the density of neighborhood populations in a city like Poughkeepsie.

City, two grocery stores, Associated Supermarket and Casa Latina, are located a few blocks just inside the eastern border between City and town, which place them outside of walking distance for most residents.

However, as Figure 4 shows, the City doesn't lack for *smaller food retailers*: corner stores, delis, bodegas, and drug stores or dollar stores with some food products. Most of these are clustered along the Main Street corridor and lie within walkable distances of many dense residential sections of the City. The neighborhoods located furthest away from commercial food establishments are mostly found in the City's southside. Although the southside is diverse and includes at-risk residential groups (especially senior citizens), it isn't characterized by the higher residential densities, lower incomes and, we assume, lower levels of private auto ownership associated with the City's northern neighborhoods.

**Figure 4: Location of food establishments in and around City of Poughkeepsie**



### *Food availability and affordability in the City's smaller stores*

It appears, then, that access to commercial food retailers of *any* kind isn't a major problem for most City residents. The next question is just how affordable are the foods sold in these City stores. For an answer, we visited food stores in the City's downtown area twice, in October 2010 and December 2011, as well as four supermarkets – Associated located in the City of Poughkeepsie and opened in April 2011 and three others located in the surrounding Town of Poughkeepsie. By the time we returned in December 2011 to get the latest prices, three small retailers had already closed. (Evidently a few more have closed since then; see "Turnover among Main Street's food retail establishments," below.) On our visits, we observed the prices of four food items: milk, bread, cereal, and lettuce. These staple food items can be used to suggest affordability within each store as a whole; in other words, if the prices of the four items are relatively high at a given location, then we assume that the store's prices are generally high. We also investigated whether stores advertise the acceptance of EBT and/or WIC benefits, and we took stock of what types of food different stores had to offer, particularly the availability and quality of fresh produce in comparison to packaged foods. Below, Table 27 presents our findings.

**Table 27: Price comparisons (in dollars), produce availability of, and EBT/food stamps acceptance for City food retailers and Town supermarkets**

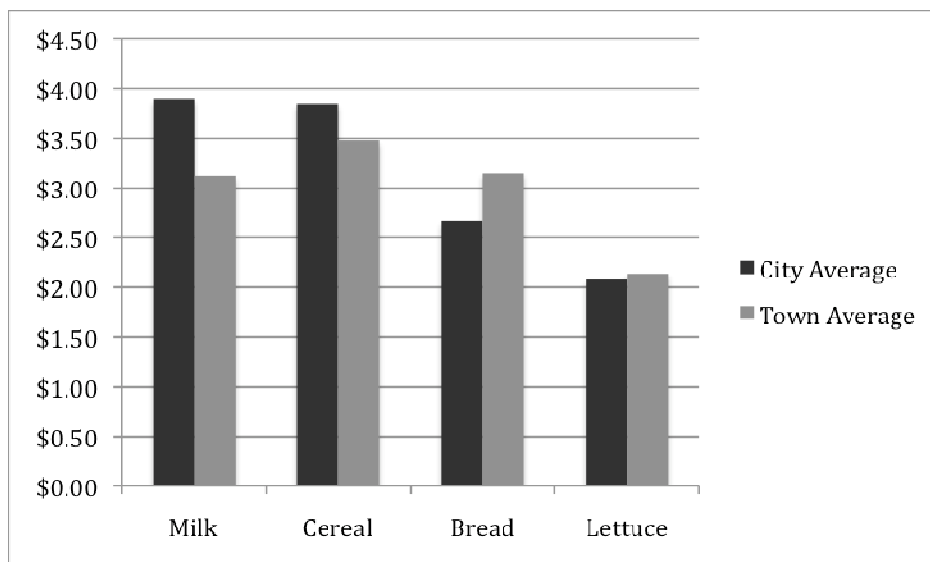
Store	Address	Milk (gal.)	Cereal	Bread	Lettuce	Produce	EBT
<b><i>City food retailers</i></b>							
1st Choice	Academy Street & Cannon Street		1.99 - 5.89			yes	yes
Active Thrift	481 Main Street	3.99	3.99	1.59			yes
Amazing Grace	10 Cayman Ct					yes	yes
Associated	690 Main Street	3.49	3.59 - 5.50	1.99 - 3.50			yes
El Azteca	2 N. Clover Street				2.50	yes	*
City Center	472 Main Street	4.49	4.49	3.49		no	yes
Corner Store	Mill Street & N. Bridge Street	3.99	4.50	3.50		no	*
City Drug		3.59	3.99				
Dalleo's	144 Mill Street	3.99	3.99	3.50		no	*
Dimpi's	9 N. Clover Street	3.99	3.50	3.50		no	yes
Family Dollar	412 Main Street	4.35	2.25 - 3.25	1.60		yes	*
Family Market	545 Main Street					no	*
I & S	366 Main Street	2.60				no	*
Indo American**	460 Main Street		3.45			no	yes
La Michocana	537 Main Street	4.50	2.50	1.50		yes	*
La Poblanita	424 Main Street	3.99	3.50-5.50	3.50		yes	*
Noaim	530 Main Street	4.50	3.99			yes	no
Pancho Villa	550 Main Street	4.00	3.99	1.99		yes	yes
PK Express**	400 Main Street					no	*
Rossi's	45 S. Clover Street	3.75 (1/2 gal.)		1.50 - 5.00		no	no
Spicy Peppers**	388 Main Street			0.85	1.65	yes	yes
West Indies	105 Main Street	n/a		3.95 - 7.25		no	no
Yalexa	519 Main Street	3.00	5.75			yes	*
<b><i>Town supermarkets</i></b>							
Store	Address	Milk (gal.)	Cereal	Bread	Lettuce	Produce	EBT
Adams	765 Dutchess Turnpike	3.50	2.99	3.00	1.29	yes	yes
Price Chopper	2585 South Road #21	2.88 - 3.69	2.00 - 4.89	3.69	1.29 - 2.99	yes	yes
Stop & Shop	59 Burnett Boulevard	2.99	2.99 - 5.99	1.99 - 3.50	2.99	yes	yes

\* Food stamp acceptance wasn't noted in our field notes, and the store couldn't be reached to find out more.

\*\* This store had closed by our second visit in December 2011, so we report the October 2010 prices we observed in our first visit.

One hypothesis we entertained before we began fieldwork was that prices would be higher in the City of Poughkeepsie than in the neighboring Town of Poughkeepsie. This hypothesis rests on the premise of economies of scale: large supermarkets that sell greater volumes can operate at lower prices per item than the smaller food retailers inside City limits. If this hypothesis proved true, then we would have important evidence for the practical limitations of City residents' food access, since City residents would face higher prices than they would in the transportation-dependent supermarkets of the town. However, our price comparisons don't reveal a clear correlation between City/town location and price; see Figure 5, below. Though on average milk and cereal were more expensive when purchased at food retailers in the City, bread and lettuce were less expensive. Of course, prices may vary due to availability and times of observation, but at least these data don't offer clear support for the hypothesis that food prices are higher in the City than in the town.

**Figure 5: Average prices of four staples in City and town retailers**



Source: City data averages prices for 21 stores, while town data averages 3 stores, based on prices observed in October 2010.

### *Nutrition in the City's smaller stores*

Admittedly, one variable unaccounted for in Figure 5 is food quality, which we didn't measure or standardize for in our field research, thus limiting our ability to draw direct comparisons. In fact, the quality of the four staple items we price-checked varied considerably. For example, we found a loaf of bread for \$0.85 at Spicy Peppers that, it's probably safe to assume, wasn't the same in type or quality as the loaf we found at Adams for \$3.00. Whether or not it's valid for us to compare the two loaves is difficult to say. More to the point, almost half of the stores we visited (10 of 24) sold no fresh produce whatsoever; many of the others didn't offer a wide assortment or large amount of fruits and vegetables. By contrast, Associated and the town's supermarkets had much larger and more nutritional options, including large varieties of fresh produce. On the whole, we found that City food retailers were disproportionately stocked with mostly prepackaged and canned food. Bottled and



canned beverages made up a large portion of the available products; many stores offered a wide selection of sodas, while few carried a comparable amount of healthier drink options.

Our fieldwork thus suggests that residents experience limited access to nutritious food in the City's smaller stores. Although the major supermarkets carried the widest variety of produce and food by far, due to their distance and, as we discuss later in "Infrastructure and the local food system," the frequent difficulties of public transportation in the City, these stores may be of little use to City residents without access to private cars.

As Figure 4 showed earlier, the downtown food retailers are located within easy walking distance not only of many residential neighborhoods but each other as well. Thus, a countervailing hypothesis is that no single store downtown *needs* to offer a large variety of fresh, healthy, affordable food, because residents can find an optimal range of food products by traveling to and shopping at *several* establishments. For instance, downtown residents could get their fruits and vegetables at a place like Spicy Peppers, the Main Street store that we considered to offer the best selection of produce before it went out of business; a few more trips to additional stores for other food items and household goods could possibly provide all that a household might need.

We don't have evidence to test whether this hypothesis explains the situation of City residents, but were it true, it seems less than an ideal solution for lower-income households. For one reason, Table 27 reminds us that most but not all food retailers accept EBT and/or WIC benefits. As our survey findings suggest (see Tables 11 and 17), store participation in these food assistance programs may be a primary reason why some residents choose a particular place to get most of their food. The fact that, for instance, three retailers selling ethnically or religiously specific food don't participate in EBT and WIC programs suggests that certain preferred foods may be "off the table" for economically disadvantaged households. For another reason, food stamps rules restrict the products for which stores may accept food stamps. Price Chopper, for example, reminds customers that it accepts food stamps only for items that are not "cooked." Stipulations like this can add to the difficulty of grocery shopping for some residents, requiring more visits to different retailers, and/or more time needed to prepare foods once they're purchased.<sup>17</sup> These examples underscore a general obstacle to food security: residents seeking to do their household's food shopping solely from downtown stores are likely to require several trips to multiple establishments, with no guarantee that the range of foods they seek will be available and affordable. The contrast with the one-stop convenience offered by major supermarkets in the town is stark.

### *Nutrition in the City's restaurants*

The restaurants in the City of Poughkeepsie cater to different clienteles. At one end of the price spectrum, there are high end restaurants such as Shadows and the Artist's Palate; at the other end, there are McDonald's and other fast food establishments. In between these two poles exist a host of small restaurants, diners, and delis preparing and serving food on premises. As we've seen, most City residents rely on prepared food from restaurants as part of their diet. On the basis of our survey, it seems a very small fraction (5.4%) turn to

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<sup>17</sup> A contention of food security advocates is that it's a misconception that packaged foods are necessarily more affordable than fresh and unprocessed food. In an interview on September 29, 2010, Ozie Williams (public health educator at Dutchess County Department of Health and a participant in the Poughkeepsie Plenty advisory team) pointed out to us that a family can buy much more with their food stamps if they purchase fresh produce and unprocessed goods as opposed to prepackaged or pre-prepared goods. In order for fresh food preparation to be as efficient as preparing packaged food, educational initiatives, like community cooking classes, are probably necessary. Williams acknowledged, however, in recent years such initiatives have been limited in number, sometimes poorly attended, and among the first to be cut when funding for food security programs is slashed.

restaurants for *most* of their food, but over one-quarter (27.3%) go to restaurants “often” (see Tables 12 and 13). How do these establishments affect the nutritional intake of City residents?

Our research didn’t look at restaurants in great detail, but here we can draw on research conducted by the Dutchess County Department of Health: the 2007 Trans Fat Survey, which sought “to assess the extent of use of trans fat, [otherwise known as] partially hydrogenated vegetable oils (PHVOs), in food service establishments in Dutchess County, NY.”<sup>18</sup> The connection of trans fats to food insecurity is an important one: a higher intake of trans fats contributes to weight gain and to health problems like heart disease and diabetes. Trans fats are especially common in fried food, a category that the report examined in terms of French fries, mozzarella sticks, chicken nuggets, fish sticks and hamburger buns. In particular, French fries are notorious for containing highest levels of PHVOs, although they needn’t be prepared with this ingredient. 73% of the county restaurants surveyed serve French fries, and of that group, 80.9% of them used PHVOs in the preparation of French fries.<sup>19</sup>

The City and Town of Poughkeepsie (specifically, zip codes 12601 and 12603) contain 253 locally owned restaurants. Of this number, 27 restaurants (or 31.8% of Poughkeepsie restaurants) were surveyed by the Department of Health. Of this City sample, 12 Poughkeepsie restaurants (44%) were found to prepare foods containing trans fats.<sup>20</sup> This rate of PHVO usage appears remarkable for being the fifth *lowest* among the 19 county municipalities studied in the report. However, the Trans Fat Survey pointedly did *not* study fast food restaurants, where fried foods are found across the menu. Thus, considering that Poughkeepsie is denser in restaurants than any other county municipality, and low income residents seeking more affordable dining may especially turn to fast food restaurants, this finding underscores the questionable nutritional value that City residents get when they eat out.

### *Turnover among Main Street’s food retail establishments*

Whereas City residents think about downtown’s array of food retailers in terms of food access, this issue also highlights a larger problem in the City of Poughkeepsie: the precarious nature of commercial development. This isn’t a topic that the Poughkeepsie Plenty Community Food Assessment explicitly identified as critical before we began our research, but we think it’s an important one to examine for several reasons. Several store employees told us their customers include a regular clientele. When such stores go out of business, this can add to the lack of City’s supermarkets in making it difficult for these shoppers to find consistent and reliable sources of food. As well, policy proposals intended to improve the local food system may sometimes assume that the proprietors of food retailers can be easily identified and contacted in order to solicit them about participating in certain programs. In fact, our research suggests that local food retail entrepreneurs might not be as stable as these assumptions would lead one to believe.

In reconciling the several sources of data we had for the City’s food retailers—existing reports, historic references, and our own fieldwork—we found it difficult to generate a stable list of these establishments. This echoes an observation common among long-time City residents, who have seen various storefronts cycle through three to four different proprietors in recent decades. We thus hypothesized a substantial level of business failure and turnover among the City’s food retailers. To investigate, we examined the yellow pages of

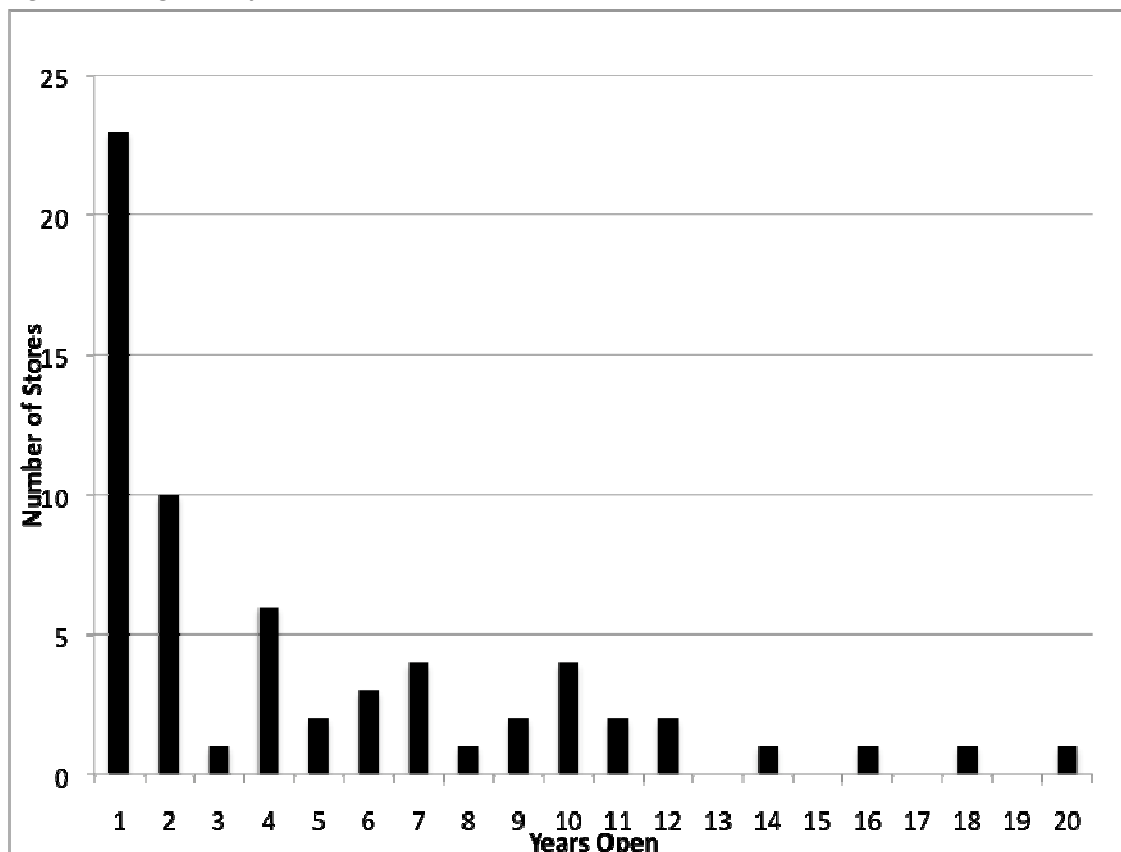
<sup>18</sup> Dutchess County Department of Health, “Dutchess County Trans Fat Survey” (August 2007), pg. 3. The report examined only the incidence of PHVO use at county restaurants, not the amounts of PHVO in their foods.

<sup>19</sup> Dutchess County Department of Health, “Dutchess County Trans Fat Survey” (August 2007), pg. 9.

<sup>20</sup> Dutchess County Department of Health, “Dutchess County Trans Fat Survey” (August 2007), pg. 7.

telephone books from 1989-2009 (with the exception of 2007, which was missing) at Adriance Memorial Library. We looked for information about commercial food retailers located on Main Street under the yellow-page categories of “Grocery-Retail,” “Delicatessens,” “Convenience Stores,” “Market,” “Supermarket,” and “Meat-Retail” or “Dairy-Retail.”<sup>21</sup> In this 20 year period, we documented a total 64 businesses. Figure 6 presents the results of our analysis. The range and affordability of the foods sold in these establishments was impossible to discover, as the majority are now closed.

**Figure 6: Length of operation for 64 Main Street food retailers, 1989-2009**



Two years was the median length for a Main Street food store to stay open in the past 20 years. Over a third of the stores (23 out of 64) stayed open for just one year; another ten remained open for two years; and only 22 out of the 64 businesses managed to stay open longer than five years. Of these 22, only seven remained by 2009: four delicatessens, two convenience stores, and one grocery store.

<sup>21</sup> We decided to use the library as a resource for historical information because the city does not keep any record concerning grocery store turnover. Limitations of our methodology included (1) human error (scanning twenty years of yellow pages for stores listed as Main Street, Poughkeepsie in a Dutchess County phone book is bound to leave some margin of error); (2) the absence of stores unlisted in the yellow pages or listed in categories other than “Grocery-Retail,” “Delicatessens,” “Convenience Stores,” “Market,” “Supermarket,” and “Meat-Retail” or “Dairy-Retail;” (3) changing categories assigned to some establishments over different phonebooks; and (4) the fact that stores and delis located near, but not on, Main Street are not included in the research for logistical reasons. City Directories, which listed Poughkeepsie businesses by street, were only published through the 1970s and into the 1980s, with the final published report printed in 1992.

Certainly, the 1989-2009 period saw major transformations occur in the downtown environment, most significantly the opening up of Main Street's pedestrian mall to auto traffic in 2001. Still, we suspect that the rate of turnover didn't significantly decline after then. Sixteen of the 64 stores listed over the past 20 years were still open as of 2009, yet only five of them were listed as Markets or Supermarkets; the other eleven were listed as Delicatessens or Convenience Stores. Although we haven't examined the grocery selection of each of these seventeen stores, given what we know about product availability in smaller food retailers, it's likely that the Delicatessens and Convenience Stores have significantly less selection and fresh produce.

### *Customer patronage and community in the City's smaller stores*

The data on business turnover suggest that smaller food retailers appear to be more successful in staying in business in the City's downtown area. We're unable to tease out the causal arrow that might explain why this could be: is it that many residents use corner stores, delis, bodegas, etc. because their food choices center on the kinds of food sold in these smaller establishments? Or do residents patronize downtown's smaller stores simply because the condition of commercial development leaves them no alternative, i.e., until the spring of 2011, no larger market existed in the City of Poughkeepsie? Studying the impact of the arrival of Associated Supermarket in the downtown area in April 2011 would provide some answers to such questions, but it shouldn't be a foregone conclusion that downtown's corner stores and delis will simply disappear in the presence of one or more supermarkets. The implications of this possibility are important for any community food assessment proposals that seek to influence City residents' food habits via the stores they patronize.

What else do the City's smaller food stores offer besides convenience? In our visits to Main Street's stores, we often observed a fragile sense of community in these establishments. One element of this dynamic involves the stores' workforce. A number of downtown retailers (probably not limited to the food business) appear to be family enterprises. In fact, we learned that a handful of ethnic stores are run by members of the same family. Beyond the family connection, we also saw that small stores are a source of employment for the City's immigrant populations. One open question is whether the new supermarket might reduce some of these jobs, at least in the absence of efforts to prioritize hiring among City residents.

Then we commonly noted how the City's food stores seemed to be a place of gathering for residents in the area. Multiple stores had gatherings of acquaintances towards the front, and customers going in and out were often in friendly discussion with the store workers. While our presence sometimes triggered feelings of suspicion toward us as outsiders—often related to problems with theft in these establishments, we learned—once we introduced ourselves to the staff and the initial suspicion was overcome, they were generally friendly and willing to talk with us about the stores and their backgrounds. The friendly interactions at these stores raise the question of whether or not the new supermarket would displace some of this community space.

Finally, we heard from a few owners of downtown's small food stores, specifically of the ethnic or culturally specific variety, that they weren't too worried about going out of business in competition with the new supermarket. In part this was because of the special goods and services they offer, and in part because of the sense of community we described. We have no way to assess their claims, or to test the loyalty of their clientele with the new supermarket open for business. However, one piece of supporting evidence comes from the past rate of turnover among Latino food stores, which seems to be lower compared to downtown's food stores in general; see Table 28.

**Table 28: Length of operation for Latino food retailers, 1989-2011**

Store	Address	Category	Years in Business	Time Period
The Latin Touch Deli	778 Main	Delicatessen	1	1998
Rosario's Grocery	105 Main	Groceries - Retail	5	1989-93
La Poblana	424 Main	Large Bodega	7	2004-present
La Cieneguita Deli / Los Compadres	724 Main	Convenience Store/Delicatessen	8	1999-2006, 2009
La Michoacana	537 Main	Convenience Store	11	2000-present
Pancho Villa Deli	550 Main	Delicatessen	11	2000-present
Casa Latina	651 Main	Groceries - Retail	13	1998-present

Casa Latina, which was the largest food retailer and (until April 2011) only official grocery store within City limits, provides a closer look how the City's smaller food stores seem to sustain customer patronage and "community."<sup>22</sup> When it opened in 1998, there were only two other small Latino shops on Main Street. In its first three years in business, Casa Latina was very successful, offering a wide range of goods such as Hispanic-market groceries—significantly for our purposes, including fresh produce—as well as food prepared from a deli counter, music CDs, and services like money transfer. In 2001, the owners were able to move into a larger store further up Main Street, where they operate today. Casa Latina gets most of its groceries imported from Latin America, especially Mexico, although they also buy food from Mexican companies in California or elsewhere in the U.S. As for fresh produce, it imports some of the culturally specific fruits and vegetables, such as plantains and chili peppers, from Mexico. However, most of the produce comes from "local" sources, namely New Jersey, Philadelphia and nearby Salt Point, NY.

The storeowner we interviewed told us that Casa Latina's clientele is majority Latino, mostly Mexican. The store also gets Jamaican customers as well as the occasional white shopper looking to try something new, though these only make up an estimated 5 percent of clientele. The majority of shoppers are women, many of them mothers with children. On weekends, however, Casa Latina gets a lot of complete families as well as single men. The store's owner observed distinct shopping patterns among these groups. Larger families buy their household supplies at bigger stores with better prices and shop at Casa Latina exclusively for the food. By contrast, many of the single men are farm workers from outside Poughkeepsie, and their weekend trips to Casa Latina cover the totality of their food and household needs. Most customers walk to the store, although some of them drive or take a taxi, especially if they're coming from out of town. Between 50% and 60% of Casa Latina customers make use of WIC and food stamp benefits. The storeowner told us she observed a steady rise in the number of

<sup>22</sup> Information in this section comes from an interview with Reyna García, the owner of Casa Latina, conducted on October 14, 2010.

customers who make use of public food assistance programs over the last two years. This, she presumed, was due to increased awareness among Latinos of the services available to them.

As the City's only grocery store until Associated opened in April 2011, Casa Latina probably isn't characteristic of the convenience stores, delicatessens, and bodegas that dominate the food retail landscape in downtown Poughkeepsie. However, at least for the City's Spanish-speaking market, Casa Latina has thrived at the same time that smaller stores selling Latino products have; the City's growing Latino population has so far been able to sustain both retail types in the local food system. Furthermore, at least Casa Latina has weathered the defection of some shoppers to other stores for household supplies. Even as the town's supermarkets expand their selection of Latin food products, the unique services (money transfers, meat counters, etc.) and community interaction that smaller ethnic stores often provide suggest these might remain fixtures of the food retail landscape in downtown Poughkeepsie for the foreseeable future.

Based on the USDA definition, a part of the City of Poughkeepsie is designated as a "food desert" with low access to large supermarkets and their greater range and affordability of food products. The City has a number of smaller food retailers—corner stores, bodegas, delis, and so on—that can be geographically accessed by most residents in the densest neighborhoods. The problems with these smaller retailers are, first, their tendency to emphasize pre-packaged foods with low nutritional value and high-mark-ups. Second, their selection of fresh foods is inconsistent, although not always more expensive than in the town's supermarkets. Third, almost none of them have inventories that provide the one-stop shopping convenience consumers can expect at large supermarkets. Accessing a combination of retailers, residents can hypothetically do most if not all of their shopping among the City's small food retailers. The real cost to residents who choose to do this comes in the form of greater time spent researching local choices and traveling to different stores; greater energy spent on shopping and carrying goods back home (particularly for shoppers who walk); added discomfort or resentment, perhaps, at not having the same shopping convenience that town residents with cars have; and of course the difficulty in avoiding foods of low nutritional value. In this context, we think it's understandable why many City residents might prioritize getting a car ride to the town's supermarkets, and/or might accept the low nutrition foods so easily found in the City.

Such a perspective emphasizes the deficiencies in the City's food retail landscape. However much this perspective is warranted, we think the City's food stores must also be seen as assets to be considered in any future reforms to the local food system. The downtown stores are sources of community interaction, of employment for City residents of all nationalities and citizenship status, and of security and scrutiny on the activities of City streets (this is particularly evident when compared to years past when the number of vacant storefronts on Main Street was higher). The ethnic and culturally specific establishments are especially sites where particular groups can exchange information about local resources and services and can maintain a sense of connection to "their own" here and back home. Finally, the entrepreneurs running these businesses are potential community leaders with an eye on local wants and needs, a vested interest in the community's well-being, and (should they collaborate with one another) a leverage that City government and institutions will likely heed. They're generally preoccupied with staying afloat in a tough economy, but we think their capacity for action could be further developed once their economic niche stabilizes and matures.

In 2011, the City of Poughkeepsie finally got the supermarket it has lacked for decades. We anticipate many benefits will result in terms of enhancing the food security of City residents who aren't immediately concerned about hunger. But we also make note now of the possible displacements this supermarket might create in the

current food retail landscape. While some storeowners aren't particularly concerned about losing shoppers, that always remains a possibility. As an example, Spicy Peppers, whose presence has helped alleviate the unavailability of fresh produce downtown and whose current clientele doesn't seem ethnic or culturally specific went out of business following the opening of the new supermarket. What might happen to the measure of neighborhood stability and potential leadership that the smaller food stores have brought about? As this situation develops, those concerned about food insecurity may want to investigate further the draw of these smaller stores for customers, particularly those that withstand competition from larger supermarkets, and be receptive to efforts to support local entrepreneurs who might in turn provide assistance in food security efforts.

#### ISSUES WITH FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

This community food assessment, undertaken to understand and *characterize* how people experience Poughkeepsie's food system, did not attempt to inventory and examine all the food assistance programs that Poughkeepsie residents can seek out. The Nutrition Advisory Committee of Dutchess County (NAC), which encourages equal food and nutrition education opportunities for all Dutchess County residents, updates a brochure of key programs each year (see Figure 7) and also maintains a listing of food pantries and soup kitchens in the county, which includes 14 such programs located in the City of Poughkeepsie.<sup>23</sup> This section lays out some basic context and a few issues that arose during the course of the community food assessment research that might otherwise be overlooked.

The City's food assistance programs can be thought of in terms of *sites* where residents can obtain food. Using the USDA's "Community Food Assessment Toolkit," a quick inventory conducted in 2009 and 2010 revealed that the City of Poughkeepsie contained at least 28 food assistance program sites. Nine of these correspond to the National School Lunch Program; as we discuss shortly, all nine schools of the Poughkeepsie City School District offered free or reduced-price meals. Another program targeted at children 18 and under is the Summer Food Service Program, which provides breakfast and lunch in the summer at a number of community locations. Five sites correspond to programs aimed at the elderly: Meals on Wheels (3) and the Nutrition Services Incentives Program (2). The non-profit Dutchess Outreach organizes two emergency food program sites, the Lunchbox and the Beverly H. Closs Food Pantry, out of the Family Partnership Center on N. Hamilton Street and provides food for two after school programs on a daily basis through the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). The last three sites correspond to Special Supplemental Program for Women, Infants and Children (or WIC, which residents sign up for at Hudson River Healthcare), the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program for senior citizens and WIC participants, and the Child and Adult Care Food Program (hosted out of the Child Care Council of Dutchess and Putnam Counties).

Given the severity of the economic downturn, City residents' demand for food assistance is at its highest in recent memory. However, food assistance programs have been impacted by declining revenues and tightening budgets across all levels of government. In 2010 Dutchess County Executive William Steinhaus proposed to cut spending and workforces in the county's departments of Health and Social Services, among other areas, to cover a \$40 million gap in the county 2011 budget.<sup>24</sup> Again, in 2012, Marcus Molinaro, the newly elected County

<sup>23</sup> Some members of NAC served on the Poughkeepsie Plenty advisory team or supported the project in other ways.

<sup>24</sup> William R. Steinhaus, "County Trying to Close \$40 Million Budget Gap for Next Year Budget," Dutchess County News Release, October 6, 2010, <http://www.co.dutchess.ny.us/CountyGov/Departments/CountyExecutive/18994.htm>



Executive, is seeking to close another \$40 million gap in the 2013 budget. Government budget cuts in turn affect the funding that non-profit service providers rely on.

**Figure 7: Food and Nutrition Education Programs in Dutchess County, compiled by the Nutrition Advisory Committee and updated as of January 2012**

**Nutrition Advisory Committee**

The Nutrition Advisory Committee (NAC) is a forum for developing strategies for the more effective delivery of food, nutrition education and wellness services by each of the represented organizations, and by nutrition education and food organizations as a collaborative whole, in Dutchess County. With support from all of the mentioned organizations and Eat Smart New York!, a statewide, USDA and NYSOTDA program



**Cornell University Cooperative Extension Dutchess County**  
**Astor Early Childhood Programs**  
**DUTCHESS OUTREACH** Food • Clothing • Caring  
**Dutchess County Cares** Services, Support and Information [www.dutchessny.gov](http://www.dutchessny.gov)

Food, Nutrition and Wellness Programs  
 2715 Route 44  
 Millbrook, NY 12545  
 Phone: (845) 677-8223  
 Fax: (845) 677-3813  
 Website: [www.coedutchess.org](http://www.coedutchess.org)

Cornell Cooperative Extension provides equal program and employment opportunities. The County of Dutchess partially funds Cooperative Extension programming in Dutchess County.

**Food and Nutrition Education Programs in Dutchess County**



**We Can Help You:**

- Feed yourself or your family
- Stretch your food dollars
- Eat healthier during pregnancy
- Breastfeed your baby
- Feed your children
- Find services available for seniors

This information is brought to you by:  
 The Nutrition Advisory Committee (NAC), encouraging equal food and nutrition education opportunities for all Dutchess County residents.

**Nutrition Education Programs**

**The Nutrition Information Program - (NIP) of Cornell Cooperative Extension**  
 Provides: Education in your home or a community setting, on how to plan and prepare meals, how to save money when grocery shopping, how to eat healthier, how to feed children/infants, and how to handle food safely.  
 Telephone: (845) 677-8223  
 Location: 2715 Route 44, Millbrook  
 Website: [www.coedutchess.org](http://www.coedutchess.org)



**Dutchess County Department of Health**  
 Provides: Nutrition information and activities on diabetes prevention and portion distortion, for teachers and students throughout the county.  
 Telephone: (845) 486-3400  
 Location: 387 Main Street, Poughkeepsie  
 Website: [www.co.dutchess.ny.us](http://www.co.dutchess.ny.us)

**Education and Support Programs**

**Astor Services for Children and Families**  
 Offers a comprehensive child development program for low-income children from birth to age 5 and provides support to their families. The Early Head Start program (birth to 3) offers home-based and center-based services. Nutrition information is provided to children and families who are enrolled.  
 Telephone: (845) 452-4167  
 Location: Will refer to one of seven sites depending on the person's address.  
 Website: [www.astorservices.org](http://www.astorservices.org)

**Child Care Council of Dutchess & Putnam, Inc.**  
 Supports family and group family day care providers who participate in the Child & Adult Care Food Program by educating them on how to serve nutritious, healthful meals and snacks.  
 Telephone: (845) 473-4141  
 Location: 70 Overlook Road, Poughkeepsie  
 Website: [www.childcaredutchess.org](http://www.childcaredutchess.org)

**Food Banks, Food Pantries and Farmers Markets**  
 To find out how to reach food banks, food pantries or farmers markets in your area, call:  
 Dutchess Outreach: (845) 454-3782  
 Nutrition Information Program: (845) 677-8223

**Emergency Food Programs**

**Dutchess County Healthy Families**  
 Provides: Assistance to people in locating sources of emergency food and provide education to pregnant and parenting women on nutrition. Bilingual services available.  
 Telephone: (845) 452-3387  
 (845) 838-2516  
 Location: Family Partnership Center  
 29 North Hamilton Street, Poughkeepsie  
 Website: [www.healthyfamiliesnewyork.org](http://www.healthyfamiliesnewyork.org)

**Dutchess Outreach/The Lunch Box**  
 Provides: Noontime meals, Sunday through Friday and a Food Pantry with emergency grocery supply; also refers to other similar programs. Provides after-school meals and evening meals (call for schedule).  
 Telephone: (845) 454-3782  
 (845) 471-2522  
 Location: Family Partnership Center  
 29 North Hamilton Street, Poughkeepsie  
 Website: [www.dutchessoutreach.org](http://www.dutchessoutreach.org)

**Beulah Baptist Church**  
 Provides: Saturday noontime meals, clothing bank and emergency groceries.  
 Telephone: (845) 473-1662  
 Location: 92 Catherine St, Poughkeepsie




Cornell Cooperative Extension provides equal program and employment opportunities. The County of Dutchess partially funds Cooperative Extension programming in Dutchess County.

**Food and Feeding Programs**

**Community Family Development, Inc.**  
 Provides: Breakfast, lunch and a snack daily to children ranging in age from six weeks to 12 years old.  
 Telephone: (845) 471-5301  
 Location: 269 Mill Street, Poughkeepsie (First Congregational Church)  
 Website: [www.cfdcenter.org](http://www.cfdcenter.org)

**Dutchess County Department of Social Services**  
 Provides: Food Stamps, Public Assistance, and Medicaid to eligible families and individuals.  
 Locations & Telephone:  
 60 Market Street, Poughkeepsie (845) 486-3000  
 131 County House Road, Millbrook (845) 677-5532  
 Website: [www.co.dutchess.ny.us](http://www.co.dutchess.ny.us)  
[www.mybenefits.ny.gov](http://www.mybenefits.ny.gov)

**Dutchess County Division of Aging Services**  
 Provides: Congregate and home delivered meals for seniors and distributed from seven Friendship Centers throughout the county. Nutrition counseling & education available. Transportation also available.  
 Telephone: (845) 486-2555  
 Location: 27 High Street, Poughkeepsie  
 Website: [www.co.dutchess.ny.us](http://www.co.dutchess.ny.us)

**Applying for Food Stamps Assistance**

**Women, Infant and Children (WIC)**  
 Provides: Nutrition guidance and food vouchers (formula, milk, juice, eggs, cheese, peanut butter) to low income infants, children up to age five and prenatal/postpartum women. Weekly prenatal classes and breastfeeding information available.  
 Telephone: (845) 452-6478  
 (845) 831-0400  
 Locations: Vary. Will refer to location depending on person's address.

**Poughkeepsie Farm Project**  
 Provides: Subsidized shares of farm fresh produce on a weekly basis (apply for a "sponsored share"), acceptance of food stamps, Farmers' Market Nutrition Program checks (for seniors and WIC recipients), and other public assistance programs at the Poughkeepsie Farmers' Market  
 Telephone: (845) 473-1415  
 Location: Poughkeepsie Farmers' Market  
 Pulaski Park on Washington Street  
 Near the Walkway Over the Hudson  
 The market is open Fridays, 2 pm to 6 pm from June-October.  
 Website: [www.farmproject.org](http://www.farmproject.org)

**Summer Feeding Program for Children**  
 Provides: Free, nutritious meals to children 18 and under at various locations during July and August.  
 Telephone: (845) 677-8223 ext 150  
 Locations: Vary. Call for more information.

**Hunger Action Network**  
 Hunger Action Network of NYS is a state-wide anti-hunger organization. They administer a toll free Food Stamp helpline where Dutchess County residents can find out if they are eligible for Food Stamps and learn how to apply.  
 Telephone: (888) 526-2978



The organizations below have resources to help individuals and families find out if they are eligible for Food Stamps and assist with the application process:

**Catholic Charities**  
 Telephone: (845) 452-1400  
 Location: 219 Church Street, Poughkeepsie

**Community Action Agency**  
 Telephone: (845) 452-5104  
 Location: Multiple locations in Dutchess  
 Website: [www.dutchesscap.org](http://www.dutchesscap.org)



### *Lunches and programming at the Poughkeepsie City School District*

In several respects, the public school system provides one of the most heavily used food assistance programs in the City. Public schools are an important institutional point of distribution in the City's food system and a central element of food access and nutrition for youth from kindergarten to 12th grade. In 2010, the Poughkeepsie City School District (a separate layer of government that largely overlaps the City's borders) included one high school, one middle school, three elementary schools, three magnet schools, and one special learning middle school.<sup>25</sup> Altogether, the district enrolled 4,559 students.<sup>26</sup> As with any service provided from a public school, food services in the Poughkeepsie City School District must be extensive to cover the needs of its diverse student population. The district serves 3,500 lunches per day.<sup>27</sup> Every student eats at least one meal per day in these schools, if not two. As Table 29 shows, 74% of the student body (i.e., the number of students eligible for either free or reduced price lunches) faces some form of food insecurity due to their household's socioeconomic situation. On October 11, 2012, the newsletter of the district reported that, "All students in the Poughkeepsie City School District will now receive free breakfast and lunch every school day. Under a new federal program, the District has been approved to provide students in all schools free meals regardless of family income levels."<sup>28</sup>

**Table 29: Lunch programs and social characteristics of Poughkeepsie City School District students, 2010-11**

	Number	Percent
Eligible for Free Lunch	2782	63%
Reduced Price Lunch	500	11%
Limited English Proficient	474	11%
American Indian or Alaska Native	9	0%
Black or African American	2645	59%
Hispanic or Latino	1109	25%
Asian or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	49	1%
White	607	14%
Multiracial	32	1%

Source: The New York State District Report Card, Accountability and Overview Report 2010-11, District: Poughkeepsie City School District

<sup>25</sup> Two elementary schools have since closed due to budgetary constraints, one in the 2011-2012 school year and the other in the 2012-2013 school year.

<sup>26</sup> "New York State Report Cards." NySTART - New York State Testing and Accountability Reporting Tool, <https://www.nystart.gov/publicweb/Splash.do> (accessed December 2, 2010).

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Alan Muhnickel, food services director of Poughkeepsie School District, December 2008.

<sup>28</sup> In May, 2012, the USDA announced that New York was one of the states selected to "use an innovative option to reduce administrative paperwork and costs, while making it easier for eligible children in low-income communities to receive free meals in the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs...The Community Eligibility Option provides schools in high-poverty areas a means of sharing with USDA the cost of providing free breakfast and lunch to all students without applications. USDA's contribution is based primarily on the percentage of households in the community that participate in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. The process builds on the highly effective direct certification system, which uses SNAP data to enroll low-income children in free meals, to eliminate entirely the cost and burden to schools of collecting and processing applications. This option is among the reforms mandated by the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, signed by President Obama on December 13, 2010." From "USDA Announces Next States Chosen to Phase In Streamlined Free School Meal Option." USDA Release No. FNS-2.12, <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cga/pressreleases/2012/FNS-2.htm> (accessed November 6, 2012).

These numbers are high even before comparing them to other school districts. However, when juxtaposed to the neighboring Arlington School District, located in the Town of Poughkeepsie, the numbers become more significant; there, only 10% of all students received free lunches, and only 4% of all students received reduced price lunches in the same year.<sup>29</sup> Importantly, these socioeconomic contrasts reflect the two districts' differences in racial composition of enrolled students. The Arlington School District is 82% White and 7% Black or African American, while the respective figures for the Poughkeepsie City School District are 14% and 59%. Also, the Poughkeepsie City School District is 25% Hispanic or Latino in ethnic origin; Arlington is only 7% Hispanic or Latino by contrast. Below, Table 30 reports the household income requirements that Poughkeepsie City School District students must meet to be eligible for free or reduced price meals.

**Table 30: Maximum income requirements (in dollars) for free or reduced price lunches in Poughkeepsie City School District**

Household Size	Annual	Monthly	Twice Per Month	Every Two Weeks	Weekly
1	20,036	1,670	835	771	386
2	26,955	2,247	1,124	1,037	519
3	33,955	2,823	1,412	1,303	652
4	40,793	3,400	1,700	1,569	785
5	47,712	3,976	1,988	1,836	918
6	54,631	4,553	2,277	2,102	1,051
7	61,550	5,130	2,565	2,368	1,184
8	68,469	5,706	2,853	2,634	1,317
For each additional family member add	6,919	577	289	267	134

Source: Poughkeepsie City School District, "Parent letter 2010-English," available at <http://www.poughkeepsieschools.org/lunch-menus/>.

Clearly, many of the City's lower-income households are already at risk of living in food insecure households before they send their children off to school. It's thus important to evaluate the nutritional value of public school lunches because these may be the most important meal of the day for many youth. Like most public school districts in the United States, the Poughkeepsie City School District participates in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), which is organized by the USDA. The NSLP has strict guidelines pertaining to caloric and fat intake and to the inclusion of calcium, iron, and vitamins into each meal. From looking at the lunch menus posted on the Poughkeepsie City School District's website (see Figure 8), we see that for lunch, five menu items are served. Some items change every day, but deli sandwiches, tossed salads, bagels with cream cheese, fruit, and milk (white, strawberry, and chocolate all 1% fat) are all served daily. The district's food services department describes its system on monthly lunch menus:

Students must take a minimum of three items, but may take 4 or 5 components: fruit, protein, milk, bread, vegetables. However, full price will be charged whether or not the student takes 3, 4, or 5 items.

<sup>29</sup> The New York State District Report Card, Accountability and Overview Report 2010-11, District: Poughkeepsie City School District; The New York State District Report Card, Accountability and Overview Report 2010-11, District: Arlington Central School District.

The purpose is to reduce waste, but we do encourage our students to take and try all five components because of the nutritional benefits.<sup>30</sup>

As the last sentence suggests, the food services department may face challenges in serving nutritional foods and getting students to actually consume them.

Figure 8: Sample lunch menu from Poughkeepsie City School District

Poughkeepsie City School District,  
Food Service Department

## High School Lunch Menu November 2010

**Poughkeepsie High School**  
**ATTENTION - PARENTS - Prepayment is encouraged -**  
 Please make checks for Pre - paid lunches to : Poughkeepsie City School Cafeteria Fund. Also, please put your child's name, grade and Pin # in the lower - left hand corner of the check. THANK YOU

**Milk: 1% White, 1% Strawberry, and .5%Chocolate Served Daily with Every Meal.**  
 Student Milk \$ .55      Adult Milk \$.65  
**Lunch Information:**  
 Student Price: \$2.00  
 Weekly Price: \$10.00  
 20 Meal Price: \$40.00  
 Adult Price: \$3.20 (tax included)

**Alternate of the Day -**  
**Everyday:** Variety of Deli Sandwiches, Tossed Salads, Bagel with Cream Cheese  
**Wk1- Cheeseburger on a bun**  
**Wk2- Turkey Hoagie on a Wheat Roll**  
**Wk3- Chicken Sandwich**  
**Wk4- Meatball Sub**  
**Wk5- Cheeseburger on a wheat bun**  
**Breakfast Information:**  
 Student Price: \$1.00  
 Weekly Price: \$5.00  
 20 Meal Price: \$20.00  
 Adult Price: \$2.25 (tax included)

**Alternate of the Day**  
**Everyday:** Cold Cereal, Bagel with Cream Cheese  
**Wk 1- Waffles**  
**Wk2- French Toast Sticks**  
**Wk3- Strawberry Strudel Stick**  
**Wk4- French Toast Sticks**  
**Wk5- Steak Egg & Cheese Sandwich**  
**Offer vs. Serve Lunch..**We offer all students the five menu items. Students must take a minimum of three items, but may take 4 or 5 components: fruit, protein, milk, bread, vegetables -- However, full price will be charged whether or not the student takes 3, 4, or 5 items.  
**Breakfast..**We offer all students the four component menu ( milk, fruit, 2 protein or 2 bread or 1 protein and 1 bread). Students in all grades must take a minimum of 3 components -- However, full price will be charged whether 3 or 4 components are taken. The purpose of offer vs. serve is to reduce waste, but we do encourage our students to take and try all five components because of the nutritional benefits.  
 Unfortunately, menu may be subject to change without prior notice.

Food Service Department  
 Phone: 845.451.4780  
 Fax: 845.451.4870  
 E-mail: amuhlnick@poughkeepsieschools.org

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri
1 Hinch Cheese Sticks w/ Marinara Sauce Baby Carrots Fruit and Milk	2 Superintendent's Conference Day No School for students	3 BBQ Chicken Brown Rice, Green Beans Fruit and Milk Jr Scrabble Cheese it's	4 Barilla Pasta w/ Meat sauce Green Beans Fruit and Milk Grips Grahams	5 Whole Wheat Pizza Slice Tossed Salad Fruit, Milk
8 Chicken Nuggets Dinner Roll Ranch Mix Vegetables Fruit & Milk	9 French Bread Pizza Baby Carrots Fruit Milk	10 Grilled Chicken Sandwich w/ Lettuce & Tomato Peas Fruit and Milk Jr Scrabble Cheese it's	11 Veteran's Day No School	12 Whole Wheat Pizza Slice Tossed Salad Fruit, Milk
15 Grilled Chicken Sandwich Potato Smiles Mixed Vegetables, Fruit, Milk	16 Nachos w/ Chili Meat Sauce, Cheese Sauce, Lettuce, Tomatoes, Fruit, Milk, Grips Graham Crackers	17 Turkey Hoagie, Baby Carrots Fruit and Milk Jr Scrabble Cheese it's	18 Turkey and Gravy Mashed Potatoes Baby Carrot s Fruit & Milk	19 Chicken Salad (Lettuce, Tomatoes, Ched Cheese., Grilled Chicken ) Dinner Roll, Fruit and Milk
22 Cheeseburgers Potato Smiles Fruit & Milk	23 French Bread Pizza Baby Carrots Fruit Milk	24 Thanksgiving Recess	25 Thanksgiving Recess	26 Thanksgiving Recess
29 Hot Philly Steak Wrap Peas, Fruit, Milk	30 1/2 day for PHS Students Hinch Cheese Sticks w/ Marinara Sauce Baby Carrots Fruit and Milk Jr Scrabble Cheese it's	<b>Hot Choice of the Day:</b> Monday-Cheese Bread Sticks Tuesday- Stuffed Crust Pizza Wednesday- T Ham, Egg & Cheese Sandwich Thursday-Meatball Parmesan Friday-Whole Wheat Pizza	<b>Chicken Choice of the Day:</b> Monday-Spicy Chicken Patty Sandwich Tuesday-Fajita Chicken Sub Wednesday-Chicken Wings Thursday-Chicken Fries Friday-Chicken Parmesan Sub	<b>Salad Choice of the Day:</b> Monday: Crispy Chicken Salad Tuesday: Chef's Salad Wednesday: Salad w/ Grilled Chicken Thursday: Mandarin Chicken Salad Friday: Tuna Salad

Source: "Lunch Menus - Poughkeepsie City School District." Poughkeepsie City School District » Higher Standards, Higher Expectations. Web. 02 Dec. 2010. <<http://www.poughkeepsieschools.org/lunch-menus/>>.

A 2008 interview with the district's food service director, Alan Muhlnickel, gives us an idea of the difficulty of this job. The food services department is the only section of schools not supported out of a school or district budget, funded instead by the federal government, state government, and the families of students who pay for either all or a part of their lunches. The food service director must always look first at affordability of food, so that students are able to purchase school meals, and is constrained by budgets when seeking to improve the quality of the food served to students.

Nonetheless, Muhlnickel finds other ways to provide healthy food to his students. As the Vassar College newspaper reported in 2009:

Aside from the finances, Muhlnickel designs the meals themselves, employing what he calls "stealth nutrition": hiding healthy ingredients and "strange" vegetables in students' hamburgers and chicken

<sup>30</sup> "Lunch Menus - Poughkeepsie City School District." Poughkeepsie City School District » Higher Standards, Higher Expectations, <http://www.poughkeepsieschools.org/lunch-menus/> (accessed December 2, 2010).

nuggets. He reported that the school had replaced the mayonnaise in their Ranch dressing with low fat yogurt and taken six grams of sugar out of the chocolate milk without any of the students noticing.<sup>31</sup>

As Figure 8 above suggests, items like brown rice, whole wheat pizza, green beans, baby carrots, etc. have replaced more traditional school meal options, perhaps under this same realm of “stealth nutrition.” Still, the district’s food services department is constrained when trying to serve more nutritious food. Their budget is tight, fresh or high quality food may be more expensive than mass produced foods, and it’s hard to get students who prefer fatty foods to make their own smart and healthy choices about food. The question remains, who’s responsible for ensuring public school students’ access to nutrition?

The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), which provides free nutritious meals to children 18 and younger while school is not in session, is led by Poughkeepsie City School District Food Service Department to respond to the food security challenge that arises for City youth when meals are no longer readily provided. This effort has grown through collaboration and support of members of the Nutrition Advisory Committee, including Hunger Action Network of New York State and Cornell Cooperative Extension Dutchess County (which convenes the committee). In 2007, only 8% of the eligible population in the City of Poughkeepsie utilized the SFSP and only two open sites operated. Budget cuts in 2009 meant that fewer programs from youth were running in the summer, resulting in fewer children utilizing closed and open sites. The Nutrition Advisory Committee worked with Poughkeepsie City Schools Food Service Department in an effort to help increase participation in the SFSP by increasing the number of open sites and participation through a marketing campaign and grass roots promotional efforts. More recently, the focus of expansion has been creating outreach materials that reach diverse populations and finding sites that are secure and walkable from home for the many City youth with little to no transportation. The number of meals (breakfast and lunch) served by the SFSP in the City of Poughkeepsie grew more than 120% between 2008 and 2012, from 22,926 meals in 2008 to 50,592 in 2012, served at 16 different sites. The result of these efforts is that approximately 30% of the eligible population now participates in the SFSP. However, this means that 70% of those youth who utilize free and reduced lunch during the school year are not yet receiving meals during the summer.

In addition to the NSLP and SFSP, Poughkeepsie schools have been the sites for pilot programs promoting nutrition and food security sponsored by the county’s Department of Health and other community partners. We interviewed Ozie Williams, a public health educator in the department, who told us that Dutchess County served as a pilot setting for state funded programs such as Eat Well Play Hard, Fit Kids, and Peaceful Playgrounds, that aimed to promote physical activity, healthy eating (specifically increased youth consumption of low-fat milk, fruits, and vegetables) and nutrition education within the public school system. In addition to educating children about nutrition, thereby (it’s hoped) altering health consciousness and dietary choices back home, these programs provided for after school health programs, limited unhealthy food in cafeterias, created jogging and biking trails, and ensured adequate recess time for elementary school students in order to sustain this altered health consciousness. The main issue is sustaining funding to support efforts like these.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Jillian Scharr, “Hunger Action Engages Students in Conversation about Nutritious Food,” *The Miscellany News* [Poughkeepsie], April 1, 2009.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Ozie Williams, Dutchess County Department of Health, September 24, 2010. Williams is a participant on the Poughkeepsie Plenty advisory team.

### *The farmers' market and food security*

The farmers' market is seen as an important effort for ensuring food and nutritional security in the City of Poughkeepsie. As stated explicitly and informally, the goals of the City's farmers' market include: to provide locally produced, fresh and nutritious foods to the community; to provide opportunities for local growers to sell their agricultural products directly to the consumer; to revitalize Poughkeepsie's central business district; to foster social gatherings and positive community interactions; and to provide an outlet for youth employment. In this section we focus on the first goal and, specifically, the farmers' market's contributions to lower income City residents' food security.

Since 2004, the Poughkeepsie Farm Project (PFP) has run the City's farmers' market, sponsoring the event in the municipal calendar, soliciting vendors from local businesses and regional farms, hiring the market manager, and overseeing advertising and publicity.<sup>33</sup> In 2010 (the season in which we conducted fieldwork there), the farmers' market was held at Mural Park on Main Street (on the first block east of the City's central business district) on Fridays, 10 am-3 pm, from early June through the end of October. The market consists of between five and ten vendors on any given week, selling fresh produce, prepared foods and other hand-made products such as jewelry. To pursue the goals outlined above, the market recruits vendors such that at least 50% of them will sell food products, while requiring its vendors to make at least 50% of their products themselves. Priority for vendor space is given to farmers and producers who grow or use products grown within a 100-mile radius of Poughkeepsie (this includes vendors of prepared foods). Further priority is given to vendors who accept EBT and other food assistance benefits.

The main produce stand belongs to the Poughkeepsie Farm Project, which is the most consistent vendor at the City's farmers' market. The PFP sells its full range of vegetables and fruits there—root vegetables, lettuces and leafy greens, melons, eggplants, tomatoes, peppers, garlic, fennel, some herbs and flowers. At its farmers' market booth, the PFP works to promote lower income residents' food security in two ways. First, it distributes subsidized shares in the PFP's community supported agriculture (CSA) program to eligible low income residents.<sup>34</sup> In 2010, the PFP offered twenty subsidized shares; whereas full-price shares cost upwards of twenty dollars per week, these cost anywhere from nothing to seven dollars per week.<sup>35</sup> Subsidized shares may also be paid for on a weekly basis rather than in one large sum at the start of the growing season, as is typical in CSAs. Subsidized shares are picked up weekly at the PFP's farm, located at the City's outskirts, or at the farmers' market to provide extra convenience for shareholders living in the neighborhoods around downtown considering that the PFP's farm is located at the City's outskirts. Second, in keeping with the criteria for vendor eligibility, the PFP accepts WIC checks, senior coupons (both issued by the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program), food stamps, and New York Fresh Checks. These food assistance programs comprise anywhere from one quarter to one third of the PFP's sales at the market, not including the sponsored shares.

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<sup>33</sup> The PFP has spearheaded the Poughkeepsie Plenty CFA.

<sup>34</sup> The PFP defines community supported agriculture as follows: "CSA is a partnership of mutual commitment between a farm and a community of supporters which provides a direct link between the production and consumption of food. Supporters cover a farm's yearly operating budget by purchasing a share of the season's harvest. CSA members make a commitment to support the farm throughout the season, and assume the costs, risks and bounty of growing food along with the farmer or grower. Members help pay for seeds, fertilizer, water, equipment maintenance, labor, etc. In return, the farm provides, to the best of its ability, a healthy supply of seasonal fresh produce throughout the growing season. Becoming a member creates a responsible relationship between people and the food they eat, the land on which it is grown and those who grow it." "What is CSA?", <http://farmproject.org/content/what-is-csa> (accessed January 4, 2011).

<sup>35</sup> The PFP holds fundraising events throughout the year to support the costs of its subsidized-share program.

On the day we conducted fieldwork, R&R Farms was also selling produce from its farm in Goshen, NY. Other vendors sell a range of prepared foods, including Molé Molé, Janet's Jerk Shop, Twisted Soul, Rose Randolph Cookies, and Benny & Caesar's Ice Cream. Overall, three to four produce vendors (including the PFP) and several other vendors of value added or prepared food participated consistently at the City's farmers' market in 2010.

The affordability of food sold at the City of Poughkeepsie's farmers' market varies, as no doubt it does at farmers' markets everywhere. Certainly, the prepared food vendors can price their goods prohibitively for regular purchase by lower income residents. Given the rules of the programs, prepared food vendors cannot accept food assistance benefits as a form of payment. The downtown lunch hour crowd that these vendors attract from nearby office buildings isn't generally the lower income population targeted by the farmers' market's food security goals.

In regards to the fresh produce sold at the farmers' market, it's a common belief that the markups on small scale and organic produce make fruits and vegetables too expensive for lower income shoppers—at the farmers' market in downtown Poughkeepsie, or likely anywhere else. It's hard for us to gauge the affordability of the produce sold at the farmers' market. While, say, lettuce may be sold at higher prices than those found in downtown food stores (recall Table 27), for the most part the latter sell different types and qualities of produce than found at the farmers' market. In this context, affordability is subjective and depends in part on household dietary habits and preferences, the level of comfort that shoppers have cooking food from scratch, and the perception they have of food sold from different venues.

The farmers' market organizers recognize the barriers posed by high costs. Some vendors try to price their produce affordably, and prioritize ensuring that they can accept food stamps, WIC checks, and so on, although not all lower income residents are eligible to participate in such food assistance programs.<sup>36</sup> Some organizers thus believe the *perception* that fresh produce is too expensive is a bigger barrier than the reality of high prices. A PFP intern we spoke to at the PFP's booth acknowledged that some City residents attend the farmers' market every week, but that many others believe the farmers' market items to be too expensive.

It is difficult to determine the relative success of market in meeting its food security goals. Are produce vendors selling as well as they could? Are residents are able and willing to buy farmers' market produce? If not, these patterns can prevent the farmers' market from getting fresh food into the homes of lower income residents as fully as it might like. Vendor inconsistency and turnover may stem from the City market competing with other higher volume farmers' markets elsewhere. Dutchess County alone supports several farmers' markets; throw in the possibility of moving even higher volumes at markets closer to the New York City area, and the incentive to sell at the City's market grows weaker.<sup>37</sup>

Perhaps the most important obstacles to expanding sales at the City's farmers' market are mundane organizational features – its hours of operation, its crowded location, Main Street's lack of parking, and

<sup>36</sup> Steve Hopkins, the market manager for the Poughkeepsie Farmers' Market, told us that fresh produce checks for WIC recipients and seniors were used more frequently at the market than food stamps.

<sup>37</sup> We heard an intriguing anecdote during a fieldtrip to a Pleasant Valley dairy farm, where farmer Sam Simon told us that a number of produce farmers in Dutchess County had found a measure of economic stability by selling directly to consumers at farmers' markets in New York City and nearby. The volumes at these metropolitan markets were high enough that farmers could "fill up a truck" in the morning with their produce and return at day's end with "an empty truck." Repeating this across seven markets a week (or more, if they sent out two or more trucks each day) could offer local farmers a sustainable economic niche in which to make a living on small scale, often organic agriculture. We also note that the USDA reported that in 2000, "19,000 farmers used farmers' markets as their sole marketing outlet"; presumably this number has grown since then. USDA, "U.S. Farmers Markets—2000: A Study of Emerging Trends" (May 2002), pg. iv.



bureaucratic constraints. The market's hours of 10 am-3 pm on a weekday conflict with many residents' work and school schedules may restrict the potential visitors. In the last few weeks of operation budget constraints at City Hall in terms of resources and manpower needed to support set up and take down led to even fewer hours (10 am-2 pm). To be sure, the market's operating hours are effective for bringing out the mix of income levels needed to support a variety of vendors, including local workers during lunchtime.

The market's location at Mural Park poses another barrier. The space barely contains the vendors who participate, and it would be strained to accommodate larger community functions. Though events such as "cooking demonstrations" and "theme days" have been hosted at the market, the lot size constrains the growth of the market as well as the feasibility of large scale events. Because of recent budget cuts, there have been fewer such events in 2010. The latest proposal of relocating the farmers' market in 2011 to Pulaski Park and the nearby Washington Street approach to the Walkway over the Hudson, the City's newest asset and popular destination, may solve some of these issues. In talking to the market manager, we gathered that the farmers' market had reached a plateau and could not grow further in its current location. Any potential expansion was constrained both by the size of the lot and the resources of City government. The move near the Walkway, which is in the City's northwestern section, may provide the opportunity to increase the visibility of the market to more residents of the City.

### *Food assistance for the homeless*

Food assistance is sometimes provided by agencies not generally associated with a focus on food issues. A case in point is Hudson River Housing (HRH), the affordable housing organization centered in the City of Poughkeepsie. HRH affects a great number of residents in the City and broader county. It's difficult to give accurate statistics, since some households and individuals only use HRH services in emergencies while others use their services daily for months at a time, but HRH reports indicate that their services and programs reach over 3000 individuals and households per year.<sup>38</sup> Among its services are a variety of housing and service programs to Dutchess County's homeless in an attempt "to prevent homelessness and its reoccurrence by addressing its underlying causes, and by providing opportunities for those experiencing homelessness to develop the means, skills and strength to overcome their difficult plight."<sup>39</sup>

HRH's classifies its housing services for the homeless in three categories: emergency (overnight shelters), transitional, and supported permanent housing. Within these subsets, there are specific shelters and food assistance services for youth, families, and single adults; see Table 31.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Gail V. Webster, "Letter to Contributors" (undated), Hudson River Housing, Poughkeepsie, NY.

<sup>39</sup> "Housing and Services for the Homeless," Hudson River Housing website, <http://www.hudsonriverhousing.org> (accessed December 1, 2010).

<sup>40</sup> Interviews with Patrice Kellett and Linda Malave, Hudson River Housing, December 2010.

**Table 31: Hudson River Housing’s housing and food assistance services for the homeless**

Program/Services	Method of Providing Food
<b>Emergency Housing (Overnight Shelters)</b> <b>Family/Adult:</b> After-Hours Emergency Placement, Dutchess County Coalition for the Homeless <b>Youth:</b> River Haven Shelter	Donated Meals, often from churches, charity organizations. A food bank grant allows them three meals a day.
<b>Transitional Housing</b> <b>Family/Adult:</b> Hillcrest House, LaGrange House, Hudson River Lodging <b>Youth:</b> River Haven Transitional Living	Hillcrest residents are offered a meal plan that can be paid for with money or food stamps; the food is sourced from wholesale companies like Ginsberg’s Institutional Foods and supplemented by donations. Hudson River Lodging residents receive three meals a day in a cafeteria setting. Residents at LaGrange House and River Haven Transitional Living are responsible for their own meals.
<b>Supported Permanent Housing</b> <b>Family/Adult:</b> Shelter Plus Care, COACH, Follow-Through, maximize, Home Base I and II <b>Youth:</b> River Haven Independent Living, Street Outreach	All permanent housing residents are responsible for their own meals.

Note that the PFP provides regular donations of produce to these programs during the growing season.

As this table suggests, food is, perhaps unexpectedly, an essential part of HRH’s mission. While providing meals is a short-term fix for the habitual concerns of the homeless, the development of food safety skills and instruction in cooking/nutrition can address more long-term concerns, as Hudson River Housing’s Patrice Kellett (director of services) and Linda Malave (manager of adult and family services) told us. Among other things, these skills can hopefully give the homeless of Dutchess County the means to gain employment, housing and security.

#### TRANSPORTATION AND OTHER URBAN INFRASTRUCTURE

Food access, food retail, and food assistance delivery don’t happen in a vacuum. They occur in a physical environment that imposes frictions on people in terms of distance, costs of provision and maintenance, and depreciation of physical things and people’s bodies, among other ways. Where the City of Poughkeepsie’s food system is concerned, transportation is perhaps the most important element in the urban infrastructure. Considering that, until very recently, the City had no large supermarkets and that almost one-quarter of its occupied housing units don’t have private vehicles, *public* transportation has to be examined as a crucial element of food access.



### Public transportation

Presently, two municipal bus systems serve the City, the City Bus (an agency of City government) and the LOOP Bus (an agency of Dutchess County, operated by a private contractor).<sup>41</sup> A recent ridership survey highlights the at-risk populations who are served by the bus system across Dutchess County. Women comprise a larger percentage of bus riders than the county population as a whole, while seniors and youth are underrepresented compared to the county population. Significantly for our purposes, bus riders disproportionately come from lower income households, indicating that this population is highly dependent on public transit. This is especially striking for the City Bus, which by design draws a City ridership predominantly; 50.7% of its riders have annual household incomes below \$15,000.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, 90% of City Bus and 80% of LOOP riders use public transit because they have no other transportation option. They use the bus to commute to work as well as do personal business and shopping. Only 37% of City Bus and 55% of LOOP trips were journeys to and from work.<sup>43</sup> These data underscore how many people are dependent upon the bus system for basic mobility through a variety of daily rounds, including food access.

To get a sense of how well these municipal systems transport residents to the large supermarkets outside of the City, we took the buses ourselves, talked with bus riders, and consulted existing reports that evaluated the bus systems and summarized riders' opinions. On the basis of the evidence we gathered, we hypothesize that neither of the two bus systems is expansive or efficient enough to make the trip to the town's supermarkets a simple endeavor. As a result, residents without access to private automobiles have no convenient or even reliable way of reaching fresh produce and other foods at the quantities and prices offered by large supermarkets.

Both the City Bus and the LOOP Bus have routes going to Stop & Shop (55 Burnett Road, east of the City) and Price Chopper (2585 South Road, south of the City) that run Monday to Saturday. However, the scheduled times and limited stops make it difficult for many to use these routes conveniently. For instance, no buses run on Sunday. See Tables 32 and 33.

**Table 32: Bus transit to Stop & Shop (departing from Main & Market Streets)**

	CITY BUS		LOOP BUS
Day	Main Street Line	Shopper's Special	Route D
M-F	7:00 am-6:30 pm	9:30 am-4:30 pm	1:09 pm-9:15 pm
SAT.	7:00 am-3:00 pm		1:09 pm-9:15 pm

**Table 33: Bus transit to Price Chopper (departing from Main & Market Streets)**

	CITY BUS		LOOP BUS	
Day	Southside Line	Galleria Line	Route A	Route B
M-F	8:00 am-5:10 pm	8:30 am-3:30 pm	6:15 am-9:30 pm	5:45 am-8:30 pm
SAT.	8:00 am-2:00 pm	8:30 am-2:30 pm	6:15 a.m.-9:30 pm	5:45 am- 8:30 pm

<sup>41</sup> Poughkeepsie-Dutchess County Transportation Council, *Dutchess County Transit Development Plan* (2009), pp. 21, 31.

<sup>42</sup> Poughkeepsie-Dutchess County Transportation Council, *Dutchess County Transit Development Plan* (2009), pp. 79-82.

<sup>43</sup> Poughkeepsie-Dutchess County Transportation Council, *Dutchess County Transit Development Plan* (2009), pp. 82-86.

As of January 2011, City Bus fares are \$1.50 per adult, a 50-cent increase from the prior year. This system has two lines each to Stop & Shop and Price Chopper, and runs on hourly loops. However, these regular routes require riders catch a bus, finish their shopping within the hour, and then return on the next loop, which can make grocery shopping burdensome. Furthermore, the City Bus stops running at 6:30 pm at the latest on weekdays, which means the bus is unavailable when it may be most convenient for residents who are working or attending school to go grocery shopping.<sup>44</sup> Significantly, City bus riders are limited to bringing onboard four shopping bags per person.

Beyond the restricted bus timetable, there are other issues relating to accessibility. While the printed bus schedule for the City Bus designates particular locations where the bus will be at specific times, there are no discernible signs or marked bus stops. For regular users who know to simply hail the bus as one might a passing taxicab, this may not be a problem.<sup>45</sup> For those unfamiliar with the system, however, the lack of specific stopping points can make it difficult to take the bus to the grocery stores in the surrounding Town of Poughkeepsie. Notably, despite the City's growing Spanish-speaking population, we observed no Spanish-language bus schedules or signs either online or on the street.<sup>46</sup>

The county's LOOP Bus, meanwhile, provides one line to Stop & Shop and two to Price Chopper. Fares are \$1.75 per zone, and commuters also have the option to purchase a \$62 Ride-Anytime Pass or a \$45 Monthly Commuter Pass, which can be used only during certain hours on weekdays. (Until July 2010, the City Bus system accepted these monthly LOOP passes.)

Using the LOOP Bus to get to the supermarkets is especially cumbersome. While the line to Stop & Shop (Route D) operates for roughly eight hours, in fact only four buses are dispatched in this time, departing at 1:09 pm, 5:15 pm, 7:30 pm and 9:15 pm. The schedule for the return trip from the supermarket to Main and Market Streets is similarly sporadic; five buses depart at 8:30 am, 11:20 am, 1:25 pm, 4:45 pm and 7:09 pm. It seems to us and the riders we spoke with that these departure and return schedules don't really correspond to one another. Town residents commuting into the City for work may be served by 8:30 am and 11:20 am buses from Stop & Shop into the City, but City residents looking to go grocery shopping can't take advantage of these school hour buses. Meanwhile, the LOOP Bus schedule for Price Chopper is highly variable. Depending on the time of day, the interval between buses may be as long as two hours. While getting from the City to Price Chopper may be relatively painless, the return trip back requires a transfer at the Poughkeepsie Galleria and is therefore considerably more time consuming.

In short, with three separate lines going to Stop & Shop and four to Price Chopper, these supermarkets would appear to be well serviced by public transit. However, this simple description belies how inconvenient these routes can be. While the City Bus operates on the hour, it runs most frequently during the workday and isn't conducive to those who have other obligations during normal working hours (jobs, children, errands, etc.).

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<sup>44</sup> Research conducted for the 2009 revision of the *Dutchess County Transit Development Plan* examined the productivity of various City Bus lines, as measured by passengers per vehicle hour, vehicle mile and peak vehicle, and found that the Main Street line was the most productive route, while the Shopper Special was the least productive. Poughkeepsie-Dutchess County Transportation Council, *Second Revised Interim Report: Route Diagnostics Analysis Poughkeepsie City Bus* (2007), pg. 15.

<sup>45</sup> While the bus schedule lists specific stopping locations, the bus system will pick up any individual standing at a street corner on the bus's regular route. According to the City Bus dispatcher, the current system should make it easier for residents to catch the bus in theory; it was also cited as a response to the high costs of signage.

<sup>46</sup> The ridership survey discussed above found that almost half of city bus riders have been using the system for five or more years, possibly indicating that the system has failed to attract a significant number of new riders. Poughkeepsie-Dutchess County Transportation Council, *Dutchess County Transit Development Plan* (2009), pp. 82-86.

Meanwhile, although the LOOP Bus would seem to offer more service by traveling later into the evening, its circulation to the supermarkets are much more spread out, running closer to every two hours.

The previously mentioned ridership survey makes clear riders' dissatisfaction with the frequency and span of service on the two bus systems. Survey respondents reported that accessibility was the public transportation system's biggest problem; when asked to rate service features, "*how often buses run* (frequency of service), *schedule availability*, and *when buses operate* (span of service)" received the lowest favorable ratings.<sup>47</sup> The restricted evening and weekend services, as well as the limited bus frequencies during the day, are serious hindrances to when and how riders can exercise their mobility. We hypothesize that the data we reported previously on low usage of public buses (see Table 14 and our focus group comments) can be understood in this light: less a reflection of low need for public transit, and more a resignation to the current system's inefficiency by would-be riders who can't afford the burdens on their time and energy on top of the costs of fares and food.

Despite the recent economic downturn, the City Bus system has faced no major budget cuts or changes in recent years, yet it has no plans for expansion in the near future. An archival search of the *Poughkeepsie Journal* reveals several issues that the City has grappled with over the last ten years, such as fare hikes, bus union strikes, bus routes in need of restoration and poor accessibility for the elderly. Anecdotal data from the *Journal* (e.g., letters to the editor) support our hypothesis that many riders find the bus system to be complicated and time consuming. While it's clear that the City of Poughkeepsie has made strides in correcting these issues, the general accessibility of the system still needs improvement.

The 2009 *Transit Development Plan* for the county's bus systems put forth a number of recommendations to improve the operation of public transit in the City and county. Most relevant to our interests, it proposed integrating the City Bus and LOOP systems through joint branding, joint public information efforts and an integrated fare structure. For the LOOP system, the plan recommended simplifying the various routes and making the network more user-friendly. Finally, the plan advocated increased service, in terms of both an increased span of service to particular destinations (such as the Galleria) and expanded evening service on weekdays and Saturdays.<sup>48</sup> We're encouraged by the local commitment to funding both the City and LOOP bus systems (e.g., funding for operating deficits has increased in recent years), and that state and federal funding has remained constant over the period of study. Neither of the systems operates under severe funding constraints, so the potential to expand service remains alive.<sup>49</sup> However, a phone call made to the Dutchess County Planning Department indicated that while Dutchess County has already adopted many of the recommendations in the *Transit Development Plan*, the City of Poughkeepsie has yet to begin doing so.

### *The influence of housing on food security*

Housing is relevant to food security for a number of reasons. Housing type, cost, and location can all affect how people access food stores and services. General characteristics of housing in the City of Poughkeepsie give an overview of the housing situation over the decade; see Table 34.

<sup>47</sup> Poughkeepsie-Dutchess County Transportation Council, *Dutchess County Transit Development Plan* (2009), pp. 86-90, 92.

<sup>48</sup> Poughkeepsie-Dutchess County Transportation Council, *Dutchess County Transit Development Plan* (2009), pp. 3-6.

<sup>49</sup> Poughkeepsie-Dutchess County Transportation Council, *Dutchess County Transit Development Plan* (2009), pp. 27-30, 46-50.

**Table 34: Housing characteristics for the City of Poughkeepsie**

	2000		2008-10	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Total Housing Units	13,153		15,653	
Occupied Housing Units	12,014	91.3	13,729	87.7
Owner-occupied Housing units	4,427	36.8	5,295	38.6
Renter-occupied Housing units	7,587	63.2	8,434	61.4
Vacant Housing Units	1,139	8.7	1,924	12.3
Median Monthly Housing Owner costs (housing units with a mortgage)	\$1,229		\$2,034	
Median Monthly Housing Owner costs (housing units without a mortgage)	\$481		\$736	
Median Gross Rent	\$608		\$922	

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 decennial census and 2008-10 American Community Survey 3-year estimates.

Over the last decade, the percentage of vacant households in the City rose from 8.7% to 12.3%. The percentage of occupied housing units in Poughkeepsie fell from 91.3% to 87.7% in the same time period. These trends may reflect declining wealth in the City, congruent with the national economic downturn.

The 2008-10 American Community Survey further estimates that 42.0% of homeowners with a mortgage, and 19.9% of homeowners without one, paid monthly owner costs of 35% or more of their household income.<sup>50</sup> In contrast, more than half (55.4%) of all renters had housing costs accounting for 35% or more of their household income. This underscores how housing costs are more burdensome for renters (who most recently comprised 62.7% of households) than homeowners (37.3% of households) in the City of Poughkeepsie.<sup>51</sup>

Table 35 illustrates the racial disparities that overlay Dutchess County's housing market. These figures are more than 10 years old but certainly consistent with what research has found in US urban housing markets. Not only do Blacks and Hispanics, on average, tend to rent more often than Whites or Asians; they also tend to live in neighborhoods with higher rates of poverty as well.

<sup>50</sup> 35% is the highest proportion of housing cost burden that the U.S. Census Bureau tracks. Typically, 30% is the threshold above which housing cost burden is thought to be excessive (e.g., according to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development).

<sup>51</sup> It's important to keep in mind that these Census figures represent official estimates and don't account for illegal subletting and crowding within houses. We observed a non-trivial amount of this activity when going door-to-door with our survey.

**Table 35: Homeownership, gross rent, and exposure to neighborhood poverty by race/ethnicity in Dutchess County, 2000**

	Homeownership rate	Gross rent as share of household income	Exposure to neighborhood poverty*
Hispanic	46.6%	28.2%	9.9%
Non-Hispanic White	73.5%	25.4%	6.4%
Non-Hispanic Black	36.9%	27.3%	14.7%
Non-Hispanic Asian	57.7%	19.0%	6.2%

Source: diversitydata.org: Dutchess County, NY: Summary Profile. <http://diversitydata-archive.org/Data/Profiles/Show.aspx?loc=393>.

\*This statistic represents the poverty rate for the average neighborhood in which each racial group lives. For instance, if the statistic is 10% for blacks, which can be interpreted as "The average black person in this metro area lives in a neighborhood where 10% of the population is in poverty." Poverty rates defined as of 1999. Excludes metro areas with less than 5,000 population of the specified racial/ethnic group.

Differences in homeownership rates, percentage of household income paid as rent, and demographic composition of neighborhoods in turn reinforce infrastructural inequalities in the City of Poughkeepsie. For example, about 80% of the housing on Main Street is rental property, some of it substandard.<sup>52</sup> The distribution of this rental housing, which may be low quality, in turn overlays the City's geography of food insecurity – potentially underserved by large supermarkets, beyond easy walking distance to the town and its commercial services, and close to small downtown food retailers that may not support regular, affordable access to nutritious food.

Housing costs should be seen in the context of day-to-day economic decisions that low income households make. A rule of thumb that we returned to frequently during the research came from Brian Riddell, Executive Director at Dutchess Outreach: people with limited money tend to prioritize spending it on food and health, two issues of day-to-day survival, before housing.<sup>53</sup> This suggests, first, that low income people struggle more with paying for suitable housing than with affording the foods they want. Second, when people do spend less on food, the consequences of low income are likely to have already impacted longer term household investments: housing, but also clothing, transportation, and so on. This may also be true when people substitute cheaper and more easily prepared foods for nutritious meals. Housing costs then aren't only a burden in and of themselves for many; they shape the financial thresholds by which households invest in the most basic long-term needs of their well-being.

Housing also has indirect effects on the conditions under which low income households decide how to spend money. For instance, housing quality can impinge upon inhabitants' health—another immediate need that people are thought generally to prioritize. In a 2008 telephone survey of randomly-sampled Dutchess County residents, a majority (52%) of City residents reported that their housing safety was a serious health issue, in contrast to 19.6% of county residents.<sup>54</sup> As well, being surrounded by vacant housing units in the City (which are

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Andrew Sawtelle, Hudson River Housing, October 13, 2010.

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Brian Riddell, Dutchess Outreach, October 6, 2010.

<sup>54</sup> Dutchess County Department of Health, "Dutchess County ICA Community Health Survey: Final Report" (March 2009), pg 18-21.

growing, as Table 34 shows) can contribute to a lack of feeling safe in one's neighborhood. In turn, this can hinder residents' civic engagement. Door-to-door surveys like the one we conducted receive low response rates in areas where residents don't feel safe opening their doors for strangers. Although people living in unsafe areas are likely to be among those most needing their social concerns and political input to be heard, their neighborhoods' physical quality can discourage them from exercising that voice.

Food security, then, is dependent on residents (1) having enough money to shop for food, (2) feeling safe to move about the City at any time to get food, and (3) feeling connected to the community of which the food system is a part, among other factors. Housing is intertwined with all of these issues. Housing problems are difficult, complicated and expensive to address, but their relevance to food security should be considered.

### COMMUNITY CONTEXTS

Beyond the formal level of government and non-profit institutions, social organization and civic engagement in a community—what analysts sometimes call “civil society”—can provide further means to deal with food insecurity. The organizations already referred to in this report, some of which are partners of the Poughkeepsie Plenty project, come together in various settings (like the Nutrition Advisory Committee; see Figure 7) to support their respective efforts and identify collaboration opportunities to work toward food security. In this section, we call attention to two other aspects of civil society – the City's Latino population and business/revitalization groups – that are relevant to an analysis of the City's food system.

### *The Latino population*

The City of Poughkeepsie counts a great deal of ethnic diversity and national origins among its residents. Admittedly, our research didn't examine all the City's immigrant groups in a systematic fashion, but here we focus on the case of its Mexican immigrants for three reasons. First, linguistic barriers pose a special risk to this population, potentially excluding them from services and resources that require proficiency in English, that isn't experienced by the City's other large immigrant group (from the English-speaking West Indies). Second, as economic immigrants, Mexicans in Poughkeepsie are likely to arrive with few financial resources, which has obvious implications for their food security here in the U.S. Third, the flourishing of Mexican commercial, occupational, and institutional niches in the City of Poughkeepsie—most clearly symbolized by the many Spanish-language establishments that have replaced once vacant storefronts along Main Street—illustrate how ethnic population can bring *community assets* to the local food system.

As we reported earlier (see Economic Context), it's estimated that 8.4% of the City's population identifies as Mexican, and that (separately) 14.2% of residents primarily speak Spanish at home.<sup>55</sup> Of the latter group, almost a third (62.9%, or 8.9% of all City residents) report they speak English less than “very well.” It's generally understood that the City's Mexican population consists primarily of people from three states in Mexico (Oaxaca,

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<sup>55</sup> To give some context for these numbers, the 2005-2009 American Community Survey estimates the number of people identifying as Mexican and the number of Spanish speakers who report they speak English less than “very well” as roughly the same in the City of Poughkeepsie: 2,486 and 2,517, respectively. This fact shouldn't be interpreted to imply that the two groups are the same, given the ethnic diversity of Latino/Hispanic residents (including 1,133 Puerto Ricans and 1,352 “other Hispanic or Latino”) and the sizable number (1,465) of Spanish speakers who report greater proficiency in English.

Puebla, and Veracruz).<sup>56</sup> Meanwhile, the Dutchess County Department of Health has reported significant if ambiguous figures suggesting the Mexican population's difficulty buying healthy food: "about a fifth of Hispanic and non-Hispanic black respondents" compared to 10% for non-Hispanic white respondents in the larger Dutchess County.<sup>57</sup>

These percentages suggest that Hispanic residents of Poughkeepsie are, like other residents of color, more likely to be food insecure. What such analyses might fail to capture, however, are the support networks that are fostered within immigrant communities. Since the Latino population in Poughkeepsie originates from just three states found in Mexico, many foreign born residents in Poughkeepsie may have known each other prior to leaving their country. Those who came to Poughkeepsie may have done so with the knowledge that someone was waiting for them ready to aid in their navigation of this new country. The implications of these support networks are significant because they help newcomers access certain resources, such as foods most similar to their diet.

There seem to be at least two different hypotheses about the food security circumstances that Mexican immigrants in the City and region might face. Since we don't yet have data to support one hypothesis or the other, here we offer them in order to inform future analysis, which might confirm one hypothesis and reject another, or more likely reconcile the two scenarios in order to arrive at a more nuanced picture of food security within the local Mexican community.

One hypothesis holds that Mexican immigrants are *at special risk of food insecurity* in the City of Poughkeepsie.<sup>58</sup> This hypothesis was articulated, for instance, from an interview with Solange Muller, a public health nutritionist and caseworker at Hudson River Healthcare who specializes in outreach to the region's Mexican community.<sup>59</sup> In her work counseling pregnant immigrant women at the Family Partnership Center, Muller has observed a higher rate of obesity in pregnant women and diabetes in young children who have recently migrated to the U.S.—in some cases, as much as a 40 pound increase following their arrival. She attributes this phenomenon to a variety of contributing factors. First, some immigrant women work at fast food restaurants where they're in close proximity to unhealthy food, and they have easy access to free fast food and soda at work and (as perks of the job) to bring back home. Another factor is lack of nutritional knowledge about food in the U.S.. Immigrants may not know about the high sugar content of soda (an instance of the problems raised by language barriers) in order to reduce their consumption. Moreover, the expanded choice of foods available in U.S. markets might result in unhealthy eating habits replacing traditional diets. The extent to which this occurs might depend on immigrants' financial situation. With debts to pay off and remittances to send home, some immigrants prefer to buy cheaper and less nutritious packaged food.

The second hypothesis emphasizes the *ethnic traditions and community assets to mitigate food insecurity* among Mexican immigrants. This hypothesis is epitomized by the views of Reyna García, the owner of Casa Latina, who expressed confidence that the food and nutritional needs of the Latino community are covered.<sup>60</sup> Mexicans in particular are "good buyers," she told us. They work hard and are willing to spend the money to eat

<sup>56</sup> Harvey Flad and Clyde Griffen, *Main Street to Mainframes: Landscape and Social Change in Poughkeepsie* (Excelsior Editions, 2009), pg. 330.

<sup>57</sup> Center for Governmental Research, "Dutchess County ICA Community Health Survey Final Report" (March 2009), pg. 43.

<sup>58</sup> Whether the food insecurity that Mexican immigrants might face in the City of Poughkeepsie is more or less severe than what they might have known in their nation of origin is unrelated to this hypothesis.

<sup>59</sup> Interview with Solange Muller, Hudson River Healthcare, October 20, 2010.

<sup>60</sup> Interview with Reyna García, owner of Casa Latina, October 14, 2010.



well and within their gastronomic tradition. In fact, García explained, many of the imported products sold at her store are no different from what mainstream American grocery stores carry. However, her customers are willing to pay a little extra to buy the traditional foods and brands they recognize from home.

At the community level, as the Mexican population reaches a critical mass, ethnic institutions appear that this community can tap into increasingly. Ethnic markets and the *raite* taxi system are an example we've covered already; ethnic churches and congregations are another one. Notably, the regional Mexican community is currently served by *La Voz*, a free monthly Hispanic culture and news publication associated with Bard College. On its website, its stated mission is to "empower its Spanish-speaking readers through actionable information on legal rights, particularly labor rights, personal finance, health education and English learning." In the last three years, it has published a few articles pertaining specifically to food-related programs, such as Eat Smart New York (sponsored by Cornell Cooperative Extension), Just Say Yes to Fruits and Vegetables (sponsored by the USDA and the state's Department of Health), and ESL in the Kitchen (a joint English-learning and cooking class held at the City's Christ Episcopal Church). Here we recall García's speculation (in the "Customer patronage and community in the City's smaller stores" section, previously) that a growing number of Casa Latina's customers make use of food assistance programs because of increased awareness of the public and non-profit services available to them.

### *Business and revitalization groups*

Aside from government and public agencies residing in Poughkeepsie due to its status as county seat, Poughkeepsie contains a number of civic associations that seek to intervene in the social, economic and physical environment for the City's benefit. We've already discussed several social service providers working directly and indirectly on issues of food security, but groups and initiatives promoting revitalization of the commercial landscape and the growth of the business community deserve further consideration.

The Middle Main Revitalization (MMR) initiative is the most visible agent promoting commercial development specifically along the City's commercial corridor, Main Street. This group's activities focus on the section of Main Street between Academy Street and Pershing Avenue, an area plagued by high commercial vacancy rates and a generally negative public image. Elizabeth Celaya, community relations manager at Hudson River Housing (of which MMR is a part), writes, "Middle Main Revitalization is rapidly emerging as a key player bringing new hope to downtown renewal efforts in Poughkeepsie. The group, initiated by Hudson River Housing, consists of a wide variety of community members, including small business owners, City government officials, landlords, residents, and non-profit representatives."<sup>61</sup> Adhering to an assets-based community development approach, the new group has used community forums, informational brochures, and special events to draw in neighborhood participants, promote local businesses and announce resources for façade revitalization and other "revitalization" activities. Its efforts toward promoting food security in its jurisdiction are observed in its goal of drawing greater commercial services to Middle Main and participating in the Poughkeepsie Plenty project.

Another business revitalization group with potential implications for local food security is the Latino Business Committee within the Dutchess County Regional Chamber of Commerce. The group began in 2010 when representatives from State Farm Insurance, Key Bank and *La Voz* approached the Chamber with the goal of helping Latinos of the county start and run businesses; introducing them to the benefits of the Chamber and

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<sup>61</sup> "New Hope Emerges on Poughkeepsie's Main Street through the efforts of Middle Main Revitalization," Hudson River Housing press release, December 8, 2009.



other business resources in the area; and ultimately increasing support for and representation of Latino businesses in local government. As a relatively new initiative, the Latino Business Committee is still establishing the best practices to engage with and advise the Latino business community of Poughkeepsie. The group's first event, meant to introduce its existence to the Latino community of Poughkeepsie, was relatively well attended, with around 50 attendees. However, by the end of 2011 the Latino Business Committee was put on indefinite hold.

Conceivably, should the Mexican community articulate a consensus about food security or any other pressing issues, it could leverage the voice of a revived Latino Business Committee or less formal associations of Mexican entrepreneurs running stores and restaurants on Main Street and elsewhere in the region. Currently the constituency for this business group is preoccupied primarily by the demands of business and has been slow to organize, but given its role in the commercial revitalization of Main Street, it could potentially wield clout with the City's broader political and institutional leadership.

#### **SITUATED IN AN AGRICULTURAL REGION**

One concern of the community food assessment, evident in the very name "Poughkeepsie Plenty," is strengthening connections between the City of Poughkeepsie's food system and the region's agriculture around the City. In a study that explored the viability of a local food system serving three of New York State's poorest communities, including Poughkeepsie, the New York Sustainable Agriculture Working Group concluded that "local farm production capacity within 100 miles of Red Hook and Poughkeepsie low income neighborhoods is more than adequate for the basic food needs of these two communities combined."<sup>62</sup>

Even if there are thousands of acres of active farmland within 100 miles of Poughkeepsie, a more recent study points to the decline in regional agriculture:

New York State has experienced a century long decline in the number of its farms and the proportion of its land under cultivation, as America's agricultural production has come to be concentrated in the mid-west and west. Following the Civil War, New York State led the nation in farmland acreage... In 1910, there were over 200,000 farms across our state; farms occupied nearly three quarters (73%) of state land. By 2007, there were fewer than 40,000 farms and only 24% of the state's land was agricultural. Historically, the Hudson Valley region has been particularly important in the state's agricultural landscape, both for the high quality of our soil and our proximity to markets. But in the past century, the percentage of land devoted to farming in our region has declined even more precipitously than in the state as a whole. Nearly three quarters (74%) of the four-county region's land was farmland one hundred years ago, but by 2007 this had fallen to 13%. In 1910, there were nearly 18,000 farms in our region; in 2007 there were fewer than 2,200. Dutchess County experienced the largest decrease in the percentage of land in agriculture, with a decline from 90% to 20%.<sup>63</sup>

The study goes on to point out that, despite the declining acreage under cultivation, the economic value of New York's agricultural products has been increasing and continues to represent an important element in our

<sup>62</sup> "The six counties [surrounding Poughkeepsie] have 2,797 farms on 488,068 acres of farmland. Over 1,000 farms in the six counties have farm sizes ranging from 50 acres to 499 acres. Farms in each production category include 388 dairy farms, 264 beef producers, 120 hog producers, 355 chicken producers, 31 wheat farms, 337 vegetable farms and 227 orchards." Hank Herrera, "Building Local Food Systems: A Planning Guide," The New York Sustainable Agriculture Working Group (2006), pp. 6, 9.

<sup>63</sup> Brian Obach and Kathleen Tobin, "Agriculture Supporting Community," SUNY-New Paltz CRRIO Discussion Brief 5 (Winter 2011).

regional economy, with sales of agricultural goods totaling over \$226 million, according to the 2007 USDA Census of Agriculture. The study describes the growing interest among producers of the promise of marketing regional goods in the New York City area.

In the planning stages of Poughkeepsie Plenty, the project was called Building Bridges to a Hunger-Free Poughkeepsie. This name was chosen, in part, in reaction to the phenomena of the region's agricultural resources bypassing the City of Poughkeepsie. The project aimed to facilitate residents' exploration of opportunities to address the legacies of food insecurity by drawing food to, not just through, the City.

While a greater connection to farms, through purchasing more local products or more exposure, probably wouldn't, by itself, end the City of Poughkeepsie's problems with food insecurity given the underlying persistent poverty and food distribution landscape that current market structures and incentives have created, it would serve several purposes that are useful to consider.

To leverage the region's agricultural capacity and increase the opportunities for residents to improve their food and nutritional security, a greater and more direct connection could be made between the City of Poughkeepsie's food system and the farmland around the City. Relatively few of the region's agricultural products currently reach the City's food retailers and farmers' market. Representation of regionally produced agricultural products wasn't the primary focus of the community food assessment, and consequently we didn't spend much time examining the region's agriculture, but we join others in believing that local farms are being underutilized as a resource for improving the City's food system.

What kinds of issues face farms looking to expand their local markets? For some answers, we visited Plankenhorn Farm in Pleasant Valley on November 10, 2010, to witness firsthand the agricultural part of the food system of greater Poughkeepsie. Plankenhorn Farm is one of nine dairy farms in the area under the brand label of Hudson Valley Fresh, a cooperative that produces high quality milk. Head farmer Sam Simon discussed a number of challenges he saw with the agriculture system, one being the small number of establishments where Hudson Valley Fresh milk was sold: Stop & Shop, Adams, at New York City markets, and at a few area institutions like Vassar College. Hudson Valley Fresh milk is generally seen as too expensive for the other area grocery stores, corner stores, public schools, and other important places where food is attained.

This problem is less a result of the failings of the Poughkeepsie food system and more a consequence of national consumer preferences and federal agricultural policy. Milk sold at corner stores in Poughkeepsie tends to be cheaper milk produced in other areas of the country, as distant as California. Low transportation costs mean that goods produced far away can be as cheap as ones produced locally. This means factors of scale, labor costs, and land prices affect price much more than distance grown from consumer. Furthermore, the retail dominance of large grocery stores fuels demand for constant provision of the same agricultural products all year, marginalizing production of crops in areas that are limited by distinct seasonal patterns, such as the northeast U.S. Simon also pointed out that price often outweighs quality as consumers and retailers' main criteria for choosing food products. These characteristics are mostly impossible to resolve at the Poughkeepsie level but could be addressed by policymakers at the state and federal levels.

Simon observed that while there once were over thirty farms in the nearby town of Fishkill, the number has now dwindled into the single digits. In part, this reflects national trends in which corporate, industrialized farming has eclipsed family-operated, smaller-scale farming. We hear about and even know young, college-educated people spending a summer or a year or two on a farm to "reconnect with the food system" and "return to their

roots,” but in many cases these ventures are only temporary.<sup>64</sup> Food policy at the regional and federal level is such that farming, except at the industrial agribusiness scale, is too often financially unfeasible, particularly given significant start-up costs, including the difficult problem of accessing affordable land.

However, local efforts can keep smaller farms of the kind found in Dutchess County afloat. As Hudson Valley Fresh illustrates, local farms can cooperate to share investments in machinery and marketing and to maintain strict control over production so as to eke out specialized niches for regional brands and premium products. Other cooperative or government initiatives include marketing local agriculture as tourism, an option that large industrialized farms usually can’t credibly pursue. The Dutchess County Tourism Farm Fresh Information Center website gives mention to the many (650) small family-owned dairy, fruit, vegetable, hay, and horse farms that make up roughly one-fifth of the county’s total acreage. It goes on to encourage tourists to visit these farms, travel the Dutchess wine trail, and stay in the nearby bed and breakfasts so as to truly experience the Hudson Valley.<sup>65</sup>

Government support and planning activity can further support local agriculture. At the regional level, Dutchess County has lent its support to local farms primarily through a comprehensive open space and farmland preservation program. The county is one of thirteen in the Hudson Valley Region taking part in the state’s Greenway Compact Program; in exchange for creating safeguards for open space and farmland preservation, participating counties are eligible for a variety of grants, aid and planning assistance.<sup>66</sup> This effort has been further augmented through the creation of the Partnership for Manageable Growth: Open Space & Farmland Protection program in 1999, which has worked through a variety of measures to protect and conserve open space resources. Since the program’s inception, over 2,281 acres of farmland have been preserved throughout Dutchess County.

Recent budget cuts have limited the county’s backing for agriculture and open space initiatives. Notably, the \$40 million gap announced for the 2011 budget led to not only diminished support for food assistance programs already mentioned (see Issues with Food Assistance Programs) but the elimination of county support for programs like Green Teen Community Gardening, leading to site closure or program shrinkage.<sup>67</sup> Meanwhile, support for open space and farmland preservation is often inconsistent across the municipalities where much planning authority resides. As of August 2009, there were three areas of open space in Poughkeepsie that were still pending protection, while five farms are already under protection in Red Hook.

This discussion merely skims the surface of the problems and possibilities facing agricultural producers in becoming part of the City’s food system. Increasing engagement between Poughkeepsie residents and area farms would serve to expand the availability of fresh and locally sustainable food as well as increase education about where food comes from — both important steps for improving nutrition and diets. Policymakers should address the agricultural assets of Dutchess County as they eventually seek to enhance the City’s food system.

<sup>64</sup> See “Leaving the Trucker Hat Behind,” *New York Times*, March 16, 2008, which mentions a couple of farms and CSAs in the Hudson Valley.

<sup>65</sup> See the “Agri-tourism” page on the Dutchess County Tourism website, <http://www.dutchesstourism.com/agri-index.asp>. For more information on initiatives to support smaller farms, see Green and Duncan Hilchey, *Growing Home: A Guide to Reconnecting Agriculture, Food and Communities* (Cornell University, 2002).

<sup>66</sup> Dutchess County has specifically received over \$1.7 million in grants from the program helping to create *Greenway Connections*, a sourcebook offering recommendations and goals for local officials and neighborhood groups. Some of the major goals of this program revolve around the redevelopment of downtown centers, the reworking of strip-malls and highway corridors, and most importantly the preservation of open space and farmland.

<sup>67</sup> Joel Tyner, “County Budget Update—Read, Weep; Then Don’t Mourn—Organize!” *Dutchess Democracy* (blog), December 8, 2010, <http://dutchesdemocracy.blogspot.com/2010/12/county-budget-update-read-weep-then.html>

## Appendices

### APPENDIX A: HOUSEHOLD SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Hi, my name is \_\_\_\_\_. I'm doing a survey for a group of local non-profit agencies called Poughkeepsie Plenty, which is conducting a community food assessment in the City of Poughkeepsie. Are you the person who does most of the planning or preparing of meals in this household?

[IF NO: Is there someone here over 18 who does most of the planning or preparing of meals in this household?]

This community food assessment is surveying a random sample of households about their food priorities and food needs. Your address was selected, and we'd like to give you the survey. Do you have 10 minutes to take it?

[IN CASE THE RESPONDENT WANTS MORE INFORMATION ABOUT POUGHKEEPSIE PLENTY: The community food assessment examines how well the city provides affordable, healthy food and easy access to grocery stores and other food services for its residents. Our goal is to develop programs to improve Poughkeepsie's food services and food system.]

Here are the conditions of the survey. It's confidential; no questions ask you for information that could identify you, and your responses will be kept private. You can refuse to answer any question or end the survey at any time. If you'd like to talk to the people in charge of this survey, I can give you contact information.

Do you understand these conditions? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Are you over 18? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Do you agree to participate in this survey? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Okay, let's begin. Please let me know if you want me to repeat or explain any of these questions.

1. Including yourself, how many people live in this household?

ENTER NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Are there children under age 18 living in your household?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. *DK or Refused*

[IF SINGLE ADULT IN HOUSEHOLD, USE "YOU" IN PARENTHEICALS; OTHERWISE, USE "HOUSEHOLD" REFERENCE.]

These first questions are about the kinds of places where you have shopped for food in the LAST YEAR.

[By last year, I mean from (TODAY'S DATE, LAST YEAR) through now.]

3. First, when you shop for food, how often do you go to a supermarket or grocery store? In the Poughkeepsie area, these stores are Associated Supermarket, Stop & Shop, Super Stop & Shop, Price Chopper, Adams Fairacre Farms, Casa Latina, and Mother Earth's Storehouse. How often do you shop at one of these stores?

- a. Often
- b. Sometimes
- c. Rarely
- d. Never
- e. *DK or Refused*

4. Think about other places to buy food, such as corner stores, delis, bodegas, warehouse clubs, produce stores, and bakeries. How often do you shop at stores such as these?

- a. Often
- b. Sometimes
- c. Rarely
- d. Never
- e. *DK or Refused*

5. How often do you get food from a restaurant or a fast-food place, or get take-out food?

- a. Often
- b. Sometimes
- c. Rarely
- d. Never
- e. *DK or Refused*

6. Of these three kinds of places, where do you get MOST of the food that (you/people in your household) eat?

[By this, I don't mean the store you go to most often, but the store you get the majority of your food.]

- a. Supermarkets and grocery stores
- b. Corner stores, delis, bodegas, warehouse clubs, produce stands, bakeries
- c. Restaurants, fast food places, take-out food (GO TO 6a)
- d. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- e. *DK or Refused*

6a. How often do you usually buy food from restaurant, a fast-food place, or get take-out food?

- a. More than once a week
- b. Once a week
- c. Less than once a week
- d. *DK or Refused*

Next, I have a couple of questions about when you shop at a GROCERY STORE. To remind you, the grocery stores in the Poughkeepsie area are Associated Supermarket, Stop & Shop, Super Stop & Shop, Price Chopper, Adams Fairacre Farms, Casa Latina, and Mother Earth's Storehouse.

7. How do you USUALLY get to a grocery store?

- a. Walk
- b. Take public transportation
- c. Take a taxi

- d. Drive a car
- e. Get ride from someone else
- f. Have food delivered to home
- g. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- h. *DK or Refused*

8. How easy is it for you to get to a grocery store?

- a. Very easy
- b. Somewhat easy
- c. Somewhat difficult (GO TO 8a)
- d. Very difficult (GO TO 8a)
- e. *DK or Refused*

8a. If it's difficult to get to a grocery store, why?

- a. Transportation issues
- b. Language issues
- c. Physically difficult
- d. Child care
- e. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- f. *DK or Refused*

These next questions ask about the STORE where you USUALLY buy MOST of the food that (you/people in your household) eat. This may or may not be a grocery store. I'm going to list some reasons why you may choose a store for most of the food you eat. This card shows you the answers you can choose from for these questions.

VERY IMPORTANT

SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT

NOT TOO IMPORTANT

NOT AT ALL IMPORTANT

9. First, how would you rate "the store is close to home or work"?

[In choosing a store for most of the food you eat, how would you rate “the store is close to home or work”?]

[Which of the answers on the card would you choose from to rate “the store is close to home or work”?]

- a. Very important
- b. Somewhat important
- c. Not too important
- d. Not at all important
- e. *DK or Refused*

10. The next reason is “the store is easy to get to”.

[In choosing a store for most of the food you eat, how would you rate “the store is easy to get to”?]

- a. Very important
- b. Somewhat important
- c. Not too important
- d. Not at all important
- e. *DK or Refused*

11. The next reason is “better prices on the food I want”.

[In choosing a store for most of the food you eat, how would you rate “better prices on the food I want”?]

- a. Very important
- b. Somewhat important
- c. Not too important
- d. Not at all important
- e. *DK or Refused*

12. The next reason is “the store has healthy foods”.

[In choosing a store for most of the food you eat, how would you rate “the store has healthy foods”?]

- a. Very important
- b. Somewhat important
- c. Not too important



d. Not at all important

e. *DK or Refused*

13. The next reason is “the store sells foods from my family background”.

[In choosing a store for most of the food you eat, how would you rate “the store sells foods from my family background”?]

a. Very important

b. Somewhat important

c. Not too important

d. Not at all important

e. *DK or Refused*

14. The next reason is “the staff understands my needs”.

[In choosing a store for most of the food you eat, how would you rate “the staff understands my needs”?]

a. Very important

b. Somewhat important

c. Not too important

d. Not at all important

e. *DK or Refused*

15. The next reason is “the store accepts WIC/food stamps”.

[WIC stands for the federal Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children.]

[In choosing a store for most of the food you eat, how would you rate “the store accepts WIC/food stamps”?]

a. Very important

b. Somewhat important

c. Not too important

d. Not at all important

e. *DK or Refused*

16. Are there other reasons I haven’t mentioned that you would like to add?

[Are there other reasons why you may choose a store for most of the food that you eat?

[INTERVIEWER INSTRUCTION: IF YES, FILL IN BELOW THEN ASK How would you rate this reason?]

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

- a. Very important
- b. Somewhat important
- c. Not too important
- d. Not at all important
- e. *DK or Refused*

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

- a. Very important
- b. Somewhat important
- c. Not too important
- d. Not at all important
- e. *DK or Refused*

Now I would like to ask you about types of food you choose to buy. I'm going to list some possible reasons why people buy certain foods other than low prices. You can choose answers from the card I gave you.

17. The first is "food from your family's ethnicity or culture".

[When you choose types of foods to buy, how would you rate "food from your family's ethnicity or culture"?]

- a. Very important
- b. Somewhat important
- c. Not too important
- d. Not at all important
- e. *DK or Refused*

18. The next reason is "food that's easy to prepare".

[When you choose certain foods to buy, how would you rate "the food is easy to prepare"?]

- a. Very important
- b. Somewhat important

- c. Not too important
- d. Not at all important
- e. *DK or Refused*

19. The next reason is “food that stays fresh longer”.

[When you choose certain foods to buy, how would you rate “the food stays fresh longer”?]

- a. Very important
- b. Somewhat important
- c. Not too important
- d. Not at all important
- e. *DK or Refused*

20. The next reason is “brand name foods”.

[When you choose certain foods to buy, how would you rate “brand name foods”?]

- a. Very important
- b. Somewhat important
- c. Not too important
- d. Not at all important
- e. *DK or Refused*

21. The next reason is “organic food”.

[When you choose certain foods to buy, how would you rate “organic foods”?]

- a. Very important
- b. Somewhat important
- c. Not too important
- d. Not at all important
- e. *DK or Refused*

22. Are there other reasons I haven’t mentioned that you would like to add?

[Are there other reasons you buy types of foods besides the ones I mentioned?]

[INTERVIEWER INSTRUCTION: IF YES, FILL IN BELOW THEN ASK How would you rate this reason?]

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

- a. Very important
- b. Somewhat important
- c. Not too important
- d. Not at all important
- e. *DK or Refused*

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

- a. Very important
- b. Somewhat important
- c. Not too important
- d. Not at all important
- e. *DK or Refused*

23. Do you look at the food labels to decide if the food is nutritious or healthy?

- a. Always
- b. Sometimes
- c. Never
- d. *DK or Refused*

That's it for questions that require answers from the card. I can take that back now. [GET CARD BACK FROM RESPONDENT.] Thank you.

These next questions are about the food eaten in your household. People do different things when they are running out of money to make their FOOD or their FOOD MONEY go further.

24. In the last 12 months, since last (name of current month), did (you/you or others in your household) ever CUT THE SIZE OF your meals or SKIP MEALS because there wasn't enough money for food?

- a. Yes (GO TO 24a)
- b. No

c. *DK or Refused*

24a. How often did this happen?

- a. Almost every month
- b. Some months but not every month
- c. Only 1 or 2 months
- d. *DK or Refused*

25. In the last 12 months, did (you/you or others in your household) ever EAT LESS THAN YOU FELT YOU SHOULD because there wasn't enough money for food?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. *DK or Refused*

26. In the last 12 months, were (you/you or others in your household) ever HUNGRY BUT DIDN'T EAT because there wasn't enough money for food?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. *DK or Refused*

Here are 2 statements that people have made about their food situation. For these statements please tell me whether the statement was often, sometime, or never true for (you/you or other members of the household) in the past 12 months.

27. First, "The food that (I/we) bought just didn't last, and (I/we) didn't have money to get more." Was that often, sometimes, or never true for (you/your household) in the last 12 months?

- a. Often true
- b. Sometimes true
- c. Never true
- d. *DK or Refused*

28. The second statement is, “(I/we) couldn’t afford to eat balanced meals.”

[A balanced meal would include vegetables or fruits; proteins such as meat, fish, or eggs; and carbohydrates such as bread, rice, beans, or potatoes.]

- a. Often true
- b. Sometimes true
- c. Never true
- d. *DK or Refused*

We’re getting toward the end of the survey here.

29. In the past 12 months, did (you/you or others in your household) get food stamp benefits—that is, either food stamps or a food- stamp benefit card?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. *DK or Refused*

[IF NO CHILDREN IN HOUSEHOLD, DO NOT ASK: ]

30. In the past 12 months, did any children in the household receive free or reduced-cost food at a day-care center or Head Start program?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. No children in household
- d. *DK or Refused*

[IF NO CHILDREN IN HOUSEHOLD, DO NOT ASK: ]

31. In the past 12 months, did any children in your household between 5 and 18 years old receive free or reduced-cost meals at school?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. No children in household
- d. *DK or Refused*

[IF NO WOMEN OR CHILDREN IN HOUSEHOLD, DO NOT ASK: ]

32. In the past 12 months, did (you/your or any women or children in this household) get food through the WIC program?

[WIC stands for the federal Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children.]

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. No women or children in household
- d. *DK or Refused*

33. In the past 12 months, did (you/anyone in the household) receive any meals DELIVERED to the home from community programs like "Meals on Wheels," or any other programs?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. *DK or Refused*

34. In the past 12 months, did (you/you or anyone in the household) GO TO a community program or senior center to eat prepared meals?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. *DK or Refused*

35. In the past 12 months, did (you/you or other adults in your household) ever get EMERGENCY FOOD SUPPLIES from a church, food pantry, or food bank?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. *DK or Refused*

These last four questions ask about household information.

36. What's your age?

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ years

b. *DK or Refused*

37. What race do you consider your household to belong to?

- a. White
- b. Black
- c. Asian or Pacific Islander
- d. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- e. More than one race
- f. *DK or Refused*

38. Do you consider your household to be of Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Mixed: Hispanic and non-Hispanic household members
- d. *DK or Refused*

39. What annual income level does your household fit into?

[INSTRUCTIONS: ROUND TO THE NEAREST THOUSAND AND CHECK THE APPROPRIATE ONE]

- a. \$15,000 or less
- b. More than \$15,000 but no more than \$34,000
- c. More than \$35,000 but no more than \$49,000
- d. More than \$50,000 but no more than \$99,000
- e. \$100,000 or more
- f. *DK or Refused*

[40. NOTE OBSERVED GENDER: ]

- a. *Male*
- b. *Female*



## CONCLUSION

That concludes the survey! Now that you've taken part in our community food assessment, would you like us to let you know when Poughkeepsie Plenty holds community forums to share the results of our research?

[IF YES, TAKE INFORMATION BELOW]

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Residential address: \_\_\_\_\_

POUGHKEEPSIE, NY \_\_\_\_\_

Phone/E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

I'd like to thank you very much for your time and consideration in answering our questions. Enjoy the rest of your day. Goodbye.

## APPENDIX B: FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

In the focus group interviews, we asked participants a small, but very open-ended, set of questions about their own shopping patterns and the issues of food insecurity that they've observed locally. We didn't ask the same questions used in our door-to-door household survey. Why not? Methodologically, focus group interviews must balance the desire of researchers for participants' perspectives on the question at hand with the needs of participants for convenience and an efficient use of the time they've donated. Particularly considering that, unlike household surveys, focus groups are conducted away from participants' place of residence, which means travel is added to the total time they spend on participating, it's necessary to keep the focus groups down to a compact period of time. This means focus group questions shouldn't correspond exactly to the questions asked in household surveys; there were simply too many questions in the survey to ask in a focus group.

Furthermore, some kinds of survey questions are inappropriate to ask in focus groups. For instance, we eliminated from our focus group interviews all the questions from the household survey that asked respondents about their individual characteristics (age, race, ethnicity, income), since researchers try to control for these, roughly speaking, by organizing socially homogeneous focus groups. Second, we eliminated all the questions on the survey of a sensitive nature from the focus group interviews: namely, questions about households' own food security problems and participation in food assistance programs. Given the focus group format in which participants answer in front of other people, asking such sensitive questions would probably fail to draw truthful responses, and they're not effective kinds of questions for the "combined minds" format of focus groups anyway.

Consequently, from our original 40-question survey we developed an interview schedule of 7 general questions that allowed us to keep our interviews around 30-60 minutes total. Focus group facilitators consulted this interview schedule flexibly, paraphrasing, reordering or in some cases dropping certain questions as they saw fit and as time allowed. Our focus group interviews generally began by facilitators welcoming participants to the focus group, providing quick background on the Poughkeepsie Plenty Community Food Assessment, and sharing some general facts about the state of food insecurity (e.g., one of every eight persons participates in a food assistance program). Then they introduced the following questions one at a time, asking follow-up questions (indented below) when the conversation was lacking:

**1. People tend to get their food from one of three sources—grocery stores, smaller delis or bodegas, and restaurants. (Important background: identify the grocery stores.) Where do you tend to go when you shop for food?**

**2. Why do you think people choose to shop at the grocery stores as opposed to the other establishments that are located closer by? (Important background: mention the grocery/town versus smaller store/City geography.)**

**3. When you go to the grocery store how do you get there?**

**How long does it take?**

**How easy do you find it to get to a grocery store?**

We know that a significant number of households in the City don't own their own personal vehicle. Can you speak more about how people who don't own a car get to the grocery store?

How do you feel about this public transportation system in this City?

**4. What are the primary factors *besides price* that determine what kinds of food you purchase?**

Some other possible reasons are food from your family background; food that's easy to prepare; food that stays fresh longer; brand-name foods; and organic foods. Do you find these factors to be important?

**5. What would you say are the primary factors in determining where you shop for food?**

Some other possible reasons are the store is close to home or work; the store is easy to get to; better prices on the foods I want; the store has healthy foods; the store sells foods from my family background; the staff understands my need; and the store accepts WIC/food stamps. Do you find these factors to be important?

**6. We are finding that a large number of households [currently, about 23%] have cut the size of their meals or skipped meals in the last year. Is this a problem for you or your neighbors here in Poughkeepsie?**

**7. We are finding that a large number of households [currently, about 21%] say the food they bought didn't last, and they didn't have money to get more. Is this a problem for you or your neighbors here in Poughkeepsie?**

For Spanish-language focus groups, we wanted further clarification about competing hypotheses regarding the risk of food security faced by recent immigrants to Poughkeepsie. Thus we included this additional question:

**8. We have heard competing stories about the problems that the Latino population faces in Poughkeepsie. One storeowner told us that Mexicans are "good buyers", who placed a strong emphasis on eating well and within their culinary tradition. Then there are also people who believe that the Latino population in Poughkeepsie is particularly vulnerable to food-related health problems like obesity. What's your opinion on this?**

We found that it worked well to use this interview schedule as a flexible guidepost toward uncovering attitudes and behavior that were relevant and interesting for interpreting the findings of the community food assessment. Any future use could modify the schedule to make room to explore new patterns or questions that emerge.