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OPENING UP THE BOX: EXPLORING THE SCALING OUT OF THE GOOD FOOD BOX ACROSS CANADA

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Opening Up the Box: Exploring the Scaling Out of the Good Food Box Across Canada

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The Good Food Box (GFB) program holds a great deal of promise to expand our understanding of Community Food Security (CFS). CFS represents a vision for solving hunger and other problems with the food system through an integrated approach that improves access to good and appropriate food for all while at the same time building community, strengthening local agricultural economies, and maximizing social justice. The GFB, one type of CFS program, is a community-based initiative found across Canada that provides a box of healthy food to customers at near wholesale prices; it has the potential to increase access to healthy food, develop alternative distribution channels, link producers more closely with consumers, build community connections, and more. Yet despite the fact that over 50 unique GFB programs exist across Canada, little research has been done on how these myriad programs are structured and function, how this program model has spread to and been adapted by communities across Canada, and how individual programs operate while balancing multiple goals and priorities.

This paper, based on qualitative interviews with managers at 21 GFB programs across Canada, explores the diversity of GFB programs in Canada, and how these programs balance multiple priorities along with day-to-day logistical constraints. GFB programs functioning across Canada have diverse goals, tensions sometimes arise when balancing multiple goals, and programs have found various ways to resolve these tensions. Moreover, GFB programs are educating and empowering people in their communities, as well as networking and learning among themselves. This is one of the first studies describing the breadth of GFB programs across Canada, and some of the findings have not been identified in previous scholarship. I describe the variety of program structures, the main priorities and goals that the programs identify, and some of the tensions and innovations that arise when working to balance the multiple goals and dimensions of CFS. I also discuss how programs communicate and learn from each other, and how the GFB in Canada can help us understand the CFS movement more generally.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Good Food Box (GFB) is a community-based initiative that provides a box of healthy food to customers at near wholesale prices; it has the potential to increase access to healthy food, develop alternative distribution channels, link producers more closely with consumers, build community connections, and more. The non-profit organization FoodShare Toronto (FoodShare) started the first GFB in 1994, and it has subsequently spread across Canada. Yet despite the fact that over 50 unique GFB programs exist, little research has been done on how these myriad programs are structured and function, how this program model has spread to and been adapted by communities across Canada, and how individual programs operate while balancing multiple goals and priorities.

This study, based on qualitative interviews with managers at 21 GFB programs across Canada, explores the diversity of GFB programs in Canada, and how these programs balance multiple priorities along with day-to-day logistical constraints. I describe the variety of program structures, the main priorities and goals that the programs identify, and some of the tensions and innovations that arise when working to balance multiple goals and objectives. I also discuss how programs communicate and learn from each other, and how the GFB in Canada can help us understand the efforts towards Community Food Security movement more generally. GFB programs functioning across Canada have diverse goals, tensions sometimes arise when balancing multiple goals, and programs have found various ways to resolve these tensions. Moreover, GFB programs are educating and empowering people in their communities, as well as networking and learning among themselves.

My hope is that this in-depth qualitative descriptive study gives voice to the experiences of GFB managers in a variety of programs across Canada, in order to understand more fully how the country-wide GFB network has come to be, and the extent, impacts, challenges and innovations that have resulted from this scaling out.

Summary of Findings

- The programs in this study ranged in size and location from large, urban centers to sparsely populated, rural counties. The smallest of the programs deliver about 40 boxes each month, while the largest program represented here packs and distributes upwards of 4,000.

- The majority of GFB programs in this study are run by non-profit organizations. Others are run by public health units, and a couple are directed by a cooperative of farmers.

Key findings related to program goals

- While GFB programs vary in many ways, some elements were common to all the GFB programs in this study. These include:

    - A central entity exists (the organization administering the Good Food Box program) to coordinate the purchasing and distribution of food, purchased in bulk to lower costs
    - The program provides a box of food, at regular intervals to customers who pay in advance
    - The food in the box comes from more than one grower (though not necessarily more than one supplier)
    - The program is open to anyone who wishes to participate, regardless of income level
    - Volunteer labor and community partnerships are key resources involved in the success of the GFB program

- GFB programs across Canada embody a diversity of goals, related to topics such as health, social well-being, and economic growth.   In turn, these goals tend to influence program structure and decision-making.

- Although there was no goal that all of the GFB programs in this study claimed universally, there were a number of common themes, including increasing access, improving food quality and nutrition, supporting a more value-based and localized supply chain, and creating new social spaces and relationships to food.

- Increasing food access is a goal for nearly all of the programs. The goal of increasing food access influences GFB programs in a number of ways, including where they

choose to locate, what organizations they partner with, and what types and prices of produce they include in their box.

- Although they are concerned with basic food access, this was not the only goal for any of the programs. All were also concerned with two or more other goals relating to the community, their customers, or their food supply chain.

- Many program managers said they are not satisfied with simply distributing food to people; they are interested in procuring and supplying high-quality, nutritious food for their customers. The goal of improving health, nutrition, and quality influences food purchasing decisions, and for some of the GFB programs it also influences education and outreach efforts.

- GFB programs also work to foster new relationships between people and food. The goal of creating new relationships around food runs counter to the current of industrial food system's process of distancing (Kloppenberg et al. 1996), instead seeking to elevate the role and responsibilities of eaters.   It has influenced many aspects of the GFB programs represented in this study, including how customers are treated and targeted, how food is distributed, the quality of foods that are selected to be included in the boxes, as well as the many education efforts that the GFB programs have developed to give their customers new food skills.

- Program maintenance and resources were a concern for all managers in this study, and every one said that funding was a challenge. Insufficient and inconsistent funding impacts programs' ability to maintain and expand and can lead to heavy reliance on volunteer labor, overworked managers, and staff turnover. A number of programs said that insufficient or inconsistent funding negatively impacted their ability to meet and balance multifaceted goals.

Key findings related to customers

- Every program I learned about was universal, that is, open to everyone in the community regardless of circumstance or income level. In other words, the programs do not require anyone to pass a means test, or "prove you are poor" in order to purchase a box. Three reasons for having a universal program were identified:

    - If everyone can use the program, then poor people will be less likely to be deterred from utilizing the GFB based on a perceived shame or stigma.
    - Everyone, not just low-income people, can benefit from participation in the GFB
    - Additional, steady customers help stabilize numbers and keep the GFB viable for the long term.

- Although GFB programs are open to all, most of them specifically target low-income populations. Others also reach out to pregnant and new mothers, seniors, and people with disabilities.

- Four programs do not have any specific target audience; to them, the goal of universality is paramount. Also, for a couple of these programs, the goal of supporting local producers outweighed the desire to make the box financially accessible to low-income customers.

- Key barriers to reaching target audiences include stigma, physical access, knowledge, and price.

- Some of the ways that GFBs have found to make their box more accessible and appealing to their target audiences include:

  - A concern for keeping prices low, and focus on price while choosing box contents
  - Citing depot locations in areas where other food outlets do not exist. Partnerships with organizations and individuals located in those areas are often key to this strategy.
  - Working with funders, community members, and partner organizations to offer subsidized boxes for low-income or other target populations.
  - Offering smaller-sized, lower-cost box options, and boxes that contain foods that are easy to prepare without a full kitchen.

- Many GFB program managers said that misunderstanding and stigma associated with their programs was a major challenge. Programs try to address this confusion through advertising, attention to how they talk about their program, and by having a universal program.

- To address stigma, a few programs have rebranded and changed their name to something other than "Good Food Box," but some thought this approach would be too expensive and cause their program to lose name recognition.

- Most GFB programs include an educational aspect to teach food knowledge and skills. The most frequently-used media for this is in a newsletter. About a third of the programs also offer food skills classes for their customers, many relying on community partnerships with other organizations that actually offer or teach the classes.

Key findings related to box packing and distribution structure

- In order to accomplish distribution of food boxes over a vast area, many GFB programs utilize a network of community partners to serve as distribution points in neighborhoods. Customers come to the depots to pay for a box in advance, and then on the day that boxes are distributed, customers come to the depots to pick up a box.

- Depots serve a number of purposes:

  - They are a convenient way to get food to customers, without the expense of home delivery.
  - These community partnerships can also help address access issues, and some GFB programs seek out agencies to host depot sites in areas where a high proportion of their desired clientele live.
  - Additionally, depots can serve an important role by bringing people together and creating new social spaces and relationships around food.

- Despite the positive aspects of having a network of depots, some managers did note a few weaknesses to this system. Working with community partners enables GFB programs to stretch their limited resources, but also leaves them more dependent on the fates of others for their success.

- Most of the programs that use depots to distribute pack their boxes at a central location, and then send them to depots. This is the same model utilized by the program at FoodShare Toronto. Managers who use this model described the relative ease of having one set of volunteers packing at one location, as compared to coordinating multiple packing locations and sets of volunteers.

- Some GFB programs utilize a different model, where food is sent directly to the depots and then sorted and packed by volunteers there. Most of these programs covered large areas, making delivery from a central packing location difficult. The programs that use volunteers at the depot level instead of a central location said their choice was driven by logistics, efforts to maintain supplier relations, and their ability to offer grassroots programs.

- Some programs that are located in a city with surrounding rural towns utilize a hybrid distribution system, where central packing occurs for city distribution, but some groups in small outlying towns also receive, sort, pack, and distribute food.

- Some very small programs offer only one pick up location, and one such program just lays out all the produce and lets their customers pack their own box.

- Packing day at a GFB program is a lively time that creates a new social space and allows community members to learn from each other and try out new roles as leaders in the food system.

Key findings related to box contents

- Although some consistencies exist, the choice of box contents is one of the chief areas where GFB boxes differ from community to community, and where tensions between competing program goals arise.

- GFB programs vary in terms of how many and what types of boxes they offer, as well as the numbers of suppliers they work with and whether these suppliers represent the conventional food system or something more alternative.

- About one-third of the programs offer just one type of box, while others offer one or more variations in terms of box size and/or content. Offering just one type of box can increase program efficiency, while multiple box types helps make the box appealing to a wider range of audiences.

- GFB programs utilize a wide array of produce suppliers, varying from program to program in number, as well as type and scale. Eight programs utilize only one supplier, while 13 purchase food from two or more different sources.

- Suppliers range from conventional outlets such as wholesalers, distributors, and grocery stores to suppliers embedded within alternative local systems, such as small local producers, farmers cooperatives, local millers and bakers, and community gardens. There were also a number of suppliers who were not completely local and alternative, but also not entirely mainstream, such as locally-owned grocery stores, green grocers, and distributors.

- Those who purchase from only one supplier work with a wholesaler or distributor, who is able to access produce from a number of growers (local or otherwise). Ease, predictability, and desire to maintain good business relations were the reasons given most often for choosing to utilize one supplier. This choice can potentially make a manager's job easier, which is important considering the limited resources most programs operate under. On the other hand, using a single supplier potentially limits choices regarding other supply chain values, and could make the program overly reliant on one business figure.

- A multifaceted set of factors influence what food is put into the GFB in each community. The programs managers mentioned eight major categories of concerns and factors that they weighed when choosing produce: availability; price; quality; staple items; variety; customer fit and feedback; supply chain values; and supplier relations.

- Program managers vary in the degree to which they weigh price as a factor when choosing products to fill their boxes. For programs trying to help people "stretch their food dollar," the box must be affordable. On the other hand, some consider price, but are willing to pay more for other factors and supply chain values like produce quality.

- GFB program managers want the food they are providing their customers with to be something that they will want to eat. As a result, some place priority on supplying staple items, including a variety of produce, and/or responding to other customer desires through their procurement purchases.

- GFB programs respond to other customer concerns and desires as well, and some actively work to solicit customer feedback.

- One of the stated goals of the original program in Toronto is to provide "culturally acceptable" food to people (Hamm and Bellows 2003:37). Three GFB managers in this study mentioned cultural appropriateness as a purchasing priority, but they also talked about the tensions that can arise when balancing food that will be culturally appropriate and food that will have universal appeal. The others did not mention cultural appropriateness as a key goal.

- Only one program manager reported actively working to include organic produce in their GFB.

Key findings relating to local purchasing decisions

- Six of the program managers said that their box always includes local produce, and that it is a top priority. Ten of the GFB managers named local purchasing as a key goal or hope of their program, and fourteen programs said that they routinely include local produce in the box, or include it as a minor part of all or most of their boxes. Only one manager said that their program's box never includes local produce.

- One of the challenges for projects such as the GFB has been linking the access needs of low-income people with the goal of building markets and seeking higher prices for producers (Allen 1998). For some GFBs this balancing is difficult, but it does not have to be an either-or situation; others have ways to support local producers while still providing an affordable product.

- The most frequently mentioned reason to purchase from local farmers was a desire to support the local economy.

- Program managers described their programs as a large, stable customer that particularly benefitted small and beginning farmers, and producers with excess produce.

- Additionally, the GFB gives customers a low-cost, low-risk gateway to other ways to support a local and sustainable food system of the alternative food movement.

- Despite the fact that nine GFB programs named price as a barrier to purchasing local food, seven programs actually said that, for them, the price of local, in-season produce in their area was a factor in its favor.

- Other factors influencing the decision to purchase locally were the freshness and quality of foods, environmental concerns, and personal desires of the program manager.

- All but one of the 21 GFB programs include at least some non-local food in their boxes, and the one exception only operates during the growing season. Reasons against purchasing local food included balancing other priorities like price, climate and geography, and lack of external and internal resources.

- A tension between pleasing customers and including food that is culturally and nutritionally appropriate also kept some boxes from being as local as they potentially could have been. This was most often the case with fruits that do not grow in Canada, like bananas and oranges.

- Lack of infrastructure to support, transport and aggregate local foods is a major roadblock for at least six of programs.

- GFB program infrastructure is not always set up to handle a robust local-food purchasing initiative. Commitments to purchase from a single supplier restricted four of the GFB programs in their choice of purchasing locally-grown food, although all of them mentioned that they asked the supplier to purchase locally when possible and within a certain price range. Additionally, two GFB managers cited a lack of time and resources within the organization managing the program as a barrier to local purchasing.

- Of the 20 GFB programs that include local food in their box, 12 managers said that they purchase directly from local farmers. Six GFB managers mentioned purchasing local food through mainstream channels, including distributors and grocery stores, and of these, four said that a main reason they include local produce in their box is their ability to purchase it through their existing suppliers. Two GFB managers purchase food from local produce auctions in their community, and two of the smaller programs include produce from local community gardens in some boxes.

- In working with local farmers, some programs hold a meeting or planning session at the beginning of the growing season, and pre-plan with farmers for the whole year. This helps address supply issues, and gives the farmers a solid idea of what they can plant and sell. If problems arise down the road, the farmers and manager can work together to find a substitute for that product.

Key findings related to program founding and interactions among GFB programs

- Over half of the 16 program managers that knew the origin of their program traced it back to the influence of Food Share Toronto. This demonstrates the strong influence of Toronto as a model for other programs. Many of these programs specifically mentioned *The Good Food Box: A Manual* (Morgan et al. 2008), indicating that it has been an important tool for them when establishing and running their programs.

- Other programs cite a neighboring community other than Toronto as their initial exposure to the GFB program model, while two programs were actually expansions of smaller, neighborhood GFB initiatives that had already been operating in their city.

- Communication and learning among GFB programs takes a number of forms. The most common way that GFB programs reported learning about one another was through published documents. Conferences and site visits are also important learning venues.

- The Ontario Good Food Box Network (OGFBN) is an initiative coordinated by Sustain Ontario (Stevens 2011). It is a powerful tool for those program managers who have time to participate and a program model that is similar to others within the network, but more challenging for those with limited resources or a more unique way of running their program. In order to create a truly inclusive network and support continued innovation and growth participants should be cognizant of being open to new ideas and not alienating programs and participants with different priorities and goals, disparate levels of resources, and novel ideas about how to run their programs.

Summary of key conclusions

- GFBs are distinct from other forms of hunger relief such as food banks because they deliver a box of quality produce to their customers in a way that aims to engage, strengthen, and nourish the person and the community.

- GFB programs strengthen communities by creating new social spaces where all are welcome to participate, providing training and education, and encouraging and facilitating new partnerships between community organizations.

- Furthermore, many GFBs support local food producers and businesses by providing a new, consistent market for products.

- During the scaling-out process, some common elements remained a part of all programs, including universality and a reliance on partnerships within the community. Certain aims identified by the Toronto program (Morgan et al. 2008: 26-27) have remained prevalent among most of the programs, including: increasing access, providing healthy produce, and supporting local producers. Creating a social space to educate and inspire food system change was also widely mentioned.

- On the other hand, some goals identified by the original FoodShare program have not remained as prevalent aross Canada: only three program managers mentioned that providing culturally accessible food was a goal for them, and only one program specifically discussed supporting organic farmers.

- While goals like supporting local farmers and providing access to affordable food sometimes clash and force decision-makers to choose between the one of the two, much more often this balancing is not an either-or situation. More often, decision-making is influenced by a number of goals, as well as to resource constraints, and managers aim to do the best they can under the given circumstances.

- Programs like the GFB, which actively and intentionally balance year round healthy food access with other goals, could serve as a middle ground to help ease and scale up the transition back to more sustainable and local food systems. They respond to the immediate need to ensure that people can obtain healthy food throughout the year in a dignified manner, and at the same time these programs can help to rebuild and strengthen local systems.

- GFB programs involve a wide range of actors in their operations, both out of intent and necessity. In doing so, they embrace an alternative model of food distribution: one that is based in community and cooperation, rather than on solely monetary transactions between customers and a business.

- Many GFB programs confront distribution and access issues head on, and encourage their customers to become more educated and engaged food consumers. By providing social space around food distribution, GFBs help start dialogues that can reconnect consumers with their food.

- Yet, despite the ability of programs to innovate and adapt to insufficient and unpredictable resources, funding is a major sideboard on what is and is not possible for the GFB. Most of the programs could accomplish a wider array of CFS goals if they had more, and more stable, funding

INTRODUCTION: GOOD FOOD FOR ALL

Steam rose up off the sidewalk as I locked my bike and walked past the rows of compost bins towards the old school building. "Today's going to be a scorcher," I thought, "I hope there are extra watermelons for the volunteers today… *and isn't Canada supposed to be cold*?"

As I walked through the loading doors into what once was the school's auto shop, I was greeted by the sweet smell of produce and the sight of hundreds of crates and fruits and vegetables stacked up throughout the room, like a maze between my cubicle and me. None of this surprised me. It was Tuesday, after all.

At FoodShare Toronto, one of Canada's largest and most well-known Community Food Security organizations, every Tuesday is Good Food Box packing day. On Tuesdays, volunteers gather in the former auto shop, which has been remade into the bright, cheery Good Food Warehouse. They line up along rows of old assembly line rollers, and start filling boxes with food, which probably arrived earlier that morning from local farmers and a supplier at the Toronto Food Terminal. Later that day, the boxes will be sent to neighborhoods throughout the city, where people who have pre-purchased them can pick them up, receiving fresh, high-quality produce at near wholesale prices.

The Good Food Box (GFB) program holds a great deal of promise to expand our understanding of Community Food Security (CFS). CFS represents a vision for solving hunger and other problems within the food system through an integrated approach that improves access to good and appropriate food for all while at the same time building community, strengthening local agricultural economies, and maximizing social justice.

The GFB, one type of CFS program, has the potential to increase access to healthy food, develop alternative distribution channels, link producers more closely with consumers, build community connections, and more. Yet despite the fact that over 50 unique GFB programs exist across Canada, very little research has been done on how these myriad programs are structured and function, how this program model has spread to and been adapted by communities across Canada, and how individual programs operate while balancing multiple goals and priorities.

This paper explores the diversity of GFB programs in Canada, and how these programs balance multiple priorities along with day-to-day logistical constraints. I describe the variety of program structures, the main priorities and goals that the programs identify, and some of the tensions and innovations that arise when working to balance the multiple goals and dimensions of CFS. I also discuss how programs communicate and learn from each other, and how the GFB in Canada can help us understand the CFS movement more generally. This is one of the first studies describing the breadth of GFB programs across Canada, and some of the findings have not been identified in previous scholarship.

SIGNIFICANCE: ROOT VEGETABLES

Hunger and Other Problems with the Modern Food System

Scholars, activists, and food system participants have noted a number of problems with the current industrial food system, including practices that harm environmental and human health, the creation of 'food deserts' when grocery stores abandon low-income areas, violations of farm worker rights, unfair price setting and market concentration, loss of farmland and farmers, and other inequalities (Gottlieb and Joshi 2010; Winne 2008). One poignant example of injustice in our current food landscape is the number of people who struggle to acquire nutritious food for their families. For instance, according to Health Canada (2011), 7.7 percent of the Canadian population, or about 1.9 million people, experienced food insecurity at some point during 2007. "At times during the previous year, these households were uncertain of having, or unable to acquire, enough food to meet the needs of all their members because they had insufficient money for food" (Health Canada 2011). Nearly three percent of the Canadian population also experienced *severe* food insecurity, going hungry, reducing food intake, or otherwise having to disrupt their eating habits at some point during the year. The same study found that food insecurity disproportionately impacts the poor; 32 percent of households in the lowest income decile were identified as food insecure (Health Canada 2011).

As households experience food insecurity, many turn to emergency food sources, such as food pantries and soup kitchens. Intended originally as charitable stop-gap measures to help people in times of crisis or while waiting for food stamp applications to process, today such "charity-based approaches to food security" are the "norm… rather than the exception" (Johnson and Baker 2005: 320) Statistics regarding the number of

people utilizing these services illustrate how prevalent emergency food has become as a coping mechanism to address household food insecurity. Over 833,000 people, or about 2.4 percent of the Canadian population, utilized food banks during March 2013, according to Food Banks Canada, a nationwide network of food banks. Over one third of those served were children. This represents a 23 percent increase over the number served in 2008 (Food Banks Canada 2013: 2).

Although food banks and other emergency food suppliers are well-intentioned and certainly provide an important service by alleviating immediate food needs, many scholars and activists argue that the emergency food system has shortfalls (DeLind 1994, Poppendieck 1998, Tarasuk and Eakin 2003, Winne 2008).   The modern food bank system is deeply intertwined with the modern food retail system: food banks need food to distribute, and grocery stores need a place to dispose of food that does not sell or is damaged. Valerie Tarasuk and Joan Eakin (2003: 182) have documented how the disposal of such "surplus food" at some food banks, which seem like a "win-win" situation at first, often results in "the distribution of visibly substandard, outdated, or otherwise undesirable products" to people who are given little to no choice in the matter. Furthermore, many scholars argue that the emergency food system distracts society from addressing the root causes of hunger and other problems in the food system, including poverty, inequality, flawed infrastructure, and the erosion of government supports (Poppendieck 1998, Riches 1997 and 1999). In other words, the emergency food system gives the average person the impression that hunger is being dealt with, distracting them from agitating for more fundamental solutions.

Meanwhile, the dominant food and agricultural system has also pushed production of food towards consolidation and globalization, and away from communities. While some large firms have benefitted from market concentration and vertical integration, others within the food system have not done equally well. Farmers have had to shift from diversified production to monocultures (Lyson 2004: 34-35), and many have experienced a loss of independence under the increasing strain of debt due to falling prices and increased costs for machinery, fertilizers, seeds, fuel and pesticides (Berry 1984, Gottlieb and Joshi 2010). Modern industrialized farming also has significant negative environmental impacts, including pollution due to heavy use of chemical pesticides and fertilizers, promotion of large monocultures in place of diversity, soil degradation and desertification, carbon emissions from transportation, and excessive use of water resources.

Consumers, meanwhile, suffer a "separation from the knowledge of how and by whom what they consume is produced, processed, and transported" (Kloppenburg et al. 1996:34). While the current system may provide blueberries from Chile in January, it also brings an illusion of choice, as each year vertically-integrated food industry firms like Kraft and Nestle, fill supermarket shelves with more packaged, branded products (Lappe and Terry 2006:6). Meanwhile, eaters have become increasingly distanced from the people and places that produced their food, resulting in disengagement which entrenches the current model and makes change more difficult to realize (Kloppenburg et al 1996: 34).

Community Food Security

 In light of these problems and other shortfalls in today's dominant food system, many scholars and practitioners call for a more multifaceted and thoughtful approach to how we produce, distribute, and obtain nutritious foods. The Community Food Security movement presents one of these alternate visions, seeking to engage communities in "a comprehensive strategy to address many of the ills affecting our society and environment due to an unsustainable and unjust food system" (Community Food Security Coalition 2011). Connecting access needs with production issues "with the goal of ensuring both an adequate and accessible food supply in both the present and the future" (Allen 1999:117), "Community Food Security (CFS) is defined as a situation in which all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance and social justice" (Hamm and Bellows 2003: 37). CFS seeks solutions based around linkages throughout the community, rather than only the individual or household level, making it different from traditional definitions of household food security. This systems approach to understanding and addressing food insecurity and injustice "is powerful because it considers a problem holistically" (Hamm and Bellows 2003: 38), and allows a diverse range of community actors, such as hunger advocates, environmentalists, farmers, consumers, legislators, business people and others to work together to create solutions that address the needs of their community while also developing its assets.

 Those who work towards CFS "envision food systems that are decentralized, environmentally-sound over a long time-frame, supportive of collective rather than only individual needs, effective in assuring equitable food access, and created by democratic

decision-making" (Anderson and Cooke 1999:141). CFS scholars and practioners critique "corporate control [of the food system] and the loss of food skills ('deskilling') in the public" (Renting et al. 2012: 294). They seek to create new links between producers and consumers, and to move "beyond the notions of food as a commodity and people as consumers" and towards a more democratic system built around the concepts of food democracy and food citizenship (Welsh and MacRae 1998: 242).

There are a wide range of projects that fall under the banner of CFS, including education and advocacy efforts, local and regional food security coalitions, farmers markets and community supported agriculture (CSA) programs, and the Good Food Box (Winne 2008). Ideally, these initiatives tend to involve a multidisciplinary approach to problem solving; community collaboration and participation in planning; promotion of action within localized communities; support of local farmers whenever possible; multi-sector linkages; and multiple project goals and objectives (Anderson and Cooke 1999: 145, Winne et al. 1998). In doing so, CFS projects have the potential to create self-reliant community systems that work to improve food access for low-income people while also supporting local economic enterprises.

Creating a more localized, vibrant, and just food system for everyone along the chain is a daunting task, however, and CFS scholars and practitioners have noted difficulties with balancing and negotiating such a wide range of goals. For instance, Patricia Allen (1999: 117) argues that, "in its focus on consumption, CFS has prioritized the needs of low-income people; in its focus on production, it emphasizes local and regional food systems. Although the CFS movement is working to integrate these objectives, it is also facing the question of where it should place its emphasis" (Allen

1999: 117). How is it possible, for instance, for a program to simultaneously seek higher prices for local farmers and more access for low-income consumers? Or balance supporting food that is culturally appropriate with food that is local, especially in places like Canada, with long winters and large immigrant populations? Furthermore, are these "either-or" scenarios even the right questions to be asking? What are really the key deciding factors for where a program will place its emphasis? This present research considers these kinds of questions in the context of GFB programs across Canada.

Many CFS initiatives are based around the idea of local needs and decision making, yet "it is unclear how the community decides what its priority needs are" (Allen 1999: 121). Furthermore, Hamm and Bellows (2003:39) note that this balancing is an ongoing process, as "the concept of CFS is a continually evolving effort to include more voices and to respond to changing social, political, and environmental conditions."

More research is needed to examine how the different interests involved in creating alternative food programs prioritize and execute their goals in order to meet the needs of their communities. Learning more about these factors, constraints, and decision points would be useful in quantifying the impact that CFS programs such as the GFB are having currently, and what goals they are pursuing and accomplishing in practice. It would also help to identify what barriers might be standing in the way of realizing a more holistic set of goals, and potentially highlight solutions to overcoming these challenges.

Furthermore, although CFS advocates endorse "decentralized, small-scale, local-level solutions, managed by local inhabitants" (Anderson and Cook 1999: 145), when a CFS initiative is successful in one place, it is often adopted and adapted in other locales. The expansion of farmers markets in the recent past is an example of this phenomenon.

Johnson and Lauren Baker argue that this is a positive development because in order for the CFS projects to have a deeper, more far-reaching impact, they must be "'scaled out' to other local contexts" (Johnson and Baker 2005: 318). Yet the process by which this scaling out is actually being accomplished on the ground is not well understood. How program models change as they are adapted to their new host communities? How do entities operating similar programs in different towns exchange ideas with one another, if at all?

Gerda Wekerle (2004:379) notes that, while CFS and food justice are "place-based movements engaged in local organizing and community development," they "are also exemplars of networked movements…which shape policy processes and outcomes at various scales." Linkages between CFS programs take many forms, including "thematic networks [that] focus on a specific kind of food security project, such as student nutrition projects or food box programs" (Welsh and MacRae 1998: 252-253). Beckie, Kennedy, and Wittman (2012: 333) have also suggested that "dynamic processes of interaction and knowledge exchange are occurring" between and within local alternative food programs, and that geographic concentration that facilitates sharing among nearby programs may help facilitate this positive process. These networks of knowledge sharing and mutual support may be key to the scaling out of CFS programs, but little information currently exists in the literature regarding how knowledge sharing and mutual support networks relate to the scaling out of CFS programs.

A deeper knowledge of how CFS programs such as the GFB have been adopted and adapted in new locations would be useful both academically and practically. Knowing more about the myriad of individual, localized CFS programs that exist would

help us understand the impact that CFS programs are having overall, and help to show what is possible when community members work towards a vision of a holistic and just food system. Revealing the innovations of smaller programs, that might otherwise go unnoticed, could show existing programs ways to improve or help other communities start similar programs. Moreover, learning about what resources and processes have been most helpful in facilitating scaling out so far could help practitioners expand the reach of CFS programs in a more focused and successful way.

Community Food Security is not the only term to describe the many efforts taking place to create a more sustainable and just food system. Other frameworks might be useful in understanding these questions both theoretically and practically. For this study of the Good Food Box program, however, I have deliberately chosen to focus on the framework of CFS for two reasons. First, CFS is a decidedly multifaceted and holistic approach that seeks to integrate the concerns of producers and consumers in systemic change to address both hunger and production problems. As scholars have pointed out, this could create a number of tensions as programs navigate multiple goals; I am interested in studying this tension. Additionally, the original GFB program, founded in Toronto, was initiated with the strong support of the Toronto Food Policy Council, which has served as a think tank for some of the leaders in developing the concept and practice of CFS, including Rod MacRae and Wayne Roberts (Welsh and MacRae 1998). Because part of my goal is to understand how the GFB has evolved as it has been scaled out across Canada, it makes sense to choose the theoretical framework utilized by the founders of the original GFB program.

The Good Food Box

Given its recent spread across Canada, the GFB as a community food security and justice-oriented program constitutes a compelling phenomenon to explore scaling out. The non-profit organization FoodShare Toronto (FoodShare) started the first GFB in 1994. It has subsequently spread to more than 50 communities in Canada. According to FoodShare, the GFB originated as a way to find solutions to hunger in urban Toronto by linking low-income consumers with local farmers and other produce sources through a "cooperative model of food distribution" that essentially functions like a large, centrally-coordinated bulk buying club (Morgan et al. 2008:18). Distinguishing it from more traditional charity-based feeding programs, the founders' philosophy was that "communities should not be dependent on handouts of food, nor should handouts be necessary" (Morgan et al. 2008: 18). Today, GFB customers in Toronto pay $13-$33 (depending on size and contents) for a pre-ordered box, and in return receive nutritious, high-quality fruits and vegetables at approximately 30% lower cost than if they had gone to a grocery store (Morgan et al. 2008: 30).

Much of the existing literature on the Good Food Box focuses on the FoodShare Toronto program. One of its founders, Katheryn Scharf (2000), wrote about the history and structure of the original GFB program. According to Scharf, an advisory group of farmers and anti-hunger advocates proposed the idea of a centrally-coordinated buying club. By circumventing the mainstream grocery store system, their hope was to create an "efficient and sustainable system" that would lower the cost of food while opening up new markets for local farmers (Scharf 2000: 122).

The GFB takes a CFS-oriented view, which is "distinct from, though not incompatible with, other strategies to reduce hunger" (Scharf 2000: 123). Scholars describe the FoodShare program as "a business with a clear social mission" that "is not part of the charitable tradition" (Welsh and MacRae 1998: 253). For example, as opposed to food banks and welfare programs, FoodShare's GFB is universal, or open to all, regardless of need. Additionally, the program focuses on providing "a good-quality product and good service [to] give customers the message that they are valued…The high-quality food in the GFB is intended to send the message that "you're worth it'" (Scharf 2000: 124). Beyond simply providing caloric nourishment, the GFB works on multiple fronts to address problems of food insecurity, nutrition education, reskilling of the population in areas of food preparation, community organizing and empowerment, and taking back a measure of control from the concentrated, mainstream food distribution channels.

Yet scholars also note that the program in Toronto "is constantly negotiating the tensions between the need for efficiency, competitiveness, and health promotion with that for service and responsiveness to community needs" (Scharf 2000: 127). Balancing goals and working with limited resources is a concern. On one hand, the GFB contains elements of a traditional business, such as the need to provide high-quality, efficient service and products, and to treat program participants as customers, rather than clients. On the other hand, far from being a traditional business, the GFB has a clear social justice mission, and in many ways "the GFB is more like a traditional nonprofit organization, governed by an ethic of service, rather than a preoccupation with the bottom line" (Scharf 2000: 125). For instance, while the customers pay the cost of the produce in their box,

many of the other services provided by the GFB program, including box packing, overhead, staff salaries, and complementary programs at FoodShare are subsidized through grants, donations, and volunteer labor.

Josée Johnson, another GFB researcher, explains that the Toronto program tries to balance "the social/equity concerns of the "reds" and the ecological agenda of the "greens" (Johnson 2003: 1). While she acknowledges that programs like the GFB "can be quite successful at the micro-level," she also cautions "simultaneously balancing environmental goals with income redistribution is an exceptionally difficulty, often contradictory, task"(Johnson 2003: 2). Scholars have not fully explored how other GFB programs across Canada prioritize and balance these multiple goals, or even if the goals embodied in the FoodShare program have been pursued elsewhere in the country.

According to Johnson and Baker (2005: 313), in order to create a bigger impact, the projects such as the GFB "must 'scale out' to other localities, as well as 'scale up' to address structural concerns." Harriet Freidman (2007) provides an example of "scaling up" by describing how FoodShare Toronto partnered with other local groups and advocates to create the Local Food Plus label to help guide just and sustainable food purchasing decisions for public institutions and others in Toronto. There is a paucity of research, however, on the ongoing process by which the GFB has been scaled *out* to communities across Canada, the variety of existing programs and their goals, challenges, and successes. This thesis aims to help fill that gap, which should prove useful to both scholars and practitioners.

During the summer of 2011, I had the opportunity to experience the FoodShare GFB program in-depth as a graduate intern with the FoodShare Toronto Good Food

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Team. During this time, I participated in the day-to-day running of the GFB program in Toronto, as well as researched the network of GFB programs across Canada. I observed that, as noted in the literature, the GFB program in Toronto is about more than food because it encompasses other CFS and community development goals, such as: a job skills training program for youth with barriers to employment, space for neighborhood drop-off coordinators to become politically active leaders, a commitment to buying local food whenever possible, and a thriving community of volunteers that create knowledge and share it amongst themselves. My observations of FoodShare helped me see that there are also struggles with running a holistic suite of CFS programs. For instance, the GFB manager must navigate multiple program goals, including balancing the box contents between locally produced food, culturally appropriate food, and food that is affordable to the program and its participants.

Some of the most intriguing research that I began during my time at FoodShare involved cataloguing and gathering information about the various GFBs that have been founded across Canada. In total, using internet searches, phone calls, and word-of-mouth, I located about 50 different GFB programs. Most self-identify as a "Good Food Box" program, but some have slightly different names, such as "Good Food Bag," "Fresh Food Box," or "Food Basket." All are locally based and provide participants with the opportunity to pay in advance for a box of healthy food that they receive at close to wholesale price.

Prior to my research there was very little comprehensive information on these programs; even the contact information for other programs that FoodShare had on their website was outdated. As I learned about this diversity of GFB programs, it brought to

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light how valuable it could be to survey as many programs as possible in order to understand the evolution and current state of GFB programs across Canada. There is little information on the variety and innovations of smaller GFB programs, as well as on the overall contribution of Canada's various Good Food Box programs to society.

A few previous studies shed light on various elements of individual GFB programs. For instance, Loopstra and Tarasauk (2013) conducted research into barriers low income families experience accessing three Toronto CFS program models, including the GFB. Of the 371 families who participated in their study, only 4 participated in the GFB program. Of those who did not participate in the Toronto GFB program, over 92% of respondents said that they did not know what the program was or how to participate (Loopstra and Tarasauk 2013: 57). This indicates that, for these neighborhoods in Toronto, a problem with GFB awareness and advertizing exists. Does the same problem affect other neighborhoods and other programs? Has another community found a way to address this problem that other GFB programs could try as well?

In one of the few papers written about a GFB program rooted outside of Toronto, Marilyn Brownlee and Allison Cammer (2004) discuss the experiences of new GFB participants in the Child Hunger and Education Program (CHEP)'s GFB program in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, which is the second-largest GFB program in Canada after Toronto. Through interviews and focus groups, Brownlee and Cammer discovered that the GFB improved eating habits by increasing the availability of fresh fruits and vegetables in participant households and providing useful recipes in the newsletter (Brownlee and Cammer 2004:1). They also found that the GFB increased participants' awareness of, and interest in, other related food- and social justice issues (Brownlee and

Cammer 2004: 17). While they noted many positive aspects of the program, the research participants also mentioned a number of barriers, including difficulties keeping volunteer neighborhood coordinators and possible hesitance to participate in the program if it is seen as being a charity-based program aimed solely at low-income people (even though CHEP's program, like FoodShare's, does not administer a means test for participation) (Brownlee and Cammer 2004: 17). Do other GFB programs in Canada also deal with challenges like keeping volunteer coordinators and explaining that the program is open to all? Do other programs also experience client impacts such as an increased knowledge and activism?

The few regional studies of the GFB outside of Toronto suggest that a great deal of variety exists in terms of how programs are structured, and even the goals they might choose to pursue. For instance, Hammel (2009) assessed the possibility of including local food in the GFB in Grey and Bruce counties in Ontario. In addition to administering surveys to local coordinators in the program, suppliers, and local farmers, she also conducted interviews with four neighboring programs, and found that, among them, they had three different models for procuring local produce (Hammel 2009: 6). Hammel then suggested a different, fourth model to pilot in Grey and Bruce counties, based loosely off the other programs but tailored to the circumstances within the local community. In addition documenting rising interest in local food provisioning among GFB programs, as well as some of the challenges and solutions to purchasing local food for the GFB, Hammel's work suggests that GFB programs are actively evolving, and that a great variety of models and ways of doing business may exist amongst them.

In a manual for British Columbia Cathleen Kneen (2004) agrees that there are "many models" for GFBs but she suggests that, in her area at least, GFB programs share four key principles: "no barriers to participation…, a strong commitment to local, in season food, high-quality fruits and vegetables…, [and] foods purchased as much as possible direct from farmers" (Kneen 2004:1).   She later adds, "the emphasis is always on local, in-season produce" (2).   This contrasts with what Hammel found, where some GFB programs were only starting to be interested in local provisioning, and again suggests that a great deal of variety may exist among GFB programs, the goals they choose to pursue, and the ways they do so.

FoodShare Toronto has published *The Good Food Box: A Manual* (Morgan et al. 2008), a guide to increase interest and help get others started (Morgan et al. 2008). It describes how the GFB program in Toronto was founded and currently functions, and also contains a few profiles of other GFB programs, as well as discussions of the resources necessary to manage a successful program. It would be useful to know more about how and to what extent resources like this manual or others have been a part of scaling out the GFB in Canada. Additionally, in that it describes the principles and functions of the Toronto, *The Good Food Box: A Manual* can be useful as a sort of baseline description of the original program to which one can compare other GFB programs in different locations.

The *Manual* also includes an interesting discussion of program goals, intimating that these may vary and evolve over time. For instance, in Toronto:

> We started with a focus on healthy, affordable food that would be used by the widest range of cultural groups. We have since broadened our goals to include purchasing produce from local farmers, supporting sustainable farming practices, and increasing

> convenient prepared produce for aging, ailing, or busy
> individuals (Morgan et al. 2008: 26).

To other programs, they say, "it is important to decide what the goals of your program are before you begin" (Morgan et al. 2008:25). They offer the following to consider:

- Making fresh food available, especially for low-income communities
- Promoting healthy food
- Supporting local farmers
- Supporting organic agriculture
- Offering culturally specific fruits and vegetables
- Increase convenience of eating healthily (Morgan et al. 2008:26-27)

These are just suggestions, though. *The Good Food Box: A Manual* does not prescribe any goals, nor any particular logistical model. In fact, it encourages local adaptation and use of resources, and again suggests that many variations of the GFB program may exist.

In-depth studies and manuals featuring programs in one location or region, such as those discussed here, provide a deep level of knowledge about the challenges and opportunities of a GFB program as it is operating within a single geographic location. Yet more research is needed into what the overall impact and reality is for all of the GFB programs operating across Canada. For instance, although Loopstra and Tarasauk (2013) indicate that, in Toronto, lack of advertising and knowledge could be keeping customers from accessing the GFB, it is unclear what this finding means for other communities with GFB programs. Similarly, do other programs face the same challenges reaching low-income audiences that Brownlee and Cammer found? Do even more ways of provisioning local food and working with farmers exist than those discussed by Hammel? What have been the effect of models like the program in Toronto in terms of influencing what others do? What goals and functions have remained constant across the GFB landscape since inception, and which have been changed or let go?

Situating this Research

This research begins to answer some of the questions of the GFB and its relationship to CFS. By interviewing 21 GFB managers in varying communities across Canada, I was able to gain more insight into how the program model has scaled out, as well as the effects of this scaling out, specifically in the variety of programs that exist. As we will see in the chapters to follow, the GFB programs functioning across Canada have diverse goals, tensions sometimes arise when balancing multiple goals, and programs have found various ways to resolve these tensions. Moreover, I gained new information about how GFB programs are educating and empowering people in their communities, as well as networking and learning among themselves.

In the following chapters, I describe the diversity among the 21 GFB programs, and reflect on some of the implications of this research. While some elements have remained more or less consistent, the GFB has evolved over the course of its scaling out, and a good deal of heterogeneity exists. I begin by describing my research methods, and the sample of GFB managers who participated in my study. Next, I describe the variety of programs in my study, focusing on their goals, how they purchase and distribute food, and how they relate to their customers, community, and other GFB programs. I also make note of how programs negotiate multiple goals, and the impact of logistical constraints on these decisions. The GFB is one form of CFS in action, and in the conclusion, I draw together these findings to reflect on the diversity created when CFS programs adapt to new communities, the challenges and opportunities created as they try to balance competing aims, and the role that programs like the GFB could serve in expanding the impact of CFS. My hope is that this in-depth qualitative descriptive study gives voice to

the experiences of GFB managers in a variety of programs across Canada, in order to

understand more fully how the country-wide GFB network has come to be, and the

extent, impacts, challenges and innovations that have resulted from this scaling out.

METHODOLOGY: FEATURED RECIPE

To accomplish the objectives of this study, I conducted in-depth qualitative interviews with program staff from 21 GFB programs located across Canada. Choosing a qualitative, interview-based approach to the research allowed me to gather richer data than a simple survey might have yielded. Qualitative methods gather exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory information (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2011: 10-11) about a phenomenon.

I developed an interview guide that included questions about how the GFB program purchases and distributes food, whether and how they participate in other community development initiatives, how decisions are made, how their community's GFB program was started, and their interactions with other GFB programs. The conversations followed a semi-structured interview format, which enabled me to ask for the same information from each of the research participants, but also gave "individual respondents some latitude and freedom to talk about what is of interest and important to them" (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2006: 102).

Following a semi-structured interview format was also advantageous because it allowed "the conversation to flow more naturally, making room for the conversation to go in unexpected directions" (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2011: 102). Some participants ultimately answered questions in different orders, but I was careful to remember to ask them all for the same information, circling back to earlier questions if necessary, and used probes and follow-up questions in order to elicit deeper descriptions and answers (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2011). My research participants often had ideas and knowledge that I had not thought to ask about, and the semi-structured format gave me the latitude

necessary to explore and respond to these new topics and ideas while still gathering standard information for all of the participants.

Due to logistical constraints, all of the interviews were conducted over the telephone. To the best of my knowledge, all of the research participants were in their office at the time of the interview, except for three who were at home when I called. Telephone interviews can be difficult because "they are not happening face-to-face, and thus gesturing, eye contact, and other means of showing interest and building rapport are not possible" (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2011:99). To overcome these challenges, I built rapport in a brief conversation before the interview started and used vocal cues and prompts to show that I was listening, engaged, and interested in what the research participant had to say throughout the interview. My interviews ranged from 36 to 88 minutes in length, with an average of 54 minutes.

Quotations are an important tool for depicting the perspectives of respondents. In presenting quotations, I have used verbatim language, but have removed awkward phrases (e.g., "um") to make it easier to read. Deletions have are indicated with ellipses, as is customary. The participants understood that their remarks would remain confidential; in the following analysis, when I use direct quotes I cite them with the interview number, rather than a specific program or manager name.

To locate potential research participants, I began with a contact list that I had created during my tenure as an intern with the Good Food Team at FoodShare Toronto during the summer of 2011. At that time, I used internet searches and phone calls to update FoodShare's out-of-date listings for GFB programs across Canada. This list was helpful in understanding the general diversity of Good Food Box programs, but much of

the contact information had changed since in 2011 and needed further revision, which I did as I reached out to programs and received updated information.

Additionally, the 2011 FoodShare list had contact information for a number of GFB programs that my research revealed are actually satellite distribution locations for another GFB program, which does all the coordinating and ordering, and then sends boxes to the satellite location for customers to pick up. For the purpose of my study, I did not consider these satellite locations distinct programs. My definition of a unique Good Food Box is the one central program that coordinates the purchasing and distribution of food, and which may or may not have other satellite locations. To the best of my knowledge, there are between 50 and 60 unique Good Food Box programs currently operating across Canada.[1]

I selected the programs to participate in my research from the updated list. The question of how the GFB has spread across Canada and been adapted to new communities has both temporal (when the program was founded) and spatial (where the program is located) elements. Therefore, I created a sampling frame to get a good variety of both old and new programs, as well as programs that are located in the province of Ontario (as over half of current GFB programs are) and programs outside of Ontario. I sorted the GFB programs into four groups: 1) Ontario programs founded between 1994 and 2001; 2) non-Ontario programs founded between 1994 and 2001; 3) Ontario programs founded between 2002 and 2012; and 4) non-Ontario programs founded between 2002 and 2012 (see table 1). I then randomized the lists of GFB programs in

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[1] I cannot guarantee that my research did not miss any small, obscure programs, nor that GFB programs have not started or closed since my interviews were conducted.

each category, and began contacting programs, starting with the first program on each list and moving downward.

I initially contacted potential interview participants via e-mail and phone calls. First, I sent an e-mail explaining who I was and the purpose of the study. If I did not receive a response to my initial e-mail within 3-5 days, I followed up with a phone call. If I still did not receive a response after three follow-up attempts, I moved on to the next program on my randomized list. I contacted seven programs that did not end up participating in the study, one of which is no longer operational. One of the programs was interested in participating initially, but never answered their phone for interviews, even when we rescheduled. I received no response at all from five of the programs. Including the program that is no longer operational, this represents a response rate of 75 percent.

The interviews were recorded for accuracy and fully transcribed. I used a process of open and then selective coding to sort and analyze the data for themes and concepts (Becker 1998, Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2011). I looked for both manifest and latent meaning through my analysis, trying to assess both the "surface content" and values that were being discussed, as well as the "underlying meaning or context" of the ideas the research participants were presenting (United States Environmental Protection Agency 2002: 95, see also Berg 2009). I worked to find themes and commonalities within the data, being careful to look for the "negative case," that is, data that does not fit the theme (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2011). These methods allowed me to systematically and objectively search for meaning in interview data (Berg 2009).

Overview of research participant programs

Program managers from 21 different GFB programs across Canada participated in interviews. Twelve of the programs included in the study began sometime before 2002, and nine were founded between 2002 and 2012. The programs were located in five different provinces: Ontario (13 GFB programs), British Columbia (3GFBs), Saskatchewan (2 GFBs), Alberta (2 GFB) and Manitoba (1 GFB). Quebec is the only other province where GFBs are located in Canada. This sample, however, is roughly proportional to the actual density of GFB programs across Canada (see table 1 and figures 1 and 2).

Table 1: Sample Characteristics

	Founded 1994-2001	**Founded 2002-2012**
Ontario	7	6
Non-Ontario	5 2-Alberta 2- Saskatchewan 1- British Columbia	3 2- British Columbia 1- Manitoba
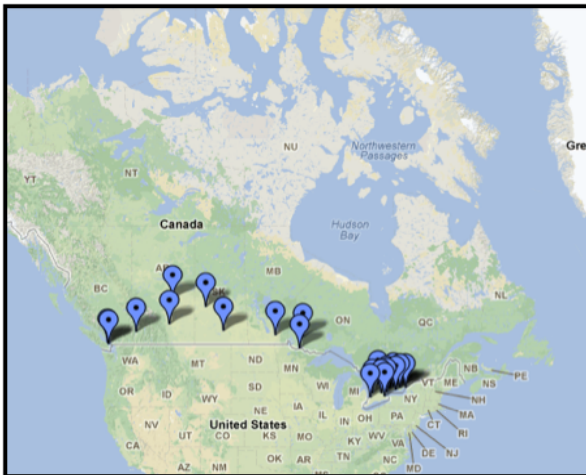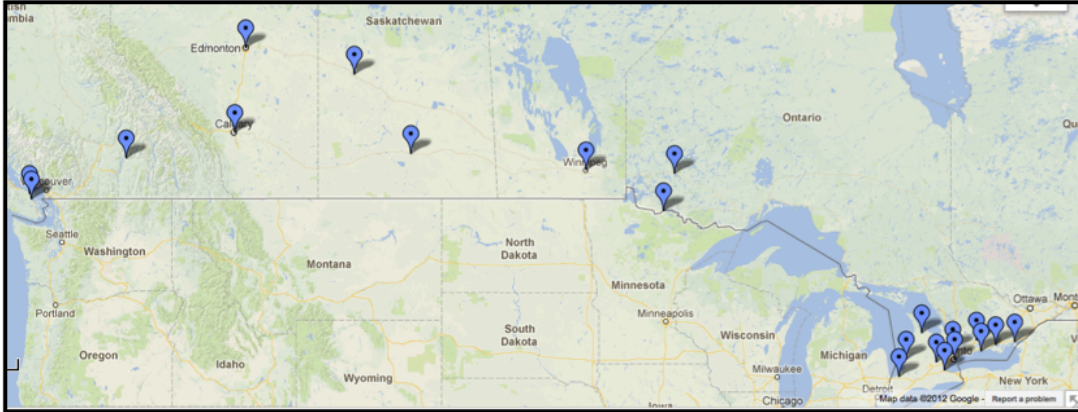
**Figures 1 and 2:
Locations of Good Food Box
Programs included in this
study**

The programs ranged in size and location from large, urban centers to sparsely

populated, rural counties. The smallest deliver about 40 boxes each month, while the

largest packs and distributes upwards of 4,000 boxes per month. In total, three programs

deliver fewer than 100 boxes monthly, five programs deliver between 300 and 500, one

program delivers 500 to 700, two programs average 1200 to 1500 boxes per month, and

one delivers around 4000. Of the 21, 18 programs have one box delivery per month, all

of which occur in the second half of the month. Two programs, both serving 500-700

customers monthly, have two delivery days per month, as does one rural program serving

under 100. The program that delivers 4000 boxes a month has weekly packing and

delivery days, distributing an average of 1000 boxes per week (see figure 3).

Figure 3: Quantity of boxes distributed monthly by participating GFBs
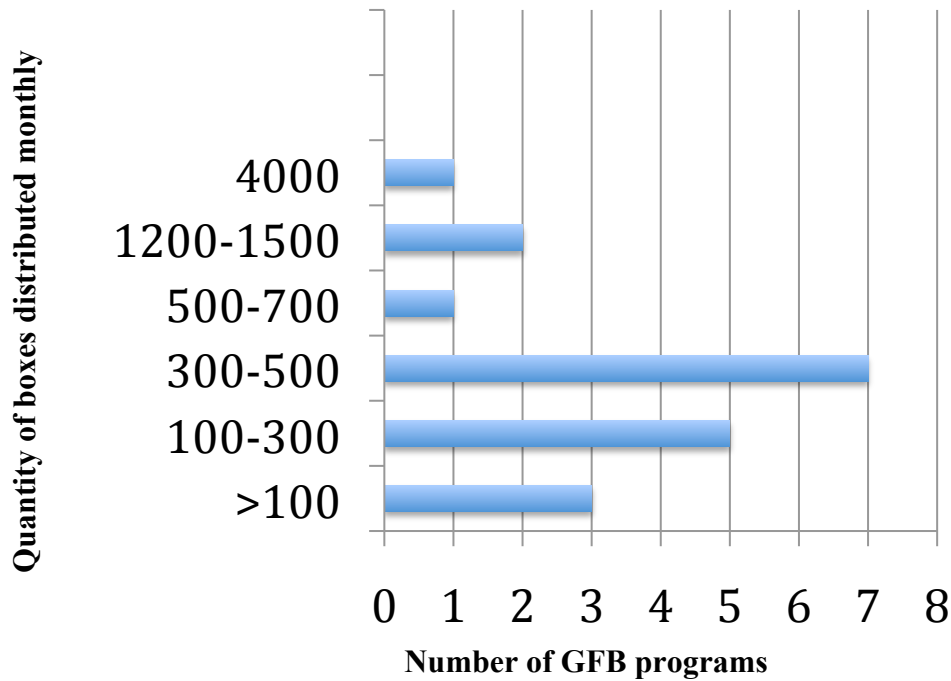
Thirteen of the programs in this study are run by non-profit organizations. Of these 13 organizations, nine are non-profits dedicated to household or community food security, and five are more general non-profit organizations, such as the Salvation Army and the YWCA. Six of the programs are housed in public health units within government agencies, and two programs are run by a cooperative of local farmers.

Individual Research Participants

During my interviews, I spoke with lead program staff from 21 different GFB programs. Although job titles varied by location, I asked to interview the person who had the closest working knowledge of the program. [2] Often, this was the person who was

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[2] Every GFB program is structured differently, making it difficult to interview one person that does the same exact job, or has the same title, across all of the programs. Most often, they were referred to as the GFB program manager, but this was not an exclusive title; others were called program coordinators or

coordinating volunteers, food purchasing, and other logistics. This group seemed most

likely to be able to provide detailed information about the day-to-day operation of their

program, as well as reflect on the history, goals, and ways goals are prioritized.

That assumption generally proved accurate, but there were some important

limitations. A weakness of only interviewing program staff is that a number of voices,

including customers, volunteers, and community members, are left out of the data.

Although this approach sacrificed depth of knowledge of individual programs, choosing

to engage with managers from many different programs allowed the study to capture a

breadth of program models and experiences across Canada, something that has not yet

been reported in the literature.

Of the program managers I spoke with, there were four men and 17 women.

Seven had started in their position within the last three years (since 2010). Nine were

hired between 2000-2009, and four have been working with their programs since the

1990s.

A potential limitation to this approach is that some of the research participants

have only been in their position for a few years, which compromised their ability to give

full answers to questions about the program's founding and early years. Of the 21

interviewees, seven had been with the program since its inception and 14 had started after

the GFB was already up and running in their communities. Yet 16 did have reliable

knowledge about their program's beginning, based on official training or first hand

experience that they were able to share with me. Furthermore, all were able to speak

about the goals and structure of their GFB program as it is currently operating.

operations directors. For ease and clarity, in my discussion and analysis, I refer to the research participants
as GFB program managers, even though some may have a different job name.

ANALYSIS: FRUITS

My aim in this project was to understand the variety of GFB programs that exist,

what goals and priorities impact their structure and function, and how knowledge about

the GFB spreads. In the following analysis, I begin by describing the categories of goals

that GFB program managers I spoke with identified. These goals impact how the various

GFB programs make and execute decisions, and reoccur throughout the analysis. Next, I

discuss the variety of ways that programs relate to customers; choose, pack and distribute

food; and how they interact with and learn from other GFB programs. I also discuss

some of the reasons behind their programmatic choices, and some of the tensions arise

when program managers must navigate competing goals and limited resources. In

addition, I provide examples of some of the creative and innovative ways that GFB

programs have found to negotiate these issues and achieve their goals. Some of these

program variations and innovations have not been documented in the literature before.

Documenting their variety increases our appreciation of the possible contributions of the

GFB and similar CFS programs. They can also provide useful examples for others

engaged in similar food system work.

Common Program Elements

GFB programs across Canada, like the communities they serve, are quite diverse,

varying in size, location, box contents, how the program is administered, goals, and target

audience. Yet while GFB programs vary in many ways, some elements were common to

all the GFB programs in this study. These included:[3]

- A central entity exists (the organization administering the Good
  Food Box program) to coordinate the purchasing and distribution
  of food, purchased in bulk to lower costs

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[3] And likely for all programs that identify themselves as GFB programs.

- The program provides a box of food, at regular intervals to customers who pay in advance
- The food in the box comes from more than one grower (though not necessarily more than one supplier)
- The program is open to anyone who wishes to participate, regardless of income level
- Volunteer labor and community partnerships are key resources involved in the success of the GFB program

These common elements' emphasis on building alternative distribution channels to connect producers and consumers, creating community partnerships and emphasizing the role of civil society help situate the GFB program within the framework of CFS (Anderson and Cook 1999, Hamm and Bellows 2003, Winne 1998) and the emerging concept of civic food networks (Renting et al. 2012). They are consistent with some, but not all, of the key features of the original Toronto GFB as identified by Morgan (2008), and have stayed with the program concept as it has spread across Canada.

Good Food Box Goals

GFB programs across Canada embody a diversity of goals, related to topics such as health, social well-being, and economic growth. In turn, these goals tend to influence program structure and decision-making. Although there was no goal that all of the GFB programs in this study claimed universally, there were a number of common themes, including increasing access, improving food quality and nutrition, supporting a more value-based and localized supply chain, and creating new social spaces and relationships to food. Additionally, many program managers noted that organizational goals, such as program maintenance, growth, and legitimacy in the community, were also very important considerations. GFB programs act based on a number of goals simultaneously, tensions sometimes arise when this occurs, and GFB programs differ in how they weigh goals and make decisions. Below, I briefly describe the main categories of goals

identified by the program managers that I spoke with. These themes will also return throughout, as I describe how the programs structure their packing and distribution systems, choose their box contents, and interact with their customers and other programs.

Increasing Food Access

One of the most common goals named by GFB managers was basic food access for their customers. Seventeen managers identified increasing access to food as one of their main program goals, and of these, eight said that increasing food access was one of the main reasons that their program was started. For some, this meant making food more affordable, as one program manager explained, "our mandate is to help people in need, and help people stretch their food dollar" (3). In the words of another, "we try to provide affordable food to everybody… That's what our goal is" (10). To some programs, the goal of improving access to food means improving physical access, and is accomplished with actions like locating depot sites in food deserts (areas where residents do not have ready access to fresh food). When describing the goals of her program, one manager noted that, "we aim to be in communities where there is maybe no grocery stores within walking distance" (1).

Others describe increasing access to food as an integrated effort between making food affordable, and getting it into neighborhoods where people can access it. Many program managers recognized the need for both physical and financial access to food and the interconnected nature of these facets. As one manager explained:

> The GFB program is geared to increase access to food for
> people. Our target audiences are people that have access issues;
> that can be financial issues or geographic issues, which usually
> tie into financial issues. Like some of the neighborhoods in [our
> city] not only are made up of people living in financial need but
> they also don't have ready access…to grocery stores where they
> could even buy fresh produce at a reasonable cost (14).

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Another GFB manager talked about how her program helped to fill a food access gap

between food banks and more traditional food outlets, remarking:

> I think its great having grocery stores, [but] I don't know if it's
> sustainable for that to be the only way. Currently there are so
> many people who can't participate in that system, that need
> something different. And is food banks the best way for them to
> participate? I don't know (16).

As we will see, the goal of increasing food access influences GFB programs in a number

of ways, including where they choose to locate, what organizations they partner with, and

what types and prices of produce they include in their box.

Improving Health and Nutrition

Good Food Boxes bring food into areas that may not be near a grocery store or

food bank, but that is not the only thing that makes them a unique model for a food

program. Although they are concerned with basic food access, this was not the only goal

for any of the programs. All were also concerned with two or more other goals relating

to the community, their customers, or their food supply chain. One of the most common

of these goals among the programs I spoke with regarded the quality of food being

distributed in the boxes. Sixteen of the program managers that I spoke with described

their goal as more than just getting calories to eaters; they aim to improve the quality of

food that people are eating. In fact, six managers mentioned that their program was

founded specifically to improve the *quality* of food that people could access.

These program managers said they are not satisfied with simply distributing food

to people; they are interested in procuring and supplying high-quality, nutritious food for

their customers. In the words of one program manager, "we're all about healthy food at

affordable [prices]" (1). And according to another manager, "my main goal is to make

healthy fruits and vegetables available to all" (21). The goal of improving health,

nutrition, and quality influences food purchasing decisions, and for some of the GFB

programs it also influences education and outreach efforts.

Building a Better Food System

In addition to goals relating to access, nutrition, and quality, ten GFB programs

also mentioned goals related to developing new, more just and sustainable values along

the food supply chain. As one manager described:

> The whole reason that the GFB program [exists]… isn't that
> there's a lack of food out there, but the distribution system…is
> just broken and not really working for everybody. So we want to
> make sure it works for consumers and works for the growers and
> works for the people in-between … by looking at it as a holistic
> approach…Now and in the future that things can work better for
> everybody; a farmer needs to be able to continue growing our
> food and they need to be able to make money off of doing that
> and do it healthily and then it needs to be able to get to the
> consumers in a good time and in a good way. That's always
> been a priority of ours is to work well with farms and work well
> with our own local food economy (14).

Within the 21 programs, most of the focus given to production practices centers

around supporting local producers. Ten managers said that purchasing locally was a

main goal within their program, and additional program managers said they purchase

locally as well. For some program managers, this goal was also manifested in other

aspects of their work, through unique local GFB projects such as education programs for

local farmers, activism around food policy changes, and working to develop local food

system infrastructure.   Additionally, two managers mentioned seeking out farms with

reduced pesticide use, and one mentioned prioritizing fair labor practices.

Creating Social Space and New Relationships Around Food

In addition to improving the quality of food their customers are receiving, six of

the program managers discussed goals of improving and changing the social space in

which their customers picked up the food. They connected these social goals to the health and wellbeing of their community and their customers. For example, when asked about the goal of providing low-income food access, one manager remarked that her program has "that component, but it's also about neighborhood, and community, and bringing people together around food" (5). Another manager explained:

> The idea is, yes, to have secure nutritious affordable food for everyone, that's true. But … the program is also to provide a nexus point, or an intersection point, that people start to build a sense of community. Because a sense of community is as important as food for wellbeing and health. This is actually a very important part of our program… community building as well as food provisioning. It's not only healthy nutritious food, but its food that is delivered in a way that makes people feel really good about themselves (17).

A few program managers also mentioned the potential for new social connections to evolve into action for a better food system. In the words of one manager:

> We're really trying to develop a sense of a movement as well, like changing the food system, and a feeling that…they're not just part of a program and they get the boxes, but they're actually part of creating something, an alternative system (15).

This goal of creating new relationships around food runs counter to the current of industrial food system's process of distancing (Kloppenberg et al. 1996), and instead seeks to elevate the role and responsibilities of food consumers. It has influenced many aspects of the GFB programs represented in this study, including how customers are treated and targeted, how food is distributed, and also the quality of foods that are selected to be included in the boxes. It also is manifested in many education efforts that the GFB programs have developed to give their customers new food skills and ways of relating to fresh produce.

Program Maintenance

My research revealed that logistical concerns such as program growth and maintenance weighed heavily on the minds of most of the GFB managers with whom I spoke, and influenced the ways that they operated their program. Fourteen of the programs in this study are run by non-profits, five are run by government agencies, and two are run by farmer-owned cooperative businesses. None of them have a large budget. Every manager mentioned that funding was a challenge for them, and seven said that finding funds to support their operations was their biggest challenge.

Fourteen of managers said funding constraints and inconsistencies had negatively affected their program's staffing capacity, leading to heavy reliance on volunteer labor, overworked managers, and staff turnover. One lamented, "A lot of our funding got cut back so I lost all of my really amazing staff… [It's] tough to fundraise for core staffing and rent and stuff like that"(16). Resource constraints also impact the ability to plan and expand programs. Eight managers said that their programs were currently at capacity, but could not consider growing or evolving without additional funds for developing and executing an expanded program. Five said that funding impacted their ability to purchase necessary infrastructure for their program such as coolers and delivery vehicles.

Finally, three managers described how a funding source had helped determine the goals and target clientele of their programs. Two of these programs were receiving funds from their county governments, which simultaneously allowed and compelled them to expand to serve a countywide audience. On the other hand, a different program used to receive funding from their county's Public Health Unit to support a subsidy for low-income people, but once the funding ran out, the program "took on a natural clientele of

its own." This manager explained that her program's primary goal was providing an outlet for local producers, and without the funding to keep the program focused on low income access as well, "It ended up appealing more to the busier people in town like working families simply because it's more convenient than going to the Farmers Market" (18).

The programs studied fund their operations through a combination of private and government grants, donations from individuals, program revenues (box margins), and in-kind donations from community partners and volunteers. All are dependent on at least two or more sources for funding and other resources, and funding inconsistencies can make it difficult for programs to plan. One manager explained, "We would like to see sustainable funding…because there's such a need for it…. [For us,] it's been different sources of funding through the years. It's never been like one sustainable pot, ever. It's a bit tenuous" (17). This unpredictability can be compounded by the fact that in the Canadian federal system, and welfare and food programs are primarily Provincial responsibilities (Riches 1997). There is no major national-level financial support for food security programs equivalent to the United States' Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, commonly known as food stamps, and Provincial support for CFS initiatives can vary widely (Morgan et al. 2008: 15-16).

Understandably, GFB managers need to weigh the goal of continuing and growing their program into decisions that they make, and my research shows that costs and logistics play an important role in determining many aspects of the program, including what products are put into the boxes, how food is packed and distributed, and even the decision to make programs open to all.

Customer Relations

Universal Programs

Every program I learned about was universal, that is, open to everyone in the community regardless of circumstance or income level. In other words, the programs do not require anyone to pass a means test, or "prove you are poor"(1) in order to purchase a box. The reasoning behind universal programs is at once philosophical and practical.

First, having a program open to everyone potentially makes it more welcoming for low-income people and other vulnerable populations. Part of the aim is to create a new social space for them and a more dignified way to relate to food. The GFB program in Toronto began as a universal program, created in response to what founders viewed as unjust conditions of food banks and the stigma created by having to utilize services that automatically signify that a person is very poor (Delind 1994, Morgan et al. 2008, Poppendieck 1998, Tarasauk and Eakin, 2005 Winne 2008). Eleven of the 21 interviewees mentioned that they have a universal program at least in part because they wanted to prevent a stigma from being created. One research participant explained:

> There's a whole thing around stigmatism…if a program is
> geared towards, say low income families…you don't want
> people to feel, like any sense of embarrassment or feel any
> stigmatism around participating in a program because it means
> that they're coming from a low-income family or something. So,
> by making it universal you also help to avoid that problem (4).

In other words, if everyone can use the program, then poor people will be less likely to be deterred from utilizing the GFB based on a perceived shame or stigma. As one GFB manager noted about her program's opposition to means testing, "it's a less hostile process if the intake isn't invasive. It's more dignified" (21).

Another reason for making the GFB open to all is that everyone, not just low-income people, could benefit from participation. Interviewees pointed out problems with

the current food system, including high prices and lack of consumer control. These

explanations hinted at a more community food security or food sovereignty-related,

holistic view of the food system. For example, one program manager argued that:

> Really basically everyone is a vulnerable population. You know,
> like, if you're going shopping at the Safeway and you're waiting
> for a truck to bring your groceries to Safeway to get stocked on
> your shelf, that to me means that you are part of a vulnerable
> population because you're, you know, its not *you* that's making
> the decision about what Safeway buys, as in you aren't
> organizing the logistics and you aren't paying for the gas to go in
> the truck, so to me, any of that control that's out of your own
> hands qualifies you as a vulnerable population (1).

Two program managers also cited the rising price of food and fuel in Canada, one

explaining, "everybody's feeling [higher prices], not just the people who are on limited

income or who are on assistance" (4).   This was also related to the goal of improving

nutrition and food quality. For example, one manager noted that everyone could benefit

from eating more healthy fruits and vegetables.

Prevention of stigma and the fact that everyone can benefit from the program are

two reasons for universal access mentioned in previous literature on the GFB (Morgan et

al. 2008, Welsh and MacRae 1998). The interviews also brought to light an additional

reason for having a GFB open to everyone: program sustainability. Although no

interviewee mentioned this as the sole reason for operating a universal program, seven

noted that the additional customers helped ensure their ability to operate and keep the

GFB viable for the long term. For example, one manager explained that including

customers of relatively greater means is "a good thing in terms of keeping the program's

numbers…consistent, to help with the sustainability of the program," (4). More

customers can lead to a better value for everyone involved: "It tends to be taken up by

folks on low incomes but we actually have people from all income levels participating in the program. We believe the more the merrier and it helps our purchasing powers"(21).

Beyond increasing purchasing power and stabilizing customer numbers, some GFB programs have found additional ways for their higher-income customers to support the program. Seven GFB managers mentioned that they fund their operations at least partially through margins reserved from the cost that customers pay, meaning that additional steady customers would lead to more money for things like outreach, education, and staff time. For instance, one GFB uses one dollar from each full price box to help cover program costs and subsidies for low-income customers, explaining,

> That's why we tell everybody it's for everybody—we're using a dollar of your box to help with the operating cost. So, because you have the means, we still want you to buy the box, because you're helping this program, especially those who don't have the means, to get it at a good bargain (6).

To further increase their ability to help those particularly in need, four programs mentioned encouraging customers and other community members to donate beyond the cost of their own box to support the cost of giving boxes or discounts to others. Money is not the only resource that additional customers contribute: one program manager cited the energy and time of middle-class volunteers and leaders as some of the greatest contributions of a universal program (5).

Target audiences

Although the programs are all universal, many of them do aim to reach certain target populations. Of the 21 programs studied, 17 GFB managers named low-income people as one group towards which their program is geared. According to one interviewee, "our mandate is to help people in need, and help people stretch their food dollar" (3). Some of these programs also named other target audiences. Five programs

specifically mentioned reaching out to pregnant women and children, three to seniors, and three to people with mental or physical disabilities.

On the other hand, four of the programs explicitly stated that they are open to all and have no target audience. For these GFBs, the benefits of a universal program, discussed above, are paramount. When asked if her program had a target audience, one manager replied, "No, we don't. We chose that anybody and everybody can get a GFB. Really, there's no target audience" (13). Another explained:

> We try to reach out to everybody. Our motto is, 'if you eat you qualify.'…the hardest thing can be getting that out to people. Some people still have the notion that it's for people on lower income. But for us, it's the more produce I'm able to purchase, the better deal I'm able to get (4).

This is not to say that these programs are necessarily inaccessible to low-income people, nor that those programs that target low-income populations are not open or welcoming to all. Most have multiple objectives and benefit from increased customer numbers. As one manager described, "our main target areas are seniors, single-parent families, low-income families… but the program isn't just for them… anyone can access it. Our main target is to get healthy produce into homes" (19). A few program managers did acknowledge, however, that the cost of their box did still make it inaccessible to some, especially the poorest members of their community.

Reaching Target Audiences

The program managers with whom I spoke mentioned some key barriers to reaching their target audiences: stigma, physical access, knowledge, and price. Physical access to a box includes having a distribution location close enough, and being able to get the box home. Knowledge includes awareness of the program itself, and the skills and resources necessary to actually use and eat the fresh produce in the box. Below, I discuss

these barriers in more depth, as well as offering examples of some of the solutions that GFB program managers I spoke with are finding to overcome them.

Stigma Despite the fact that all of the GFBs in this study[4] are open to everyone in the community and market themselves as such, GFBs are sometimes still associated with poverty. According to one program manager, "one of the things that most Good Food Boxes struggle with is that there's a perception that they're only for low income people, and that there's a stigma associated with receiving or purchasing a GFB" (7). Six of the 21 participants in this study mentioned that this misperception is a problem for their program, and five listed it as their biggest challenge. In the words of one interviewee, "People weren't aware of the program. We are not the food bank. This is a paid program and we are open to everyone" (20). On the other hand, one program manager said that they face confusion from both ends of the socioeconomic scale: those of more means in the community think the box is only for low-income people, while low-income customers "said, 'oh yeah, that's for the wealthy.' So, it's very odd that the poor people feel like it's for the people who are more well-off, and the people who are well off think, 'oh, no, that's for the poor.' It's a really hard thing to communicate to people" (10).

This confusion and stigma around the program is also consistent with the challenges identified by Brownlee and Cammer (2004: 12), whose study of the CHEP GFB program in Saskatoon found that "general perceptions" of the program were the biggest barrier to participation. They found that low-income people were hesitant to participate because "ordering a Good Food Box might be indicative of poverty, and nobody wants to have attached to them the stigma of poverty." Yet, simultaneously, "some who perceive [the] GFB as a food assistance program might not even inquire

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[4] And, in fact, all of the GFB programs that I am familiar with.

about the program—that is, they do not feel that they should be taking from those in need." (Brownlee and Cammer 2004:14).

Some programs have taken action to address this confusion. Three described targeting advertising and marketing resources to the message that the box was open to all. Two even changed their names to something other than "Good Food Box" in an attempt to distance themselves from misperceptions that the program model was for poor people. Another did a feasibility study for a name change, but ultimately decided that it could not shoulder the rebranding costs, and that it would lose more from no longer having the name recognition associated with the GFB (10).

Physical access. To reach their target audiences, GFB programs sometimes locate distribution sites in low-income and other underserved communities. According to one manager, "when you look at where our sites are located, it's definitely targeting higher risk neighborhoods" (2). Other community agencies already working in that area often serve as hosts. As one manager explained:

> What we try to do then, is, considering that it's good food for
> everyone, and the people that have the lowest incomes tend to
> have the hardest time finding, or getting that sense of real food.
> So, we'll take time to target communities, and take time to find
> out if there's a partner within that community who'd be willing
> to work with us (7).

Even if a program is located in their neighborhood, carrying a large box of twenty or more pounds of food home can prove a daunting task, especially for seniors, people with disabilities, or some one who must rely on public transportation. Two GFBs have found a way to address this problem by partnering with volunteers or another community agency to deliver boxes to those who are homebound.

Price. Another way that programs aim to address the concerns of low-income populations is through attention to affordability and value. This underlying belief is important in guiding program decisions, especially in regards to how and what food is purchased for the boxes. As will be discussed later in the section on box contents and purchasing priorities, price is an important factor and many programs must weigh this desire for good value with other goals.

Many GFB programs recognize that even the low cost of their product can be unaffordable to some, and some have taken actions to make their boxes even more financially accessible. For example, one manager noted that "even though its only 20$ for a large box, there are apparently people in the community who cannot afford that." To address this type of problem, at least four programs reported that they are able to offer at least some boxes to lower-income people for free or a reduced rate. Most of the funding for the subsidies come from partners in the community, such as daycare centers that occasionally use extra funds to buy boxes for their clients. One program has actually been able to get their county government on-board, and plans to offer free small boxes to people who participate in the provincial welfare program (21). Additionally, three programs run a special promotion around the holidays in which community members are encouraged to buy a gift certificate for a GFB for a family in need.

Knowledge of program. In order for customers to access the box, target demographic or not, they must first know that one exists near them. This challenge is not unique to the GFB programs that participated in this study. For example, a study of 371 low-income families in Toronoto found that only four families were participating in the program and that most "had never heard of the Good Food Box before" (Loopstra and

Tarasuk, 2013). One way that GFB programs reach out to their key demographics is through targeted marketing. For example, one manager described her program's efforts to involve young mothers:

> One thing we've really tried to target lately is young families…
> who need to stretch hat food dollar farther, and just don't seem
> to think about fruit and vegetables…. So, we've done newsletter
> inserts in schools [and] early years centers, talking about it at
> healthy beginnings or prenatal programs, saying 'hey, mom,
> you've got to eat healthy, especially for pregnancy, but that
> child's got to eat healthy food, too, so…you've got to have an
> accessible and affordable source for these foods'(5).

Food skills and knowledge. Even when people know about the program, they sometimes lack knowledge of what to do with all the box contents, regardless of their income level. Accordingly, thirteen of the programs I learned about offer educational opportunities for their customers. As one interviewee observed:

> It's interesting that, we want everyone to be involved, but some
> people are going to need more support to really use the program
> that just saying 'here's your box of fresh fruits and
> veggies'…There's a need for follow-up…. Helping them prepare
> food, store it properly…(5).

One of the main avenues GFB programs have for addressing this lack of food preparation knowledge is through a newsletter that is sent out with the boxes, often containing recipes for new foods in the boxes, storage and preparation tips, and other information related to health, nutrition, and community news. The positive view that respondents had of newsletters corroborates the finding by Brownlee and Cammer (2004:16) that newsletters are "a beneficial means of informing people of new ways to prepare good food."

Additionally, seven GFBs programs have developed classes and workshops to help their customers learn to use the food in their boxes. For example, according to one GFB manager,

I also do a cooking out of the Good Food Box class… at some of
our host sites we do like, 'now that you have all this fresh food,
what do you do with it?'…So, we get together once a month
with them and we say, here's what you can do with the food…
for example, how do you store it?...(7)

Such classes can be a successful way to spread knowledge and create community spaces;

yet they also require time, resources, and staffing that many of the GFB programs simply

do not have. To address this, five of the seven GFBs that offer classes partner with other

organizations in the community, such as the public health unit, county wellness

committee, or the depot host organizations who actually host and staff the educational

opportunity.   In doing so, they are benefitting from multi-sector linkages and

partnerships that can help facilitate CFS project success (Anderson and Cooke 1999: 145,

Winne et al. 1998). Such collaborations can benefit programs by allowing "organizations

to effect change that they could not achieve on their own and [expand] the number of

people involved in an effort" (Hassanein 2008: 290).

Box Packing and Distribution Structure

GFB programs use a variety of processes for packing and distributing their boxes

to places where their customers can pick them up. Below, I describe the various types of

distribution logistics that GFB programs use, and their reasoning behind choosing to

develop each of these mechanisms. As with many aspects of the GFB programs in my

study, I found there to be a number of reasons, both goal-oriented and logistical, behind

the choice of how and where to pack and distribute boxes to GFB customers.

Depots

GFB programs vary in terms of the size of geographic area in which they

distribute food, but in general, the programs represented in this study tended to serve

customers from a large area. Six serve their entire county, which can be vast considering

that some of Canada's counties are very long and narrow, encompassing both rural and urban areas. Nine programs serve their city and parts of the county in which they are located, but not every single area in the county. Three programs cover regions that are larger than one county, and two of the larger, urban programs only deliver within city limits. Finally, one program only delivers to parts of the city. In that city, however, there are some small, independent neighborhood GFB programs that exist and provide food access in the remaining neighborhoods.

In order to accomplish distribution of food boxes over a vast area, many GFB programs utilize a network of community partners to serve as distribution points in neighborhoods. Nineteen of the programs represented in this study have set up such locations, variously referred to as depots, neighborhood drop points, neighborhood contacts, and distribution points. These depots are housed at locations within the community such as the YMCA, public health centers, daycares, schools, libraries, churches, colleges, First Nations' centers, public housing buildings, businesses, and even private homes. Customers come to the depots to pay for a box in advance, and then on the day that boxes are distributed, customers come to the depots to pick up a box.

Two small programs represented here do not utilize depots, primarily because they serve small towns. As a result, their customers can all come to one location to pay for and then later pick up their boxes.

For those programs that use them, depots serve a number of purposes. They are a convenient way to get food to customers, without the expense of home delivery. As one manager explained, "Financially, with our very tight budget, we can't afford to deliver to

an individual person, but we will deliver to a neighborhood contact, if they have a certain number of boxes ordered" (17).

These community partnerships can also help address access issues, and some GFB programs seek out agencies to host depot sites in areas where a high proportion of their desired clientele live. For five of the programs, depot partnerships also address knowledge challenges, with the depot hosts offering cooking classes to customers in their neighborhood that the GFB program itself does not have the resources to offer.

Additionally, depots can serve an important role in creating new social spaces and relationships around food. One manager described this phenomenon:

> People getting together and talking to their neighbors and
> showing up the same day to pick up their boxes, that all creates a
> community space that also encourages healthy eating, that
> encourages healthy growing, that encourages a distribution
> system. When people talk and people all buy into the same
> system—if they were all just individual customers … they
> wouldn't get that same kind of momentum going (14).

Despite the positive aspects of having a network of depots, some managers did note a few weaknesses to this system. Working with community partners enables GFB programs to stretch their limited resources, but also leaves them more dependent on the fates of others for their success. For example, one manager described how the recession's impact on a partner agency caused them to lose their depot site. "The host agency for our depot at the time … had to close their doors with no notice," she said, "our host agency couldn't host us any more" (1).

Packing and Distribution Logistics

The 19 programs in this study that use networks of depots to deliver food to customers do so in various ways, impacted by their program goals and logistical set-up. All of the programs, including the two that only have one distribution location, receive

produce in bulk from one or more suppliers, and use volunteer labor to sort the food and pack it into individual boxes before distribution to customers. They differ in terms of where along the line the boxes are sorted and packed.

Centralized packing. Thirteen programs have one central location where food is packed and sorted before the packed boxes are distributed to depots. Seven of these programs use a central space donated by a community partner, such as a church or school, for packing and sorting. Six use space that their lead organization owns, and two rent space from a community partner at a reduced rate.

When I asked the programs that used a centralized packing model why they chose that design, the most common answer related to efficiency and the relative ease of having one set of volunteers packing at one location, as compared to coordinating multiple packing locations and sets of volunteers. According to one manager, "With relatively little extra funding we're able to run a much larger program… Basically, if we need 10 volunteers to pack 50 boxes, 10 volunteers with a couple more hours can pack 250 boxes… we're scaling up. It's more efficient to go larger" (15). Another manager described how a central packing location makes more sense for her program's long, skinny service area, explaining, "[our region is] quite linear, so it just worked better being in one spot and sending it out from there" (11). Additionally, having one central location where all the food is brought before being packed can make purchasing from many suppliers, including local farmers, easier than trying to send it to multiple sites.

Yet, logistics were not the only reason for programs to choose a central packing location. Packing day at a GFB program is a lively time that creates a new social space and allows community members to learn from each other and try out new roles as leaders

in the food system. One program manager described how her program brought seniors

and young adults together with mutual benefit:

> One of the alternate schools, the young students come and help
> us unload too, which is nice because most of our volunteers are
> seniors. So they'll get in the back of the truck and unload the
> parcels. It works really well because the seniors always make
> these wonderful little goodies for them and kind of dote over
> these kids. A lot of these young people don't get that attention at
> home. They love helping the seniors. It's a win-win thing for
> both groups (12).

Another program manager described the empowering effect that these volunteer

opportunities have on people in her community:

> Our volunteer base [is] almost all people who are marginalized
> in their communities. So, they're people who have disabilities,
> maybe seniors, maybe young moms, people with mental illness
> issues, and so this is an opportunity for them to be the
> community builders. Often they're the people who are
> receiving, and in our program, they're the people we need to
> help us. I see that as a huge development (16).

Seven programs also mentioned that they offer some form of job training for volunteers,

such as safe food handling certification, public speaking experience, and new

opportunities to assume leadership roles. Additionally five program managers

specifically stated that they have volunteer programs specifically geared towards helping

provide training and new experiences for adults with developmental disorders.

Certainly GFB programs that do not have centralized packing also offer

opportunities for new roles and learning. For those programs that have one central

packing location, however, doing so seems to potentially increase the scale at which these

efforts can occur.

Decentralized packing. Four of the GFB programs represented in this study do

not pack their boxes at a central location, but rather each depot site is sent a bulk order of

food and it is sorted and coordinated by volunteers there. The programs that use

volunteers at the depot level instead of a central location said their choice was driven by logistics, supplier relations, and their ability to offer grassroots programs.

Some GFB managers who run a decentralized program say this model makes sense for their program logistically. Three of these programs cover some of the largest regional areas, making attempts at centralized coordination difficult, as one manager described:

> So, part of it, too, is our geography, right? We are the size of Prince Edward Island, and we have one office … How are we going to be in touch with people two hours away? …We can't be hands on everywhere (5).

Maintaining relations with produce suppliers was also a factor considered by the four programs running decentralized packing models. For three of the four programs, purchasing and supplier relations are coordinated centrally. These three programs each rely on one main supplier, and value their ties with them. In two of these three programs, a single supplier delivers food directly to the depots, and in the other the depots send volunteers to the supplier's warehouse to pick up their share of produce and bring it back to be sorted and packed. Limited resources coupled with a desire to maintain good supplier-buyer relationships keep these three programs using the model of sending food directly from the supplier to the depots.

For the fourth program, supplier relations also are one reason for decentralized packing, but in a different way. This program, which is based in a very dispersed area, hires a depot manager in each community who is are responsible for purchasing food for their depot from many local merchants. This helps maintain local relations, as their GFB manager describes:

> Usually I let each of the coordinators be part of their community and source within their stores, rather than having central

suppliers. Because then it removes the ability for it to be small
and community and grass-roots (16).

The desire to appear grassroots and have community buy-in was echoed by another GFB

manager running a decentralized packing model who said, "[we] want this to be a

community-based program, we don't want it to be seen as a government, public health

thing. We want it to be a locally supported and just get more buy-in from the local

residents" (5).

     <u>Other models.</u> Two GFB programs in this study use a combination of central and

decentralized packing to reach a larger area. These two programs have one main packing

location from which they distribute packed boxes to nearby depots. In addition, they

allow smaller outlying communities to order bulk produce at the same time. Partners in

these communities then send in volunteers to pick up the produce and bring it back to

their towns to be sorted and packed by local volunteers.

     Additionally, as mentioned earlier, two of the smaller programs only have one

pick up location for boxes. One of these programs still utilizes volunteers to pack boxes

for customers. In the other one, the produce is instead all laid out on tables, and

customers go along and pack their own bags. The choice to do so was based on logistics

and customer feedback:

> The coordinator was organizing all of the boxes, …and it took
> her a long time to organize it all. People preferred a model, we
> found out through our evaluation, where the items were all on a
> table and they could pick which one they wanted (18).

Box Contents

     Although some consistencies exist, the choice of box contents is one of the chief

areas where GFB boxes differ from community to community, and where tensions

between competing program goals arise. GFB programs vary in terms of how many and what types of boxes they offer, as well as the numbers of suppliers they work with and whether these suppliers represent the conventional food system or something more alternative. This section describes this range, and then describes the wide array of criteria that decision makers at GFB programs consider when choosing what products to include in each of their boxes. Next there is a more detailed discussion of how the GFB programs in this study weigh the pros and cons of local purchasing, and some of the ways that those who do purchase successfully from local farmers have been able to negotiate some of the barriers.

Types of Good Food Boxes

Five of the GFB programs represented in this study sell only one type of box, while the others offer their customers the choice of one or more variations on a standard box. Of these, nine offer more than one size of box, such as a box with smaller amounts of produce geared towards couples or singles, or a box for families containing larger quantities. Meanwhile, seven programs offer a variety of box contents. Four programs offer a separate fruit-only box or bag as an option for customers to get in addition to or in lieu of the standard fruit and vegetable box. One program offers a separate vegetable-only option. In order to increase access for people who may not have the space, skills, or time to process larger pieces of produce like a head of lettuce or a whole melon, three of the programs offer "good to go" or "wellness" boxes containing easier to handle produce items, such as cherry tomatoes, spring mix, and pre-cut carrots. Two of the programs offer a meat box as an optional add-on. Other variations include an organic box, a box with staple items including canned and dry goods, and a premium local box.

Suppliers

GFB programs utilize a wide array of produce suppliers, varying from program to program in number, as well as type and scale. Eight programs utilize only one supplier, while 13 purchase food from two or more different sources. Those who purchase from only one supplier work with a wholesaler or distributor, who is able to access produce from a number of growers (local or otherwise). Ease and predictability was the reason given most often for choosing to stick with one supplier. Another reason, mentioned by three program managers, was a desire to maintain good relationships with their current supplier. These suppliers had been with the program for a long time, and seemed to be key figures in its operations. Regarding one such supplier:

> He has been in that food, garden market business for over 25 years. He's got his connections down at the food terminal, and has been a really solid piece of our program. Now, when he retires we could be in trouble (5).

The choice to use one main supplier can potentially make a manager's job easier, which is important considering the limited resources most programs operate under, and especially for programs whose chief aim is to bring large amounts of high-quality produce into people's homes for a low price. On the other hand, using a single supplier impacts produce decisions, potentially limits choices regarding other supply chain values, and could make the program overly reliant on one business figure.

Meanwhile, thirteen of the programs procure their box contents from more than one source. These suppliers ranged from conventional outlets such as wholesalers, distributors, and grocery stores to suppliers embedded within alternative local systems, such as small local producers, farmers cooperatives, local millers and bakers, and community gardens. There were also a number of suppliers who were not completely

local and alternative, but also not entirely mainstream, such as locally-owned grocery stores, green grocers, and distributors. GFB programs seem to have potential to involve multi-sectoral actors from across the food system in improving healthy food access, while also providing an opportunity for the community to support both small-scale and mid-level local enterprises. In total, 15 of the GFB programs in this study patronize conventional suppliers, 13 purchase food from within the alternative local food system, and six frequent suppliers who work within a more local, but still conventional model.

These numbers contrast with Kneen's (2004:2) assertion that "the focus is always on local, in-season produce." While this is true for some programs, there is much variation in terms of what produce is included, how much is local, and the source of local produce in the boxes. This diversity extends the discussion started by Hammel (2009); she found different purchasing arrangements among the four programs she studied, and my research revealed an even wider range of procurement strategies and relationships that GFB programs are utilizing to fill their boxes.

Content Decision-Making

Who has the authority to choose what contents are included in each box varies between programs as well. In 13 of the programs represented here, content decisions are made solely by the program manager. Logistics and ease seemed to be the reason behind this, rather than a desire to exclude others from the decision-making; for most, it seemed to make sense that the job of ordering produce would fall to the manager. In the words of one, "I try to ask for input from, you know, my host site volunteers and from some of the staff that buy boxes, but yeah, basically, I decide" (4).

Within four of the programs, content decisions are made by the manager in consultation with other staff. Three programs, mentioned earlier, use only one supplier who also makes produce decisions for the box. One program has a public committee that meets every month to decide what food will go into the box. Furthermore, as will be discussed in the next section, customer feedback and fit is a factor that at least 11 of the programs studied consider when purchasing box contents.

Purchasing Priorities

A multifaceted set of factors influence what food is put into the GFB in each community. The programs managers mentioned eight major categories of concerns and factors that they weighed when choosing produce: availability; price; quality; staple items; variety; customer fit and feedback; supply chain values; and supplier relations. In other words, GFB programs adopt and balance a number of goals. The procurement criteria that programs choose, as well as which of these criteria are given priority, sheds light on the goals that are embedded and negotiated within each program.

Seventeen of the program managers said availability is a purchasing priority for produce. This is understandable; if a product is not available through their normal suppliers, it is highly unlikely that a program would have the resources necessary to seek it out. More specifically, 12 managers said that they choose foods when they are available during their peak season.

Price was a major criteria mentioned by 16 program managers. It makes sense that price would be important to a large number, given that most if not all GFB programs are trying to deliver a product of good value to their clients. Program managers vary in the degree to which they weigh price as a factor when choosing products to fill their

boxes. Eight of them said that price was their top procurement priority. For example, one

manager stated, "we're trying to watch the budget for the box contents and everything…

I'm always careful about how I spend on various things" (4). For programs trying to help

people "stretch their food dollar," the box must be affordable. As one manager

explained, "because our mandate is to help people stretch their food dollar, our main

concern is getting them good produce, but at the best price" (3).

On the other hand, some consider price, but are willing to pay more for other

factors and supply chain values like produce quality. After price, quality was the

purchasing priority mentioned most often by GFB program managers, and for five

programs, quality was their top purchasing priority. In the words of one manager:

> Quality is definitely our top priority because if we don't have
> good quality nobody is going to buy it. We're doing our best to
> keep the cost low for people but if we don't have good quality
> then we're not going to have any participants in the program (8).

This priority is in part logistical, and connected to wanting customers to see the program

as a value to them. It also ties closely into the program goal of nutrition and health. For

example, one manager stated that her program's goal is to "improve the quality of food

that people would eat. There's never any junk food or anything put into our Good Food

Boxes, everything is fresh" (9).

The focus on multiple goals and values, including quality and nutrition, helps set

the GFB programs apart from some of the emergency feeding programs criticized by

Poppendiek (1998) and by Tarasauk and Eakin (2005). GFB programs situate themselves

within a different niche in the food system. Their role is concerned with a wider array of

goals and criteria than basic access to calories. For example, one manager declared, "We

are not the Food Bank. This is a paid program and it is open to everyone… My

expectation is high that [our suppliers] provide us with a very high-quality product."

Another agreed, "we expect top quality produce" (20).

In addition to quality, another set of purchasing priorities revolve around customer fit, appropriateness, and feedback. GFB program managers want the food they are providing their customers with to be something that they will want to eat. As a result, some place priority on supplying staple items, including a variety of produce, and/or responding to other customer desires through their procurement purchases.

Twelve programs mentioned always including staple, standard items such as potatoes, apples, and onions that their customers could easily cook with. For some, their desire to include foods that their customers could use, and negative feedback they had received when they had tried to include more novel items, made them reticent to veer too far from staples. This emphasis seems to stem from a desire to give people foods that they are likely to know how to use and prepare. One program manager explained,

> If you get too far from the norm, you get a lot of grief, because
> people don't know what to [do with them]… Even sweet
> potatoes throw people off, "what do I do with these?" Right?
> And the Swiss chard, with most people, it's like "I don't know
> what to do with that." It's interesting. If you do anything too far
> outside those traditional, meat and potato kind of food ideas,
> people have some trouble with it (5).

On the other hand, eleven research participants said that including a variety of food in their boxes was an important procurement for their program. One said that, while it would be easy to include the same basic items every month, she tries to make sure "there's only the same thing in the box two [times] in a row" (10). Another said she "want[s] a nice variety of things" in the box (5).

Some managers noted that variety was important for making the box something that people want to purchase and use. For instance, one manager told me that his

program includes things like lemons, garlic, or ginger in their box, to help make cooking

more interesting for their customers. This practice tied into his program's goal of

education and creating new relationships to food. He explained, "part of our goal is to

encourage people to consume and be more excited about using fresh fruits and

vegetables, providing some of those additional small items can really enhance the

cooking" (15).

For other programs, variety was closely tied to nutritional quality, and allowing

their customers to create complete, healthy meals. For instance, according to one

manager:

> When it comes to the vegetables, we're hoping for a mix of
> staple items such as carrots, potatoes, squash, and then some
> other heartier leafy greens, so a wide variety of nutrition, so
> mostly cooking vegetables. We also try to put 3 or 4 items in the
> box that would be more eaten raw or fresh like salad, tomatoes,
> lettuce, cucumber. We're hoping that the variety of the box
> would be enough food that the family could subsidize their
> eating with healthy food throughout the week and be a mix of
> fresh vegetables that they could eat raw and also some
> vegetables that they could cook more heartier meals with (14).

Some of those who mentioned variety as a purchasing priority were the same

people who talked about the importance of including staples. For them, the key was

balancing predictability and usefulness with novelty, in order to achieve a box that their

customers feel comfortable with but do not get bored of. For example, one manager

remarked:

> I always try to have a nice mix of things in it, I try not to have
> the same things every single month. Like, there's certain staple
> items like carrots, onions, potatoes that are in there pretty much
> every month, but, you know… [I'm] trying to mix it up (4).

Another described how she strikes a balance between including familiar foods and trying

to introduce new items to customers:

> Say there's some obscure vegetable that I would like to put in,
> like kohlrabi, to introduce people to a new vegetable. I'm not
> going to put three or four other weird vegetables in the same
> box… So it's just trying to find that balance between what
> people are familiar with and then introducing something a little
> more unusual for people to try. And then if they don't like it, it's
> not the end of the world. You know, they haven't spent a huge
> amount of money on it, but it's worth trying (17).

GFB programs respond to other customer concerns and desires as well, and some actively work to solicit customer feedback. Eight managers reported receiving feedback on produce directly from their customers, and nine reported getting feedback through depot coordinators. As one program manager explained, "If people ever have feedback, we welcome it. I ask the satellite site managers to call me if there is ever any issue at all or if they hear anything good or bad. That's one way the satellite sites help me out because they can have their ear to the ground about things" (8). Six managers also mentioned occasionally distributing customer feedback surveys.

According to some managers, balancing the desires of multiple customers as well as other purchasing priorities can be difficult at times. "Everybody buys the box for different reasons," one explained, "so keeping all of those needs and wants and wishes in the forefront and meeting all of them can be difficult at times" (14).

In addition to providing nutritious food in a way that builds community self-reliance, one of the stated goals of CFS (and the original program in Toronto) is to provide "culturally acceptable" food to people (Hamm and Bellows 2003:37). Three GFB managers mentioned cultural appropriateness as a purchasing priority, but they also talked about the tensions that can arise when balancing food that will be culturally appropriate and food that will have universal appeal. For example, according to one:

> We want to make our product as culturally accessible and
> appealing as possible. We don't go too far with exotics in one

> particular direction. For example, if we wanted to appeal to new
> Canadians and we say, "Let's get some more Asians buying our
> box." We could take the approach of including more Asian
> vegetables but that's going to potentially alienate somebody else.
> We do look for stuff that's as universally appealing and cultural
> as possible (21).

Balancing culturally appropriate food with local purchasing was also a concern for some

programs, and will be discussed further below.

On the other hand, not all of the programs were primarily concerned with

providing culturally appropriate food and catering to individual customer desires. For

example, one manager noted that for his program, logistics, universal appeal, and price

outweigh cultural appropriateness:

> I try to stay consistent on what most people, in general, would
> eat. Obviously, there's other ethnic groups and stuff that chose
> different things. I can't customize the box. It all has to be fairly
> standard otherwise it would be a nightmare. Like some people
> don't like radishes and sometimes I throw radishes in. Some
> people don't like green pepper and they think there's too many
> peppers in a box. It is hit and miss. You go—they have to
> understand that they're still getting an affordable price box (19).

Logistics and resources play an important role in determining what products can be

included in the boxes, especially in terms of price, as noted above, as well as supplier

relations.

For four of the programs, their purchasing relationship with a single supplier is a

major influence on what produce they can include in their box. For three of these

programs, decisions are actually made by the supplier, based on the amount of money he

(they were all men) has to spend that month. One manager described how each month

she tells her produce supplier, a local distributor, "how many boxes we need, this is how

much money we have." She then asks, "'what can you do?' And then he works out what

he can provide for that kind of money and those number of boxes" (2). These supplier

relationships save staff time and other resources, but reduce the control and options for the program manager and customers.

Local Purchasing Decisions

When purchasing food for their boxes, many GFB programs work within their local food system by purchasing foods grown near them. Six of the program managers said that their box always includes local produce, and that it is a top priority. Ten of the GFB managers named local purchasing as a key goal or hope of their program, and fourteen programs said that they routinely include local produce in the box, or include it as a minor part of all or most of their boxes. Only one manager said that their program's box never includes local produce.

GFB managers negotiate a number of factors when choosing whether to purchase locally or not, and sometimes they are forced to solve problems and make difficult decisions. One of the major challenges for CFS projects such as the GFB has been linking the access needs of low-income people with the goal of building markets and seeking higher prices for producers (Allen 1998). For some GFBs this balancing is difficult, but it does not have to be an either-or situation; others have ways to support local producers while still providing an affordable product. Looking at why or why not the GFB programs include local food in their boxes, and how GFB managers negotiate these situations gives insight into how they balance multiple program priorities and how they creatively utilize community resources.

<u>Reasons for purchasing locally.</u> A number of reasons drive GFB programs to purchase from local farmers. The most frequently mentioned was a desire to support the local economy. Ten program managers said that they purchase locally-grown food to

promote the "economic benefits of buying locally" (2). For example, one explained, "We have to support our local economy a little bit better…So we try to source the potatoes that are from the [local] potato grower's association" (1).

A few of these managers remarked that their local purchasing had in fact shown positive impacts on the local agricultural economy. By serving as a large and consistent outlet, GFB programs help to create markets and redirect food dollars to producers within their own communities. One manager described how her program had benefited young farmers in particular:

> What the food box program has allowed is new, young farmers to start up. People have been able … to expand their gardens and get some money for that. It brought in some more money into those poor families. They haven't had to have a huge expense to it. I think that's been our hugest success. Really allowing some younger producers—some producers to get their toes wet and get some cash right from the get-go for what they are growing, which has allowed them to expand. That is the success, I think, of this food box. They have a market (13).

A different man described how they were able to help farmers who may have a bumper crop to sell:

> What we're trying to do is create a service for them. So, if they can't sell some of their produce… we make sure that they know if they have a lot of a specific product left in the fields whether it's cucumber or tomatoes or squash that we're a good source for moving lots of their produce (15).

Another program manager discussed their ability to benefit local farmers by taking cosmetically deficient, but otherwise nutritious produce, like "cucumbers that were too small" (12) from local farmers who might otherwise be unable to sell them. On the other hand, some GFB managers would not be willing to do this because appearance, quality, and ensuring that their customers do not feel as though they are getting "seconds" are more important goals for their program.

Additionally, the GFB gives customers a low-cost, low-risk gateway to other ways to support a local and sustainable food system of the alternative food movement. One manager explained:

> In our perspective, this is an entry point, especially for people who can't afford to purchase boxes through a farm or through a higher organic end box program, this is a way for them to get used to the idea of buying food through a box program. And so when they're at a point where they have more income and feel they want to support a local farm or more organic stuff, it makes a nice transition into actually supporting those organizations or farmers. So we see it actually as a benefit to those organizations (15).

Furthermore, in some communities, farmers are finding the GFB to be a more cost-effective market than other local venues they are used to. Compared to a farmers market, for instance, delivering a bulk order to a GFB program is potentially a much more efficient use of a farmer's time. "People think of local farmers taking part in farmers markets and I'm not sure that people in general have an idea of how expensive and difficult that undertaking is for a farmer," explained one manager. "So if a farmer finds a place to get a good price for what they do with less of an investment on their part, that would be good for local farming" (21).

Despite the fact that nine GFB programs named price as a barrier to purchasing local food, seven programs actually said that, for them, the price of local produce in their area was a factor in its favor. A number of GFB programs have found that local food in season often presents the most cost-effective choice. As one manager explained, "in the summer, we'll get much more local produce from Ontario…because the price is a bit cheaper, because it's local, whereas in the winter it's from… the States… or other southern countries, so it might be more expensive" (3). Another program mentioned

receiving lower produce prices and less fluctuation from nearby farmers than from their

wholesaler suppliers. He explained that:

> Usually when the local farmers have it available, they give us,
> you know, some pretty rock-bottom prices….I think when the
> local farmers aren't available and we have to deal primarily with
> the local chains, it gets hard because of the prices, they're going
> up (6).

Potatoes and apples were two types of foods that were often mentioned as affordable and

available most of the year.

Good price in season was not the only factor influencing decisions about

purchasing local food. Another reason for local purchasing included the freshness and

quality of local foods. For instance, one manager mentioned that they always try to

include local strawberries when they are in season "because they're so amazing" (4).

Others are concerned about environmental effects of the mainstream food system, such as

one manager who noted that purchasing locally is "good for the environment; it doesn't

travel a long way" (17).

In addition, for some of the managers efforts to support the local economy are tied

into the official goals and mission of their GFB program. For example, according to one

manager, in her GFB, "the goal [is] to provide an outlet for as much local products as we

[can]" (13). In the words of another, "we really pride ourselves on being able to provide

local food and support local producers" (10). One respondent explained that her

program's mandate for supporting local farmers can make balancing low-income access

difficult, but also and ensures local producers are included:

> First of all, our mandate is to buy local first … It's kind of dicey
> because we have a target group of low income but a lot of our
> local produce is [priced] higher, [but] still have that as our
> mandate that we'll buy from the local suppliers first (12).

For a couple of managers, the main impetus for local purchasing is their own initiative. Two managers are championing local purchasing because it is personally important to them, even if it means more work. One said:

> For me, personally, [the top priority is] local. I really support, believe in that. Since its inception, the program has always been about buying local, but I have really made it a point of mine. I mean it would be really easy for me in the winter to source from the grocery store because I wouldn't have to get up at six in the morning and drive in the snowstorm to somebody's house to buy local potatoes, but I think its important, so we just made that a priority… I'm supporting people that I know, and I want to help them out (10).

On the other hand, one manager cautioned against letting personal beliefs and desires get in the way, because they may prevent achieving other program goals. According to him:

> Every kind of manager or person buying for the GFB has a certain ideation of what the GFB should be. I think for myself the most important thing is to keep in mind of what it started to be about and what it should always be about and keep your own personal ideas out of that in order to keep it true to what it should be and what it always has been. I could find it very easy if your own ideation about local food, like I said, it needs to be about affordability first and variety. I take out my own shopping habits out of my own life where I want everything organic or everything local and not put that in the boxes for everybody all the time or else they would only be getting 8 products a week instead of 14 (14).

Barriers to including local foods in the GFB. For GFB programs, 'local' is one attribute among many that must be balanced when purchasing box contents. All but one of the 21 GFB programs include at least some non-local food in their boxes, and the one exception only operates during the growing season. Just as there were a number of reasons for purchasing locally grown produce, the research participants also mentioned a wide range of factors that limit the inclusion of local foods in the GFB. These included balancing other priorities like price, climate and geography, and lack of external and internal resources.

Price was the most frequently mentioned barrier to local food purchasing. Nine program managers said that the additional cost of local food made including it in their boxes a challenge, and required balancing priorities. As one manager explained, "I believe that local is best, but again when you're working with such a strict budget, I just do the best that I can with what I'm given" (11). A different manager remarked, "we've tried buying local. But, we have found unfortunately that if it is local, its more expensive" (9). Another talked about the need to ensure that local food provisioning did not distract from their program's main goal of being affordable to their low-income customers:

> We do our best to source locally if we can, [but] if it's not a good
> price then we can't do it because we need to have good value for
> our customers because lots of them are low income. They're
> really counting on that food and the good value for money (8).

A tension between pleasing customers and including food that is culturally and nutritionally appropriate also kept some boxes from being as local as they potentially could have been. One manager explained, "it would just drive people crazy, too, to get root vegetables all winter long. You know, people still want fresh fruits, and lettuces, and things like that" (4). This was most often the case with fruits that do not grow in Canada, like bananas and oranges. For some, this related to customer preference and cultural accessibility: "Sometimes during the summer we could have completely local boxes. But our customers like bananas" (14). For others, the nutritional value of fruits was important: "bananas, that's one of the staples that we generally have, just because they're a good source of potassium" (1).

Some programs that focus more on local provisioning criticized this approach, and do not include tropical fruit during the growing season. According to one manager, some programs:

> …Want all health so they will always have bananas in there.
> They don't necessarily have the goal of as much local as
> possible. There's would be a little lower on the local side; ours
> might not be as balanced with the fruit and vegetable side. If we
> have 12 items in the box, we might only have 2 of those items as
> fruit… But nutritionally it would be balanced because there's
> many vegetables that can give you Vitamin C (13).

Yet those including tropical fruits, like bananas, in their boxes argue that, in order to reach customers and deliver a product that they want and feel comfortable with, local provisioning must be balanced with other goals:

> [It's] a diverse city…that's one of the reasons why we will never
> do completely local boxes. We're not going to tell people what
> they should and shouldn't eat. People come from all over the
> world into the city … and we want people to eat fresh produce.
> So if that means that they want to eat bananas or pineapples or
> avocados or certain things that will hopefully never be growing
> [here], that's great. We encourage that. So we want to have a
> mix of different varieties of fruits and vegetables that are
> culturally appropriate for people, fresh, quality, affordable (14).

In addition to balancing priorities like price and appropriateness, GFB programs face a number of logistical constraints in local purchasing. Canada's harsh geography and climate impact the ability of at least 12 research participants to include local food in the GFB throughout the year, and reduces the amount that all the programs can include in winter. Purchasing seasonally-available food was named as a priority by nearly all of the managers, and in each case was connected to the price of the food. As one manager noted, "its very difficult to afford stuff that's grown, even if it's grown locally… when it's not really in season" (4). Many of them mentioned trying to include seasonally-available local produce in the box, such as sweet corn in the summer and acorn squash in the fall. Outside of the main growing season, however, other purchasing priorities, such as desire for variety and price concerns, mitigates against having a completely seasonal or completely local box:

> Outside of the growing season, I definitely do have to buy things that are not local, that are not from Ontario. And also, it would just drive people crazy, too, to get root vegetables all winter long. You know, people still want fresh fruits, and lettuces, and things like that. (4).

In addition to the expected seasonal changes, catastrophic weather events can also strain efforts to include local produce. There had been a harsh, late frost during the spring of the year I was conducting interviews, for example, and as a result some of the managers noted the difficulty of procuring local apples and other tree fruit. For example, one manager explained, "our growing season was not good at all for apples this year, and as a result the apples are quite expensive. Last year I could put a pound and a half from a three-pound bag into the large boxes. Now, I have to put a pound in to get within my budget" (17).

A related limit had to do with geographic constraints that sometimes resulted in low numbers of local producers. A large part of Canada is located on the Canadian Shield, a hard, rocky surface that is difficult for farming. Two of the program managers I spoke with mentioned that this was a problem for them. Another was located on an island with few farms meaning even most "local" food had to be shipped in.

For six of the programs, a major problem includes a lack of infrastructure to support, transport and aggregate local foods. For some, transportation between farm and packing site is a challenge. In the words of one manager, "we've tried to include farmers … But we don't have the manpower to go out to the farm and pick up stuff, and they don't have the manpower to bring it in to us" (7). Another explained that, in her community:

> Most of the farmers have agreements with trucking companies to come and pick stuff up at the farm. So, they go to the farm, pick up the goods, take it to a sorting and distribution center, which is

usually in a large center…Then it gets washed, weighed, packaged, scrubbed,… processed, and it gets put into portion-appropriate sizes, or containers, and then it goes back out to the wholesalers. So, stuff that comes from a local farm could go to [the city] first, for sorting, cleaning, and repackaging, and then come back…Which is crazy, given that it's three hours of a drive [there] one way (7).

Weak local food infrastructure can also cause problems in finding and aggregating enough product to fill all of the boxes. For instance, one manager explained that his program no longer purchases from local farmers because of inconsistent supply:

What we found was, because of our numbers we might need like 300 or 400 heads of broccoli on a specific date, whereas we found the farmers… weren't really able to guarantee us the quantity on a specific day. Like it might not be quite ready, or harvestable…It was too much work, and logistically it was hard… So, we just decided to go with a food wholesaler, and they've always got fresh produce, and it's never an issue of if they've got it or not (3).

Two programs mentioned that having a local food hub for aggregation, a food auction, or other place for local farmers to come sell their produce locally, would be very beneficial to their program. In one of these towns, they hoped to address the issue by "trying to establish some sort of local food hub and distribution system in smaller centers" (7). Two GFB programs do currently purchase from local food hubs and auction houses, and one GFB operates out of a food hub. Yet, existence of a local hub or auction house still does not ensure access to local food, as other logistical constraints can get in the way. As a program manager in a different community with a local produce auction stated, "We have an auction house now running nearby, and the problem is it's not on a regular—like it's not every day, and it's not each time that one of our programs has their delivery day" (5).

GFB program infrastructure, as well, is not always set up to handle a robust local-food purchasing initiative. Commitments to purchase from a single supplier restricted

four of the GFB programs in their choice of purchasing locally-grown food, although all of them mentioned that they asked the supplier to purchase locally when possible and within a certain price range. These programs have long-standing, good relationships with their suppliers, which they prioritize maintaining. For example, according to one manager,

> We have a buying relationship …and we've worked with them since just about the beginning. We've just celebrated 16 years together and we purchase through them. It's kind of luck of the draw, you know, cause they'll just kind of get food from wherever, but that's just—we have a really good relationship with them. It's kind of luck of the draw, but we do try to purchase ethically, as we can (1).

Finally, two GFB managers cited a lack of time and resources within the organization managing the program as a barrier to local purchasing. One manager said, "there's no funding for me to go out and hunt and peck and have everybody be able to deliver it before seven thirty on the morning of the box. It's just easier to order from [the distributor]" (11). Likewise, in another program, where volunteer coordinators take on much of the ordering, "certainly the desire to have more local was there, but every coordinator said, 'If it's going to take more work, or another phone call, no way!'"(5).

Sources of local produce. GFB programs purchase from a variety of sources, which differ between communities. This is true for local purchasing in addition to more general food provisioning. Of the 20 GFB programs that include local food in their box, 12 managers said that they purchase directly from local farmers. Six GFB managers mentioned purchasing local food through mainstream channels, including distributors and grocery stores, and of these, four said that a main reason they include local produce in their box is their ability to purchase it through their existing suppliers. Two GFB

managers purchase food from local produce auctions in their community, and two of the smaller programs include produce from local community gardens in some boxes.

In working with local farmers, five of the programs hold a meeting or planning session at the beginning of the growing season, and pre-plan with farmers for the whole year. This helps address supply issues, and gives the farmers a solid idea of what they can plant and sell. If problems arise down the road, the farmers and manager can work together to find a substitute for that product.

Additionally, if farmers cannot deliver the expected amount to fill all of the boxes, two of the GFB managers said that they are willing to put different items into different sizes of boxes. For instance, "let's say the farmer does say, 'I can only provide beets for the small boxes,' and then, I'll make sure that I get beets for the large boxes from another source, if I can. They can be different" (17).

As mentioned earlier, two programs are actively purchasing from local produce auctions, which happen to be run by Mennonites in both communities. In one of these, the manager goes to the auction and does the purchasing herself. Even though the auction does not occur on packing day, she has worked out an arrangement where the auction lets her borrow their walk-in refrigerator to store her purchases until packing day, when she drives to pick them up. In the other town, the GFB manager has developed a relationship with one of the farmers that sells at the auction. He does the purchasing for her, and if he buys things on a non-packing day, he lends the walk-in cooler that he has on his farm for storage space. He also introduced her to an affordable truck driver, who she has started hiring to drive the food from storage to the packing site.

Interactions among GFB programs

To varying degrees, all of the GFB programs in this study respond and adapt to local goals, partnerships, and logistics. But they do not act in isolation from others engaged in similar work elsewhere. While the scaling out of the GFB program across Canada has led to localized adaptations, the programs also share knowledge and ideas with one another. In fact, all of the managers I spoke with reported interacting with other managers in some way. How these interactions occur vary among the programs; below, I describe some of the ways communication occurs, and some of the outcomes.

Program Founding

In order to learn more about how the GFB spread across Canada, I asked the program managers that I spoke with about how their community first learned about the program.[5] Nine of them said that their organization had first gotten the idea to start a GFB program when they learned about the original program run by FoodShare Toronto. The founders of four of the programs learned about the GFB model from seeing it work in a neighboring (non-Toronto) community. Two of the programs are an expanded version of a smaller neighborhood-based GFB that was already running in their own community. Finally, two programs cited being influenced initiatives operating in other places like the United States or Brazil.

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[5] Due to the fact that not all of the managers were with their programs since founding, not all were able to answer questions about founding influences, but some did have history to share with me. Seven research participants had been with their program since founding, and an additional nine had learned about the founding of their program through their jobs enough to tell me with confidence at least the basic inspiration and founding goals of the program. For the discussion about program founding, I only refer to these 16 programs.

Over half of the 16 program managers that knew the origin of their program traced it back to the influence of Food Share Toronto. This demonstrates the strong influence of Toronto as a model for other programs. One reflected:

> [Our] program is modeled after Food Share's Good Food Box
> program, which I'm sure you're familiar with. Food Share is
> kind of the leader in terms of Good Food Box programs in
> Ontario, and maybe even Canada (4).

Of those programs that cited Food Share as a founding influence, six are located within Ontario, one is found in British Columbia, one in Manitoba, and another in Saskatchewan. Many of these programs specifically mentioned *The Good Food Box: A Manual* (Morgan et al. 2008), indicating that it has been an important tool for them when establishing and running their programs.

Four programs, three in Ontario and one in Saskatchewan, cite a neighboring community other than Toronto as their initial exposure to the GFB program model. According to one manager:

> Well, the only source of information that we had initially was
> [the neighboring county's] Salvation Army was running this
> program. And, the lady that initially started [our program]
> thought, this is a great idea for our people here… So, we didn't
> have a lot to go on, I mean, that was really the only thing that we
> looked at (3).

Another manager described first hearing about the program in Toronto, but then contacting a program within her own province to conduct a site visit and learn more.

Finally, two of the programs were actually expansions of smaller, neighborhood GBF initiatives that had already been operating within their cities. In one location, the old programs had been amalgamated into the new, scaled up program, and in the other, the two now run concurrently. Both of these programs were influenced, in part, by the model in Toronto, but in both cases, the new scaled-up programs worked hard to learn

from the programs that were already working within their local communities, and claimed that this was an important model for them when shaping their programs. According to the manager of one of these:

> I think in terms of the understanding the community, that was the information that was really important to know from the two existing good food box programs. So in terms of the details of what prices are you charging, or what approximately is going in your boxes, how are you distributing, what are some common challenges with your program? So we took a lot of that into consideration in terms of developing this program (15).

Similarly, the other program manager said that after first hearing about the Toronto program at a conference, talking to the staff managing the existing small program allowed them to get enough localized information to hold a meeting of relevant stakeholders and explore options that ultimately led to the expansion across the city. These are just two brief examples of this type of neighborhood-to-city program expansion that emerged during my study; more in-depth research into cases like this could be interesting for future scholars interested in exploring knowledge and processes that go into scaling up GFB programs to a larger community, in addition to their scaling out across the country.

Forms of Interactions

Communication and learning among GFB programs takes a number of forms. The most common way that GFB programs reported learning about one another was through published documents. Conferences and site visits are also important learning venues for the program managers I spoke to.

Ten programs talked about learning from reading materials that had been published by another GFB. Of these ten, nine spoke of Toronto's *The Good Food Box: A*

Manual (Morgan et al. 2008). One program also mentioned a GFB manual that they had received from a group in British Columbia.

The programs that have used *The Good Food Box: A Manual* generally refer to it positively. According to one manager, it was "quite a package of information, and I sort of lapped all that up and thought it was really good information" (11). Another said that, when first starting in her position as manager, "My bible was the manual put out by Food Share Toronto" (21). She noted that it was particularly useful because it featured a discussion of how to work with different sizes and scales of programs.

In-person interactions at site visits and conferences also emerged as an important tool for GFB managers from different cities to learn from one another. Eight of the people I spoke with said they had benefitted from visiting another program's location. One manager described how, when people in her community showed interest in starting a program, she called a neighboring community that was running a program and

> Asked if we could piggy-back and learn from them until we
> knew enough about it to run it on our own. So we took a vanload
> of volunteers with their cash orders and helped pack boxes and
> brought them back, and mentored with them, and learned about
> what they did (16).

Another explained that how visiting a neighboring program helped her understand how she could scale up her own to handle larger orders and serve more customers:

> Definitely the most useful thing was to go to their facility and to
> just see how they work and how they pack. I was able to see
> their order sheets and their database and that kind of thing. That
> was extremely helpful to me just in my day to day (8).

Conferences also were described as valuable venues for sharing ideas with other GFB programs by eight of the respondents. This may be because, with limited resources, conferences offer an opportunity to interact with a number of program models and ideas

at once. It also may be due to the fact that groups like Sustain Ontario have started

holding special sessions dedicated to GFB programs at some of their conferences. Four

of the managers with specifically mentioned these types of networking sessions at

conferences as being of value to them.

The results of these interactions between programs varied, but seemed generally

to be positive. Ten of the program managers that I spoke with said that they had

answered questions or provided information to other programs. Eight programs reported

learning about best practices around things like ordering systems, packing and

distribution, and fundraising. Four said that learning about what a larger program was

doing had helped them to expand their own program. Some interviewees did not say how

their interactions with other programs had impacted them. Lastly, four managers said

they learned some things, but that they did not change their program much as a result.

The Ontario Good Food Box Network

The Ontario Good Food Box Network (OGFBN) is an initiative coordinated by

Sustain Ontario. They bring together GFB programs across the province of Ontario in

order to provide "a venue whereby communication to and between programs is easily

facilitated" (Stevens 2011). I did not specifically ask about the OGFBN, but it emerged

as a topic during ten[6] of my conversations, all with managers located in Ontario that had

experience with the Network. The experiences that they reported with the Network help

to shed light on some of its strengths and weaknesses. It is a powerful tool for those

managers who have time to participate and a program model that is similar to others

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[6] In total, 13 research participants were located in Ontario, and of these, 10 mentioned the OGFBN. In this section, I only consider the ten programs whose managers brought up the OFGBN during their interviews.

within the network, but more challenging for those with limited resources or a more unique way of running their program.

Five of the ten managers that spoke about the OGFBN were active participants with positive experiences to report. For them, the network is an important resource for sharing best practices, identifying common challenges, and working together on solutions. For instance, according to one manager, the OGFBN meetings:

> Have been really useful, in that we're finding that different municipalities and different cities have different takes on, on the support that they will give to Good Food Boxes…Funding is all over the place…. One of the things that we are going to share as a result of the meeting is the different resources that we have found that are available to us (7).

Another said that her experience with the OFGBN has:

> …been really positive. What I love is that we all have different challenges and many of us have similar challenges. The fact that we're able to put a question out to the group like, what's the best way to get shipping containers? Where do you source environmentally sensible bags? People respond and it's been very helpful (21).

The other five managers that mentioned the OGFBN, however, said that their participation was limited. For two of these, this is due to lack of funding and staff time to participate in the meetings. In the words of one of these managers, "In theory, yeah, we are, [part of the network] but in practice, less so, simply because I haven't had a lot of time to keep up to date on the website and that sort of thing (4)."

Three managers, on the other hand, said that having a unique program model made it difficult for them to participate in the conversations that the other OFGBN members were having. Two of these programs are focused on local food provisioning, while another purchased from a single produce supplier. Their different procurement and distribution structures made it difficult for them to relate to some of the other

programs in the network. As one explained, "I'm more than happy to share information with others, but that one little piece [different procurement] kind of limits who can replicate what we're doing" (5). Two of the managers said this lack of similarity sometimes made them feel unwelcome or underappreciated by other network members:

> **…** it's been good and bad….we are a very small, agricultural community, so oftentimes we're overlooked. … they focus on, I guess more urban areas are and where the most amount of people can be affected, so, um, that was disappointing, that's all… We're like 'hey you guys! We're out here! We *do* have internet, and we live out here, you know!'(10).

It appears from these discussions that the OGFBN and similar networks can provide an important venue for knowledge exchange, learning, and common action. Scholars (Beckie et al. 2012, Wekerle 2004, Welsh and MacRae 1998) suggest that these networks may be key to scaling up efforts, and my research shows that while there is potential here, there may be some hurdles caused when programs scale out and adapt widely. For instance, while the OGFBN shows strong potential to help programs share resources and collectively advocate for stable provincial funding, some of the more unique program models do not feel like they fit in or are welcomed by the rest of the group. In order to create a truly inclusive network and support continued innovation and growth, participants should be cognizant of being open to new ideas and not alienating programs and participants with different priorities and goals, disparate levels of resources, and novel ideas about how to run their programs.

Conclusion

GFB programs pursue a holistic set of goals, including increasing access, improving food quality and nutrition, supporting a more local and sustainable food system, and creating social space to forge new relationships around food. Given limited

resources, they must balance these goals with logistical constraints when making choices about program structure, box contents (including local purchasing), and their relationships with customers. The ways they do so vary, and some of these adaptations and constraints have not been described in previous studies of the GFB.

Decisions about how a GFB will be structured and operate are influenced by an interplay of program goals and resource constraints. How these factors are weighed and acted upon differs among communities. For example, the decision to adopt a centralized or a decentralized box-packing model is influenced by philosophical concerns such as the desire to provide opportunities for volunteer engagement as well as logistical constraints such as supplier relationships and geography. While many programs have stayed with and slightly modified the centralized packing model pioneered by the original program at FoodShare, others have found that, for their region, having locally-based depot packers works better for their suppliers and also helps embed the program within widely-scattered communities.

Similar concerns also confront those who choose the contents for each box, as programs balance multiple purchasing priorities, including availability, price, quality, staple items, variety, customer feedback, supply chain values, and supplier relations. For instance, when choosing whether to purchase a head of cauliflower from a local farmer, all program managers would likely consider price, quality, and the fact that the vegetable was produced locally; but they might not all make the same purchasing decision. They may purchase the local cauliflower because their program aims to support local farming, because the quality of the local version is superior to what is available through conventional systems, because the price of the local product was lower, or simply

because the local cauliflower was readily available through their distributors. On the other hand, a different manager may choose not to purchase the local product if the price was higher, if customers would not be able or want to use the item, or if they lacked the resources or infrastructure to obtain the product from local producers. The weight that these and other factors are given during the decision-making process varies by program, as do the resources and funding streams available to support their work. As a result, a great diversity of program models and adaptations exists.

One thing that has remained constant across programs, however, is that they are universally open to anyone in the community who wishes to participate, although most do work to attract customers with few financial resources or other barriers to accessing healthy food. Universal program access aims to make the program a dignified experience for customers and avoids creating the stigma around the GFB that some food banks experience (Poppendiek 1998, Tarasauk and Eakin 2005). Program managers also noted that people from all walks of life could benefit from more affordable, healthy food. Additionally, those with relatively more means can help boost purchasing power, ensure steady numbers, and improve program sustainability.

In addition to improving food access, the GFB creates community and offers opportunities for learning, communication, and new ways for people to relate to food. For individuals who are their customers or volunteers, they create opportunities to connect with other food consumers to learn from each other and engage in realizing a vision of a more inclusive, accessible, and, in some cases, localized food system. Many also offer classes and other resources to teach food skills to their community. GFB programs often rely on partners within the community to facilitate education programs or

coordinate depot locations. These partnerships address logistical constraints and also

provide a unique opportunity to bring actors from throughout the community together in

order to create food system change. Yet reliance on partnerships, and in particular

dedication to one or a few produce suppliers, can also constrain the choices available to

GFB programs

In addition building relationships within their own communities, GFB programs

also communicate with others engaged in similar work elsewhere to share best practices

and learn from each other's experiences. For many programs, the amount of outside

communication that can occur is limited by staff time and resources, and programs report

that conferences, published materials such as FoodShare's *The Good Food Box: A*

Manual and other sources that offer a breadth of information about a number different

programs in a relatively short amount of time are the most useful to them. Site visits that

offered in-depth, hands on experiences with the operations of another program are also

seen as very useful. Some managers also discussed the Ontario Good Food Box

Network, an emerging community of practice seeking to facilitate knowledge sharing and

collective action among GFBs in Ontario. The experience of participation in the OGFBN

has been positive for those managers who have time to participate and a similar program

model to others in the Network. On the other hand, the OFGBN appears to be less useful

for programs with limited staff time to spend on external communications and

networking, and for those with a unique program model. For these managers, the cost of

participation outweighed the benefits of sharing best practices that may or may not be

relevant to their local reality.

Clearly, there is no one right way to operate a GFB program. Responding and adapting to local constraints and opportunities can present challenges for GFB programs, but many have figured out how to weigh their goals and resources to create innovative models that respond to community needs. Some programs have been able to use local resources and partnerships to overcome difficulties experienced by others. For instance, many GFBs face challenges reaching their target audiences, but some have come up with solutions such as targeted advertizing, subsidies, home delivery, targeted products and education opportunities. Some of these solutions have been identified in the literature; for example, Brownlee and Cammer (2004: 17-18) suggested targeted advertizing and products as potential solutions to addressing stigma, and Hammel (2009: 8) noted that subsidies are an important part of some of the programs in her study. This present research adds to our understanding of how many GFB programs are using these solutions, and to what effect. This research also builds on the work of Hammel (2009) in finding that while local purchasing is a hurdle for many, others have instituted partnerships and procedures that enable them to more efficiently communicate with local producers or utilize local produce auctions. I hope that some of the ideas and solutions that I have shared will be useful to others who operate GFB programs, and inspire us all to look to our communities and creativity for innovative ways to overcome what may at first seem to be impossible contradictions.

CONCLUSION: PACKING IT ALL UP

The original GFS program in Toronto emerged out of an effort to promote Community Food Security, with goals of empowering communities; creating an alternative, holistic distribution system; increasing community involvement; supporting local farmers; and providing high-quality culturally-appropriate food. (Welsh and MacRae 1998, Morgan et al. 2008). This closely aligns with many scholarly definitions of CFS (Anderson and Cooke 1999, Hamm and Bellows 2003, Welsh and MacRae 1998, Winne 2008), which discuss decentralized, multifaceted projects to support integrated systems providing good food to all in a way that builds and relies upon community. The subsequent spread of the GFB to new communities across Canada has resulted in a wide variety of GFB program structures, priorities, and activities. Some elements, such as universality and the use of volunteers and community partnerships, were consistent among all 21 programs. Other aspects, including how programs are structured, where and why they purchase food, and how they interact with community members other GFB programs differ among programs.

These stories and adaptations help illustrate the variety and innovation of GFB programs across Canada, and the multifaceted benefits that they bring to their home communities. They expand our knowledge of what the GFB is and what it can be. Furthermore, examining the scaling out of the GFB and the resulting variety of programs helps lend insight into the dynamics of one type of CFS project, and furthers our understanding of how those involved with CFS initiatives negotiate multiple goals, and how CFS programs are introduced and adapted to new communities. This research

widens our knowledge of the array of GFB programs across Canada, and also raises additional questions for future scholars of CFS and the GFB.

As CFS programs, GFBs are distinct from other forms of hunger relief such as food banks because they deliver a box of quality produce to their customers in a way that aims to engage, strengthen, and nourish the person and the community. They are building more resilient food systems and providing resistance to market concentration by giving people a new way to acquire food. GFB programs strengthen communities by creating new social spaces where all are welcome to participate, providing training and education, and encouraging and facilitating new partnerships between community organizations. Furthermore, many support local food producers and businesses by providing a new, consistent market for products.

The process of scaling out and program establishment occurred differently in each of the communities I studied; many programs heard about the model from FoodShare Toronto, but others had learned about it from other neighboring communities or had scaled up smaller models from their own locality. The programs are still communicating, and managers found that resources like *The Good Food Box: A Manual* and networking sessions at conferences help them to share ideas and improve their programs.

Additionally, I learned that some networks, such as the Ontario Good Food Box Network, have been formed to help facilitate communications among programs. This initial data expands our knowledge of the impact and challenges of networked CFS projects. These programs are sharing knowledge as well as working together on local, regional, and provincial scales to advocate for more systemic change and support, as suggested by Weckerle (2004). My conversations, however, revealed that a local GFB

program's participation in the OGFBN was limited by time and funding resources, and that programs were less likely to participate if they had a unique program model that did not translate well to other communities. This could represent a challenge for networks, especially those that seek to discover and share innovative solutions and ideas. In order to promote creative problem-solving, networks should encourage and welcome the participation of those with models different from their own.

During the scaling-out process, some common elements remained a part of all programs, including universality and a reliance on partnerships within the community, while other goals of the original program have been less widely adopted. Certain aims identified by the Toronto program (Morgan et al. 2008: 26-27) have remained prevalent among most of the programs, including: increasing access, providing healthy produce, and supporting local producers. Creating a social space to educate and inspire food system change was also widely mentioned. On the other hand, some goals identified by the original FoodShare program have not remained as prevalent: only three program managers mentioned that providing culturally accessible food was a goal for them, and only one program specifically discussed supporting organic farmers.

Scholars have cautioned that, because they have many goals and seek a holistic solution to fix production and consumption, CFS initiatives are taking on "potentially contradictory" aims (Allen 1999:117). With respect to GFB programs, while goals like supporting local farmers and providing access to affordable food sometimes clash and force decision-makers to choose between the one of the two, much more often this balancing is not an either-or situation. Rather, decision-making is influenced by a number of goals and resource constraints, and managers aim to do the best they can under

the given circumstances. For most programs it is not a question of "do we support local farmers or do we increase low-income food access?" Instead, it is more of a conversation: "Let's find a way to work within our limited means to ensure that people can access healthy food, while supporting the local economy and building community as best we can."

This balancing is not necessarily negative, and it could help the GFB to serve an important role in widening interest and participation in food system change. For instance, in order to ensure the goal of increasing access, all but one of the programs includes at least some non-local food in their boxes at some point during the year. It would be easy to use this fact to criticize the GFB for not doing enough to support local farmers, but to do only that would ignore many of the positive aspects of this choice. It is highly improbable that many local food systems in Canada could supply an affordable, nutritionally varied box of produce year-round. While this may have been possible in the past, modern food system consolidation has resulted in deterioration of local food systems and infrastructure, a phenomenon noted by scholars (Lyson 2004, Winne 2008) as well as many of the research participants. Some CFS programs like Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs) and farmers markets have begun to reconnect farmers with consumers, but have generally done so by working alongside, rather than within, the dominant food system. Additionally, these programs are often seasonal and involve an up-front investment of money or time, making them out of reach or impractical to large segments of the population. This has led some scholars to question the potential for CFS projects to adequately respond food security issues (Allen 1999).

Programs like the GFB, which actively and intentionally balance year round healthy food access with other goals, could serve as a middle ground to help ease and scale up the transition back to more sustainable and local food systems. They respond to the immediate need to ensure that people can obtain healthy food throughout the year in a dignified manner, and at the same time these programs can help to rebuild and strengthen local systems. As some managers noted, GFB programs that purchase locally serve as a consistent market for farmers, allowing them to grow, expand, and diversify their production system. GFB programs also drive demand for local products, by exposing their customers to new foods and food skills. Even those GFBs who purchase local food through their supplier rather than directly from producers have an impact. As a large customer requesting local products, GFB programs have enough purchasing power to encourage their wholesalers, distributors, and local grocery stores to provide options from local producers, which are then available to all of the supplier's other accounts as well. In doing so, these GFBs help to scale up the local food system further increase the places where local food is available in the community.

GFB programs involve a wide range of actors in their operations, both out of intent and necessity. In doing so, they embrace an alternative model of food distribution: one that is based in community and cooperation, rather than on solely monetary transactions between customers and a business. This affirms some of the aims of the original program in Toronto, which asserts that "food distribution systems that involve communities and help to create neighborhood leaders have a great potential to enhance individual and community empowerment" (Morgan et al. 2008:18). For instance, while programs are reliant on volunteer packers due simply to logistics, many managers also

discussed the social connections and education that occurs during box packing days as one of their program's best asset. Similarly, using depots helps save on delivery costs, but also facilitates new interactions among neighbors.

GFB programs also interact with many actors in their community beyond their customers. Many rely on partnerships to facilitate distribution of boxes at depots, supply and sort food, provide education opportunities, help with marketing, and provide resources like subsidies or in-kind donations of location, staff, or equipment. Many of these partnerships arose out of necessity, but they have resulted in some very innovative adaptations in the programs studied. For instance, one program manager has discovered that the libraries in her town will let her use their interlibrary loan transportation system to transmit box orders and payments from depots in outlying town, saving her gas and postage.

Another interesting partnership involves mental health agencies, which bring adults with disabilities to volunteer at packing day at a few of the programs. The GFB gets a steady stream of invested volunteers from this arrangement, but the real benefit comes to the volunteer packers, disabled and otherwise. Packing days bring their diverse group together in a new social and work setting, allowing volunteers to learn from and about each other, and to develop new leadership and communication skills.

Many GFB programs confront distribution and access issues head on, and encourage their customers to become more educated and engaged food consumers. By providing social space around food distribution, GFBs help start dialogues that can reconnect consumers with their food. This focus on creating new relationships to food and community stands in contrast to the distancing occurring between consumers and

producers in the conventional food system (Kloppenburg et al. 1996: 34), as well as the false sense of accomplishment that some scholars criticize food banks for (Riches 1996, 1997). Hassanein (2008:290-296) further suggests that this space for "talk" and interaction around food issues is essential to building a more democratic food system because "discussion and deliberation are necessary for democratic decision-making… people make better decisions for both themselves and others if they have shared ideas and engaged in deliberation."

Yet, despite the emergent benefits of collaboration, and the ability of programs to innovate and adapt to insufficient and unpredictable resources, my research shows that funding is a major sideboard on what is and is not possible for the GFB. This was evidenced by the fact that program maintenance was a major goal for nearly all programs, and the large extent to which price, logistics and resources were listed as major considerations in how programs are structured and what food they provide. My research strongly suggests that most of the programs could accomplish a wider array of CFS goals if they had more, and more stable, funding. This has important consequences. First and foremost, funding and resources to support innovative programs like the GFB must be made more available and more predictable, if we expect these projects to grow and succeed in executing multiple goals. Nearly half of the respondents said that they are ready to expand the reach and impact of their program; the only thing standing in their way is a paucity of resources.

Furthermore, competing goals and the instability of funding to support GFB programs suggests that, while they do serve an important and innovative role in developing new ways of distributing food and have certainly found new ways to bridge

gaps in the food system, GFB programs cannot be the only solution to the ills of our current industrialized food system. While my findings lend nuance to the questions of balancing posed by CFS scholars, they are still consistent with the argument that CFS efforts are "important additions to, but not substitutes for, a nonretractable governmental safety net that protects against food insecurity" (Allen 1999: 117). In other words, food insecurity is ultimately driven by market concentration, income inequality, and rising costs for other essentials such as housing and health care. Until we address these issues on a systemic national and international level, CFS programs will be at best a band-aid, and some members of society will still be left out (Allen 1999, Poppendieck 1998, Winne 2008).

Yet the GFB could provide a valuable starting point for addressing these problems. It brings consumers from a wide range of income brackets together to distribute food in a novel way. In doing so, new relationships are formed, conversations are started, and consumers have a chance to experience and relate to food differently. GFB programs are feeding people healthy food now, but they could also be feeding the fires of food system reform.

Future Research

The conversations I held with GFB program managers help to broaden our understanding of the GFB, but more research is warranted in order to continue learning about the impacts that GFB programs are having, how they affect and are perceived by suppliers and customers, and how these programs can continue to be improved. This study was a broad sampling, based on interviews with one person at each GFB program. If future researchers took a more in-depth, focused look at the decision-making dynamics

at one or more of the programs through case studies, it is likely that they would reveal additional factors that influence GFB program formats and operations. Future research could also examine the relationships between the main organization coordinating the GFB and the depots, in order to see how the depot organizations and hosts understand the GFB and the constraints affecting their participation in the project. Brownlee and Cammer (2004) and Hammel (2009) both suggest that depot coordinator resources and time are a major constraint for some programs; what is the perspective of depot coordinators in smaller, or differently-structured programs than those previously studied? It would also be beneficial to look more in-depth at the relationships between the GFB program and its volunteers, in order to understand the value and impact of volunteering from the volunteer's perspective, rather than just the GFB manager.

Another study could look further into the relationships between GFB programs and local farmers, and to understand the costs and benefits of selling to the GFB program from a producers' perspective. Hammel (2009) interviewed some local farmers who might sell to the GFB in the future, but it would be useful to have an idea about how the program is perceived by current GFB producers and suppliers, especially among programs with different procurement practices. All of this additional knowledge would help GFB program managers understand the strengths and weaknesses of their programs more fully, and could result in new or shared innovations that help them utilize their resources more effectively and accomplish a wider range of goals. Asking GFB volunteers, customers, and suppliers about how the program has changed their views around food would also help assess the potential of the GFB to create social space that inspires food system change.

In addition, differences in goals or structure seem to occasionally keep programs from sharing best practices with one another or from adopting an innovation from another program that was structured much differently than them. This could potentially prevent how much networking and collective action will occur between GFB programs if they differ too much. This idea emerged in my study, and more research into the dynamics, potential, and challenges of sharing between programs and specifically within the OGFBN and other thematic networks of GFB programs could help ensure that knowledge sharing and problem solving benefit from collaboration.

The GFB, already understood to be a holistic approach to food access, is even more complex than suggested by previous literature. Clearly, there is a great variety of GFBs that exist across Canada, and their experiences and adaptations can serve as models for future innovations and projects. I hope that this first attempt at cataloguing and understanding this variety will inspire others to pay attention to some of the innovations happening outside of the more-studied programs. Furthermore, I hope it will encourage GFB programs across Canada to look to their neighbors for sharing inspiration, and encourage all of my readers to be open to new ideas about how to innovate towards a food system that brings good food for everyone.

Appendix A

Good Food Box Program Manager Interview Guide

Instructions to interviewer:
___**Check Tape**
___**Record the following:**
      Interview Number:

      Date:

      Start Time:

DIAL NUMBER—WAIT FOR ANSWER
Hello. My name is Stephanie Laporte. Can I please speak with [GFB MANAGER'S NAME]?
      IF ASKED FOR MORE INFORMATION:
I am conducting a study of Good Food Box programs across Canada and [MANAGER'S NAME] has agreed to participate.

INTRODUCTION: Thank you so much for talking with me today. I am trying to learn more about the variety of Good Food Box programs across Canada. I am interested in your experience learning about and working with the Good Food Box program, how your program has been developed over the years, and things like that. I will be talking with program managers from across the country, so my hope is that the research will highlight the diversity of Good Food Box programs, and help shed light on what's working well, and what can be improved.

Before we get started, I want to let you know that your participation is voluntary and your identity as a participant in this study will remain confidential. Your name will not be used in any presentations or written reports. You also can stop participating in the interview at any point, if you wish. Also, if you don't know the answer to a question, or don't want to answer, that is fine—I'm just happy with whatever information you can give me.

I hope that my research will be useful in helping to understand and improve programs in the future. Just so you know, I will be doing a public presentation about the research at my thesis defense, and I might also try to find other ways to share the research, such on a website or in a journal. I would also be more than happy to share a copy of the research with you.

If it is alright with you, I would like to record the interview. That will help ensure that your views and answers are accurately recorded.

Is that alright with you? IF YES, TURN ON RECORDER.

PROGRAM STRUCTURE [IF APPLICABLE: I've been able to read a bit about your program online, but] I'd like to hear from you about the general structure and logistics of your community's Good Food Box program. I am going to start by asking you about the distribution side of your program, and then ask some questions about how you source and purchase food. Later on, I also have some questions about how your program was created, and how it functions in the community.

1. What year was your Good Food Box program started?

2. What year did you start working with the Good Food Box program?

3. What geographic area does your program's clientele come from?

4. Has the region covered by your program changed at all over the years?

       FOLLOW UP: How?

5. About how many boxes do you distribute per month?

6. How do you coordinate the distribution of food?

       PROBES: _____Neighborhood drop off locations?
                      _____Partnerships with community organizations?
                      _____Volunteers?
                      _____Home deliveries?

       FOLLOW UP: How many deliveries per month?

       FOLLOW UP: Why did you decide to structure the box drops in this way?

7. That's very interesting. Now, I'd like to ask about your program's target audience. What kinds of customers does your program try to reach?

       FOLLOW UP: Thanks for telling me about the clientele you are *aiming* to reach. About what percentage of your *actual* customer base is your target audience?

8. Do you administer a means test for participation in the program?

       IF YES: What is it?

       IF NO: Why not?

       FOLLOW UP: Why did your program decide on that policy?

Food sourcing/ purchasing: Thank you for telling me about the distribution side of your program. Now, I'd like to ask you about the food you put in your boxes.

9. What types of food are typically included in your boxes?

10. Who decides what food is included in the boxes?

11. Where do you source your food from?

      PROBE: Any others?

12. Thinking about the whole year, about what percentage of the food in your Good Food Box is produced locally?

      FOLLOW-UP: Does this vary by season?

      FOLLOW UP: How do you define "local"?

13. What criteria do you use in deciding what food to put into the boxes?
      [CHECK OFF:] ____Quality   ____Local

              ____Good Variety   ____Organic

              ____Staple Foods   ____Reduced Pesticides

              ____Nutrition   ____Price

              Other:

      PROBE: Any others?

14. Of these criteria, what would you say is the top priority?

      PROBE: Why?

15. Do you ever find it difficult to balance these priorities when purchasing food?

PROGRAM ADAPTATION: Thank you for telling me a bit about how your program operates. Now, I'd like to talk a bit more in depth about how your program was started, and how your community learned about the Good Food Box program model. [*If applicable:* I know you weren't around at the time of founding, but I appreciate any information you can give me from what you do know.] First, I am going to ask some questions about how your program got started and developed, and then I have some questions more specifically about how you learned to do your job.

16. What organizations were involved in getting your Good Food Box program started?

      PROBE: Any others?
      PROBE: What that organization do?

17. How did your community first learn about this type of food program (Good Food Box programs)?

18. What sources of information did the founders of your program rely on when setting up the program?

     _____Site Visits   _____Talking with other programs
     _____Toronto GFB manual   _____Past personal experience with programs
     _____Other:

19. Were any of these more helpful than others?

20. In what ways do you feel your program is unique compared to other Good Food Box programs?

21. Thank you for telling me about the program and its beginnings. Now, I'd like to hear a bit more about how you gained the knowledge necessary to run your program. First of all, from your experience working with your program, what skills would you say are most important for a GFB manager to have?

22. It seems that there is a great deal of knowledge necessary to run a successful program. When you started, how did you learn how to do the job?

23. Did you contact other GFB programs in order to learn about their program?

       FOLLOW UP: What was your experience learning from other GFB programs?

24. And, now that you are familiar with running a GFB program, do you ever share what you know with other communities?

       FOLLOW UP: In what ways?

       FOLLOW UP: And has your community's Good Food Box program ever been directly involved with starting a Good Food Box program in another community or geographic area?

COMMUNITY NEEDS/ BALANCING CFS GOALS Thank you for telling me about how your program got started. Now, I'd like to ask you a few questions about how your program's goals and priorities, and the way in which it serves your community.

25. How are management decisions made in your program?

26. Is there any way for community members and customers to participate in program planning?

       FOLLOW UP: Why? Why not?

27. In addition to the main food box program, is your GFB program involved in any other food or community development initiatives?

        PROBES: _____Food skills or nutrition education
                             _____community gardens
                             _____farmer training
                             _____Job skills training
                             _____leadership development

        PROBE: Can you think of any others?

28. [If applicable: It seems that your Good Food Box program works on a number of areas and issues.] As a Good Food Box program manager, how do you feel about balancing all of the areas that your program is trying to address?

        PROBES: Does it ever cause conflict? Does it foster creativity?

29. Have your program's goals changed over the years, and if so, how?

30. In some of the research that I have been doing, Good Food Box-type programs are sometimes referred to as "Community Food Security" programs. I was wondering if you use these terms when describing your program, or if you think if your program as a Community Food Security program?

WRAP UP: Thank you so much for your answers so far. We are almost done. I would just like to ask you a few more, larger-picture questions.

31. What would you say has been your biggest challenge with the GFB program?

32. What has been your biggest success?

33. Where would you like to see your program in five years?

Those are all the questions I have for now. Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you very much for your time today. I am hoping to acknowledge and thank the Good Food Box programs that participated in the project as part of my thesis. Would it be alright to include your program's name in the listing? (Your name will be kept confidential)

Would it be alright if I contact you in case I have a follow up question?

Interview End Time:

_____

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