V. GENERAL STRATEGIES FOR PLANNING AND ORGANIZING [F-10, F-11, & F-12]

This section begins with ways to assess the larger resource dimensions of your region and your local food system. This is followed by two short pieces that lay out basic planning and strategic sequences and elements. How to involve community groups in local food system visioning and discussion is outlined next. Finally, three detailed assessments of the Chicago foodshed are included.

A. The larger context [F-10]

1. Sustainability and urban impacts: "How Big is Our Ecological Footprint?" Mathis Wackernagel with The Task Force on Planning Healthy & Sustainable Communities, University of British Columbia, November 1993.


C. Preliminary Planning and Strategizing: [F-11]

1. “Developing and implementing your own local plans.” Ken Dahlberg and Tom Hemingway, 1995


C. Engaging other people and groups through visioning processes: [F-12]


D. Examples of detailed community food system assessments: The "Food Files" series. [F-12]


How to facilitate a vision workshop

Next time you have a 15-minute break, try this exercise: Find a quiet place, take a moment to relax, close your eyes, and take a journey into the future:

It is the year 2013 and you are hovering in a balloon above your own community. During the past 20 years, it has transformed itself into an ideally healthy community.

Imagine yourself floating down to the center of this place, where you climb out of the balloon and move around the community. Take your time as you go into and out of stores ... workplaces ... streets ... parks ... neighborhoods ... houses ... healthcare and educational settings.

In what way are the places you visit and the people you see healthy? What makes them healthy?

Notice the colors and shapes and textures around you. What sounds do you hear? What smells do you notice?

Pay attention to how people move from place to place.

Observe the settings where ill people receive care and the places where people learn.

Take the time to experience this community at different times of day and night. At different seasons.

Try to imagine yourself as an elderly person living in this environment ... as a child ... as a woman/man ... as a disabled person.

Now spend a few minutes revisiting places you have seen that struck you most forcibly or that you liked the best, then re-enter the balloon, ascend back into the sky, and return to the present.

This is the core exercise in the vision workshops I have conducted in Canada, the US, and Europe. Organizing such a workshop provides one of the most powerful ways to answer the question, "What is a healthy community?"

The workshop is a futuring exercise specifically adapted for use with participants drawn from the general public.

It requires only the simplest of equipment-pencil and paper, flipchart or other large sheets to draw on, colored markers or crayon-and one trained facilitator (additional facilitators can be trained on the spot).

A vision workshop is best organized by a steering group presenting many sectors of the community, including hospital. It can involve anywhere from 20 to more than 100 people. Participants should represent a diverse cross-section of the community. The vision workshop itself takes a half-day, but it is useful to have another half-day to begin to develop priority action plans.

Here are the steps you might take if you were facilitating such a workshop:

* Begin the workshop with a minimum of introduction about your concept of a healthy community.

The idea is to demonstrate to participants that they already know what a healthy community is-not to give them your ideas and have them feed those ideas back to you.

* Ask participants to reflect back on the past few months and recall something they have personally experienced that strikes them as an example of a healthy community.

Don't allow people to give you examples they've heard from someone else or examples of what makes an unhealthy community. Insist on personal and positive experiences. In large groups, ask for volunteers and take 15 or 20 examples. In small groups, use this exercise as an "ice breaker" by asking people to introduce themselves and give their example.

* Write the answers on a flipchart.

Unless you have a high proportion of healthcare professionals in the group (which you shouldn't), you will find that people seldom talk about or give examples of the healthcare system. Rather, they will talk about parks and green spaces, street fairs, neighbors helping neighbors, bicycle paths, recycling campaigns, school and community events, good transit, and anti-Litter initiatives.

After filling a couple of flipcharts with experiences, point out, first, that the participants already know what a healthy community is and, second, that they know that it is not primarily the result of the activities of the healthcare system. (This second point may surprise them once they realize what they've said.)

* Facilitate a guided imagery exercise like the one above.

Have people take a "trip" through their own community at some point in the future, say 15 or 20 years hence, when it is an ideally healthy place. It may be useful to explain that guided imagery is not some strange "way out" experience but is used frequently, especially in sports psychology and increasingly in business, to help people improve their performance and achieve clarity about their goals and plans.

The exercise should take about 15 minutes. Remember to use value-free language that leaves it up to the participants to specify what they see. Don't, for example, talk about cars, buses, and bicycles; just ask them to notice how people move around. Don't use words like "school" or "hospital"; participants' image of an ideally healthy community may not include what we now call hospitals and schools.
* **Ask to write down a list of the images that they found most powerful surprising enjoyable, or in any other way.**
If you are dealing with a non-literate population, and we have done workshops for homeless men and for students in English-as-a-second-language classes, ask then to make a list in their head.

This is perhaps the most magical moment of the workshop. For five minutes or more, you can hear a pin drop! Once people have completed their lists, take a coffee break.

* **Divide people into groups of six or eight, keeping the groups as mixed as possible.**
Ask each group, together with a facilitator, to move to one of the blank flipcharts that are pinned or taped to the wall. They will use these sheets to draw their picture of the ideally healthy community.

* **Ask all members of the small group to briefly describe one item from their list.**
This could be their favorite, the one that surprised them most, or whatever. This allows for a quick exploration of the range of ideas among the group and gives some sense of what themes will have to be portrayed in the picture.

* **Take 30-40 minutes to do a group drawing.**
Encourage people to draw anything they like. Others can add to it or amend it if it doesn't fit with their vision, but they can't delete it. The aim is to arrive at something that reflects a shared vision within each small group.

Encourage all members of each group to participate in the drawing. Inform them that no adult can draw better than a seven-year-old child, so they shouldn't be embarrassed by the child-like nature of their collective enterprise. (A golden rule here is that architects, planners, engineers, and professional artists are not allowed to draw first, since they don't draw like seven-year-old children and will intimidate the others.)

Avoid the use of words as much as possible. Urge people to use symbols instead (dollar signs, for instance, instead of the word "money" or "wealth").

About 20 minutes into the exercise, encourage people to look at their lists and see if there are important themes or issues from their image that are missing. Participants usually find this a lively and often amusing exercise.

* **Have each group present their drawing.**
The presenter should be selected by the small group and should not be that group's facilitator. It is useful to videotape this section of the workshop for future reference, to be able to recall accurately what was said and to present the results to other interested groups in the community.

* **Ask participants to identify the common themes that recur in the pictures**
Write these on a flipchart at the front of the room. If there are a lot of themes, try and group them without getting too broad and vague. These themes become the basis for identifying priority actions and even for establishing work groups for follow-up, which can take place as another half-day session on the same day, or as a separate half- or full-day workshop.

-Dr. Trevor Hancock

**HEALTHCARE FORUM JOURNAL**  **MAY/JUNE 1993**
One of the most serious problems facing the nation's poor is access to affordable food. A plethora of programs currently exist whose sole purpose is to deal with food issues. Yet few of these programs offer solutions on a scale that is commensurate with the problem. Food activists and concerned citizens often are we// aware of the problems and inequities of today's food system but few understand the economic forces that shape the system they seek to alter.

The information presented in this report is intended to lay a foundation for understanding the forces and trends that affect the cost and availability of food. Both the farm and marketing sectors of the food system are analyzed. As the first part in a new TNW series on urban food systems, the report provides the kind of information that food system reformers must have in order to create new strategies at an appropriate scale.

by Paige Chapel

Supplying food to consumers is the nation's largest industry, employing 18 million people. Although farmers account for only 3 percent of the U.S. population, they produce enough food to feed 220,700,000 U.S. citizens each day and supply more than 85 percent of the world's surplus food. In the U.S. alone, $345.7 billion was spent on food and beverages in 1980.

Chicago is located in one of the most productive farm states in the nation. Illinois' farm sector ranks as the nation's fourth largest when measured by agricultural cash receipts. Although the state encompasses only 1.6 percent of the nation's land area, it produces 9 percent of the nation's farm products (crop and livestock). It is number two in soybean, corn and hog production. 1980 cash receipts by farmers for Illinois crops and livestock was nearly $8 billion-an important figure since two out of every five workers in Illinois are linked to the state's agribusiness sector through farming, food processing, transportation, marketing, banking, chemical and implement manufacturing businesses. Table I shows Illinois' major farm products and their percentage of total cash receipts.

Chicagoans do not have to go very far to see an Illinois farm. In the six county metropolita area (Cook, DuPage, Kane, Lake, McHenry, Will) there are 4,892 farms accounting for over one million acres of farm land. The cash receipts for these farms totalled $283 million in 1975. Cook County alone has 460 farms within its boundaries, accounting for over 53,000 acres of agricultural land and $29 million in cash receipts.

Although most Chicagoans may not believe it, Chicago is located in a region with some of the cheapest food prices in the nation. When compared to other Bureau of Labor Statistics regions, food prices for cereals and bakery products, meats, fish, eggs, dairy, and processed snacks were consistently lower than the average of the north central region. Prices for fresh fruits and vegetables tended to be moderately priced on the whole.

Considering that Illinois is a major grain and hog producing state (see Table I), one would expect Chicago meat, cereal, and bakery product prices to be below or competitive with prices throughout the region. In a September, 1981 survey, Chicago meat and dairy prices were well below the regional average while the price of staples (flour, sugar, bread) and fresh fruits and vegetables were considerably higher than the regional average.

The Problem

Despite living in the breadbasket of the nation, an estimated half million Chicagoans suffer from inadequate diets each year. At Cook County Hospital alone, 200 of the 800-1,000 patients admitted daily to the emergency room are treated for starvation or nutrition deficiencies. Simple rationales of this phenomenon are the lack of dollars with which to buy food, limited access to food stores, consumption of poorer quality foods, or a combination of all three.

During 1972-74, the period of the most recent Consumer Expenditure Survey of the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average U.S. urban wage earner ($10-$20 thousand earned annually) spent close to 20 percent of his/her before-tax income on food, whereas consumers earning $5,000 or less annually spent closer to 40 percent of their wages on food. When taken from after-tax paychecks, the percentage of income spent on food is still higher. The situation is exacerbated by the steady rise in food prices, particularly for people on fixed incomes. Since 1967, food prices, in Chicago have risen 180 percent.

At Cook County Hospital alone, 200 of the 800-1,000 patients admitted daily to the emergency room are treated for starvation or nutrition deficiencies.

Access to affordable food is linked to two major components of the food system: production and marketing. The production component includes those processes and expenses on the farm that involve growing crops or raising livestock. Marketing consists of all the phases in the food system between the farmer and consumer, including the processing, transporting, wholesaling, and retailing of food products. The availability and affordability of food in the city is directly affected by where and how food is produced and marketed.

The Farm Sector

In 1978, 23 percent of all U.S. farms were located within standard metropolitan statistical areas. At that time, metropolitan agricultural areas produced 26 percent of the value of all food commodities sold in the...
continental U.S. However, farmland in metropolitan areas is rapidly disappearing. One hundred thousand acres of Illinois cropland are lost each year through conversion to suburban housing, office buildings, industrial plants, shopping centers, schools, parks, cemeteries, golf courses and other developments. Suburban sprawl not only uses up land, it also increases taxes for remaining farms. As land values soar, the already suffering profitability of farms decreases. The solution for many farmers is to sell their land to developers and relocate or give up farming for another occupation.

As farms move farther away from cities, transportation costs associated with food distribution increase and are passed on to the consumer. In 1980, 3,005,072 people living in Chicago consumed 4.4 billion pounds of food, over 12 million pounds each day. Hauling this amount of food into Chicago required an estimated 300 trucks each day. The cost of this food to Chicagans was $3.1 billion, $166 million of which was for transportation. As energy and labor costs increase, the cost of transporting food to cities will continue to rise.

TABLE 1: Illinois Cash Farm Income, 1980

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commodity</th>
<th>% of Total Receipts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corn</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soybean</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wheat</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other crops (inc. vegetable 0.4)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Livestock &amp; by-products</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dairy</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eggs</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cattle</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hogs</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Transportation is not the only energy-dependent component of agriculture. In 1979 the food industry used 16.5 percent of all energy consumed in the U.S. while farming accounted for only 17.6 percent of this quantity. In 1980, energy use on the farm accounted for 2.5 percent of the country's total energy consumption. Yet in 1975, farmers were using 10 calories of fossil fuel energy to produce 1 calorie of food energy. The price they have had to pay has not been cheap. Since 1977, the cost of farm fuels and energy has risen 114 percent.

More often than not, the farmer absorbs part of the increased cost as well as the consumer. The prices received by farmers for their goods have risen 40 percent since 1977 while the prices they pay for production expenses have increased 50 percent. Higher energy costs coupled with the doubling of interest rates since 1977 has resulted in a serious drop in farmers' net income. The trend of prices paid by farmers rising faster than the prices they receive is likely to continue well beyond 1982.

Not only is the current food system dependent on increasingly expensive resources, but its dependence on those resources make it vulnerable to shortages and political and economic disturbances. The U.S. currently imports 40 percent of its fuel. An energy shortage or reduction of 10 percent would result in a 55 percent increase in the price of fresh fruit and vegetables. In a major crisis, perishables would disappear from grocery stores almost immediately. Under normal buying patterns, stores with floor areas of 10,000 square feet or more might have canned goods for as long as a week; smaller stores without storage space would be empty sooner. If panic buying occurred, consumers could empty all the stores in less than a day.

**Since 1975, the farm-retail price spread has added $70 billion of the $100 billion increase in consumer expenditures on food.**

Dependence on fossil fuels and other non-renewable resources permeates U.S. agriculture. Most biocides and fertilizers utilize petroleum-based chemicals. Each year, farmers use 61/4 pounds of pesticides for every person in the U.S. at an annual cost of $839 million. In addition, 111 pounds of synthetic fertilizers are spread on each acre of cropland, amounting to 210 pounds of fertilizer for every person in the nation. Without the use of these chemicals, crop yields would drop an estimated 50 percent.

Perhaps one of the weakest links in the current food chain is the tenuous supply of non-renewable resources that compose synthetic fertilizers. Consider the fertilizers that supply crops with three essential plant nutrients: phosphorus, potassium, and nitrogen. The current consumption rates of phosphate fertilizers will deplete our rock phosphate supply by the year 2000. The U.S. produces less than 25 percent of the potash used on farms - production is expected to drop to 10 percent within 20 years. Nitrogen fertilizers are made from natural gas. As the price of natural gas is deregulated, farmers can expect the price of nitrate fertilizers to increase.

Phosphate fertilizers illustrate the vulnerability of a food system that relies on foreign supplies. All phosphate fertilizers contain sulphur. The U.S. currently imports part of its sulphur from Poland, Iran, and Iraq -countries in the midst of political and economic crises. The unstable political climates in these nations have resulted in the decreased mining and export of sulphur, which in turn has created a shortage of sulfur on the world market and an increase in sulfur prices. Simultaneously, phosphate fertilizer prices have soared. If the already tense political climate between the U.S. and any of these nations flared such that sulfur was no longer exported to this country, U.S. agriculture would be detrimentally affected.

Clearly, the American food system operates within a delicate balance of environmental limitations and international relations. A shortage of one or more of the critical resources needed to produce and transport food could have a devastating effect on cities and particularly on low-income consumers.

As a hedge against an expensive and vulnerable food system, urban gardening projects have sprung up in cities across the nation. A survey conducted by the Gallup Organization for Gardens for All estimates that 38 million households in the U.S. had food gardens in 1981, accounting for 47 percent of all American households. The food produced in home gardens has an estimated retail value of $16 billion. (Statistics on Chicago's gardening program are not yet available.)

But vegetable gardens only supply a small part of the American diet; and production only accounts for one component of the food bill. The price that consumers pay at the grocery check-out line reflects both the farm value of the raw commodity and the charges by various segments of the
food marketing industry to cover their costs and profits.

The national 1981 farm value and consumer expenditure for food was $88 and $248 billion, respectively, compared to $81 and $260 billion in 1980. For each dollar spent in food stores in 1980 (this does not include dollars spent for food away from home or by institutions), 37 cents paid for the farm value, 28 cents paid for processing, 6 cents was spent on intercity transportation, 9 cents paid for wholesaling, and 20 cents was spent on retailing.

The Marketing Sector

Because the raw commodity is only one input into the food marketing process, a decrease in a product's farm value may be partially, completely, or more than offset by cost increases incurred by food marketing firms in assembling, processing, transporting, wholesaling, and retailing food products. In recent years, the marketing bill has accounted for more than 50 percent of the increase in food prices (farm value and imported fish and seafoods account for the remainder). Since 1975, the farm-retail price spread has added $70 billion of the $100 billion increase in consumer expenditures on food while the farm value has only added $30 billion (see Figure 1). A small part of the higher consumer expenditure is due to the 1 to 2 percent increase in the volume of food purchased by consumers as a result of the decrease in food consumed away from the home.

However, the bulk of the increase was caused by rising labor costs and by the rising price of inputs bought by the food industry from nonfarm sources (e.g., paper, plastic, metal, energy, etc.).

Three economic factors determine the size of the marketing bill: productivity, food industry costs, and profit. Productivity in the food industry can have a significant impact on food prices. For example, tomato canneries are faced with higher input costs for energy and metal cans. If productivity (the number of cans of tomatoes produced per unit of inputs used) remains constant then the increased energy and container costs would be passed on to consumers. However, if a cannery reduced its energy bill and streamlined its truck loading operation, a smaller input of energy and labor would be used per can produced. This would offset part of the higher production costs and would hold down the retail price of canned tomatoes.

Since labor costs are the largest contributing factor to the marketing bill, most food industries attempt to improve worker output per hour. Labor productivity is affected by available technology and skill and motivation of the work force.

In the last decade productivity increased in the food manufacturing sector while it decreased in the food retailing industry. There are several reasons for these trends. Manufacturers have switched to fewer and larger plants and have invested in modernized equipment, all of which reduce labor hours. On the other hand, supermarkets have introduced long hours and new services (bakeries and delicatessens) to compete for food sales. Expansion measures accounted for a 13.4 percent increase in labor hours between 1972 and 1979, while sales increased only one percent. As a result, a number of national retail chains have operated at a loss in recent years.

Increases in the retail price of food largely reflect rising costs faced by the food marketing sector (see Figure 2). Following the trend of the last ten years, the farm value accounted for approximately one-third of the retail price of food. The remaining two-thirds makes up the farm retail price spread or the “marketing bill.”

A description of each component of retail food prices follows:

Labor. By far the largest component of the marketing bill, labor costs make up 45 percent of the 1981 total and accounted for two-fifths of the increase in the marketing bill. During the first nine months of 1981, total hourly earnings in the food industry rose 10.8 percent.

Packaging. Eight cents out of every food dollar is spent on packaging. In 1980, major increases in the cost of plastic resins, tin cans, glass, and...
paperboard drove up the bill for food packaging by more than 14 percent. The increase in packaging costs in 1981 moderated to 7.6 percent due to adequate supplies of paperboard products and petroleum.

**Transportation.** Higher rates for rail and truck transport pushed the cost of transporting food up 13 percent in 1981, accounting for 6 percent of the retail price of food. This increase was slightly below the rise in the 1980 cost.

**Energy.** The fastest rising component of the marketing bill, although still one of the smallest, is fuel and electricity. In 1981, energy costs accounted for almost 6 percent of the marketing bill and 4 percent of consumer food expenditures. Energy prices averaged 19.5 percent between September 1980 and September 1981, compared to a 17.8 increase between 1979 and 1980.

**Other.** The remainder of the bill includes a variety of minor expenses that are incurred during the processing and marketing of food. Individually, they are small, but when added together they make up a major component of the marketing bill (24 percent in 1981). These costs include plant and equipment depreciation, rent, TV, radio, and newspaper advertising, repairs, bad debts, contributions, property taxes and insurance, and interest. Costs in this category increased at the general inflation rate in 1981.

Profits for all sectors in the food marketing industry made up almost 6 percent of the marketing bill in 1981, and 4 percent of the price of retail foods (see Figure 2). After-tax profits as a percentage

An energy shortage or reduction of ten percent would result in a 55 percent increase in the price of fresh fruit and vegetables.

As in most recent years, the costs of labor, packaging, transportation, and energy were responsible for three-fourths of the increase in food processing and marketing costs. Figure 3 shows the relative increase in input prices for the food marketing industry in 1980. (Note: these increases are cumulative, not averages.)

Profits for all sectors in the food marketing industry made up almost 6 percent of the marketing bill in 1981, and 4 percent of the price of retail foods (see Figure 2). After tax profits as a percentage of sales have remained stable during the last three years and as a result have not added directly to the rising cost of food. While some national retail food chains (A&P, Food Fair) have operated at a loss in recent years, the after-tax margin

**Chicago is among hundreds of U.S. cities that sit at the end of a food pipeline - a pipeline that is highly dependent on transportation and energy.**

for retailers as a whole has continued to average about one percent of sales. The margin for food manufacturers continues to average slightly above 3 percent as it has for the last four years. Based on the USDA's projected components of retail food prices (see Figure 2), Chicagoans paid farmers $961 million for food in 1981. The remaining 2.2 billion consumer food dollars paid for the marketing bill. The dollars paid to each sector of the marketing industry are shown in Table 2. When individual commodities are compared, their farm values and marketing bills vary greatly (see Figure 4). Generally, perishable commodities that require the least amount of slicing, processing, and packaging (such as eggs, poultry, dairy, and meat products) have smaller marketing bills. Commodities such as bread, pasta, canned goods, and frozen foods require more handling and inputs than raw foods. Consequently, the majority of the consumer expenditure for these items pays for the marketing component. Commodities with smaller marketing bills are not necessarily less expensive; this merely means that a greater portion of the consumer expenditure goes directly to farmers.

**Summary**

The U.S. may be one of the richest agricultural nations in the world yet millions of Americans go hungry each year. Furthermore, our agricultural wealth is based on the consumption of limited resources and a competitive and increasingly expensive manufacturing industry. Chicago is among hundreds of U.S. cities that sit at the end of a food pipeline - a pipeline that is highly dependent on transportation and energy.

On one hand, the urban food chain is based on a distant supply system that points to the need for local, energy- and resource-efficient food production. On the other hand, it is made up of a marketing system that will require the elimination of middle marketing steps in the food chain and the development of alternative industrial processes if prices are to be reduced.

Urban agriculture programs potentially could produce fresh vegetables and fruits. This is currently being done on an individual basis in Chicago. Larger scale, community "farm" projects have yet to succeed in Chicago or in other U.S. cities. While urban gardens do have some impact on the availability of and consumer expenditure for food, the average Chicagoan does not live by fruit and vegetable alone. The American diet largely consists of meat, fish, dairy, grain, and every manner of processed foods. While some fruits and vegetables can be grown locally, grain crops require large tracts of land for sufficient impact on local consumption. And the raising of livestock for food purposes is prohibited by the Chicago Board of Health unless it is used for personal consumption.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marketing Component</th>
<th>% of Chicago Food Bill</th>
<th>Food $ Spent in 1981</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Labor</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>961 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Packaging</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fuel &amp; Electricity</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profits</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>496</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE 2: 1981 Chicago Food Marketing Bill**
For More Information

This first installment was condensed from a longer report authored by Paige Chapel. Copies of the full 20-page report, complete with footnotes and additional charts, are available for $2.00 from the Chicago Food System Research Project, Center for Neighborhood Technology, 570 W. Randolph, Chicago IL 60606, (312) 454-0126.

The second installment of this TNW special report on the urban food system will examine more closely these production limitations. Included will be a report on Chicago's metropolitan food system centering on the farming origins of the Chicago market basket and current trends within the marketing sector itself. Also featured will be a national view on the need for urban food planning. Part III of the series will cover consumer access questions at the retail level, as well as a look at alternatives such as food cooperatives. Programs for the hungry poor will also be examined. Part IV will attempt to review the state of the art in urban food planning in other locales. In addition, this final installment will conclude the series by suggesting some new solutions urban residents could undertake to assure a continuing supply of quality, affordable food in the future.
For Additional Reading


IL Bureau of the Budget, Statistical Abstract 1980 Springfield


Chicago Dept. of Consumer Services, Weekly Food Prices and Commodity Availability Survey; Sept 2-30, 1981.


As the Center for Neighborhood Technology’s Food Program Coordinator, Paige Chapel has spent the last four years as the Center’s urban ag specialist, providing technical assistance and research to numerous community organizations.
special report: The Food Files--II

Metro Agriculture: Meeting Local Needs?

by Paige Chapel

Food is the most basic element of life. It is the foundation of a productive, healthy society. Yet as we learned in the first installment of The Food Files ("Complex Forces Shape Our Urban Breadbasket" TNW V. 5 #7), urban dwellers exist on a food chain linked to an intricate transportation network, distant resources and a sophisticated market economy—a food chain that few consumers understand or have access to, except at the checkout counter.

Although food is important to everyone who eats, the nature of our food system does not rank as a burning consumer issue. For example, although organic farming methods and health food shops seem more common, many city residents are unaware of the nutritional quality of the food they consume or are simply unable to afford better diets.

It is easy to understand why residents of the Chicagoland area might not be conscious of their food system. Chicago is located in the nation’s, indeed the world’s breadbasket. Illinois is the largest agricultural exporting state in the country, Illinois farmers feed the world.

Most urban consumers have little to do with the production of the food they eat. Few of us have seen empty grocery store shelves when we go to buy our foodstuffs. Where our food comes from and where it will continue to come from is of little concern to us as long as there are no visible signs of scarcity or starvation.

However, if we look more closely at the food system, we can begin to see serious problems that are not readily apparent on the surface—the kinds of problems that have serious impact on producers and consumers alike.

Many years have come and gone, as have many farmers, manufacturers and retailers, since Chicago was hog butcher to the world. Each year, the urban ag specialist, providing technical assistance and research to numerous community organizations.

Chicago area loses land that was devoted to the production of food; fewer Chicagoan, are employed by the food industry as more warehouses and factories leave Chicago and more and more of the retail food market becomes concentrated in fewer corporate headquarters.

This second installment of The Food Files will examine current agricultural production in the Chicago Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area (SMSA). We will also take a look at the origins of the Chicago market basket and brief IV review trends in Chicago's food marketing sector.

Agriculture in the Chicago SMSA

Despite Chicago’s reputation as a major urban area, the six-county metroregion (see Figure 1) supports a substantial agricultural economy. As of 1978, over one million acres of land in the SMSA were devoted to agricultural use (see Table 1). In Cook County alone, there were 450 farms accounting for 51,164 acres of farmland.

Interestingly, a fairly diverse range of food commodities are commercially produced in the SMSA, including beef, pork, mutton and lamb, chicken, turkey, dairy, eggs, seven different grains, 24 different vegetables, eleven different fruits, not to mention mushrooms and honey.

Meat and dairy production is concentrated in Kane and McHenry Counties where approximately three-fourths of all the beef and pork produced in the SMSA originates and where 81 percent of the SMSA dairy herd is raised. 86 percent of the area’s egg production is concentrated in Lake and Will Counties.

By far, the vast majority of farm production in the SMSA is in grains, with corn being the principle crop. Will County led the area in total corn and soybean production in 1978. Overall, Kane, McHenry, and Will Counties were the largest grain producers in the SMSA, not surprising considering that these counties are also the leading farm districts (see Table 1 below).

The commodity in which Cook County excels when compared to other SMSA counties is vegetable production. Cook is a leading grower of snap beans, beets, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, collards, eggplant, mustard greens, sweet peppers, radishes, spinach, squash, tomatoes, and turnip greens.

One might speculate that the reason for this diverse cornucopia is Cook County farmers’ proximity to direct market outlets such as farmers’ markets and large roadside stands that serve urban and suburban Chicagoans. Other counties that are major vegetable producers include: McHenry County in cabbage, sweet corn, dry onion, and pea production, and Kane in peas.

Lake and McHenry are the major fruit producing counties in the SMSA, accounting for the bulk of the apples, grapes, pears, plums, pumpkins, raspberries, strawberries, and watermelons grown.

Although Cook, Lake, and McHenry lead the SMSA in vegetable and fruit production, most of Chicago’s produce is imported from regions of the U.S.

Production/Consumption Ratios

Based on the production data compiled by the Center for Neighborhood Technology (CNT), 18.5% of the beef consumed in

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As the Center for Neighborhood Technology’s Food Program Coordinator, Paige Chapel has spent the last four years as the Center's urban ag specialist, providing technical assistance and research to numerous community organizations.
Chicago is produced in the SMSA, 10.5% of the pork, and insignificant amounts of mutton and lamb, chicken, and turkey. Approximately 16% of the eggs eaten in Chicago are produced in the SMSA (largely in Lake and Will Counties).

If all the grain grown in the metro-area was used exclusively for human consumption, the SMSA would have produced enough corn in 1978 to feed over one hundred cities the size of Chicago for an entire year. Oat production that same year could have fed a population five times the size of Chicago. Wheat and rye production equaled 8.2% and 20.3% respectively, of Chicago’s consumption. SMSA barley production was equivalent to 50% of projected consumption. In reality, the vast majority of grain produced in the SMSA is used for livestock feed and is most likely exported.

Although 8.2% of the wheat consumed in Chicago was produced in the immediate area, Chicagoans probably ate very little of it. Due to the differences in the uses of the various classes of wheat, a large share of Illinois production is shipped out of the state while western wheat is shipped into Illinois. In 1977, over 60 percent of the wheat used in Illinois flour mills was imported. According to agriculturist Lowell Hill at the University of Illinois, the characteristics of the baking and milling industry are such that Illinois’ import-export trade in wheat is not likely to change in the near future.

As one might expect, an insignificant amount of produce is grown in the SMSA when compared to the quantities consumed. A few vegetables proved to be exceptions to this rule. Based on 1978 vegetable acreage in the SMSA and standard Illinois yields, the metro-area produced 171% of the cabbage consumed in Chicago, 84% of the sweet corn, 29% of the eggplant, 85% of the peas, 26% of the sweet peppers, 30% of the tomatoes, and over 550% of the pumpkins. Of these crops, cabbage, sweet corn, peas, pumpkins, and tomatoes are used for processing and are shipped to other areas in the U.S. The majority of the produce grown in the SMSA is canned by Green Giant and Libby, McNeil and Libby, Campbell Soup, and Del Monte.

Although these data do begin to paint a picture of Chicago’s food system, they must also be taken in stride. Because only partial data were available in some instances, more food may have been produced than actually shown. At the same time, the data compiled by CNT does not take into account any loss or waste during transport between producer and consumer.

Finally, it is somewhat unrealistic to talk about SMSA farm production in relation to Chicago alone. City residents consume an estimated 42% of the total food eaten in the 5ix-county area. Since one out of every five Chicagoans is deemed statistically hungry, Chicago may consume even less of its share of the SMSA diet. Despite these discrepancies, it is clear that a very diverse market basket is produced in the immediate area surrounding Chicago.

### TABLE 1. Number of farms and farm acreage in Chicago SMSA, 1978.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTY</th>
<th>#FARMS</th>
<th>TOTAL FARM ACREAGE</th>
<th>%LAND IN FARMS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cook</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>51,164</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DuPage</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>44,908</td>
<td>21.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kane</td>
<td>995</td>
<td>250,469</td>
<td>75.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lake</td>
<td>504</td>
<td>95,265</td>
<td>32.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McHenry</td>
<td>1,270</td>
<td>269,121</td>
<td>68.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will</td>
<td>1,382</td>
<td>364,072</td>
<td>67.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>4,835</td>
<td>1,074,999</td>
<td>45.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The SMSA produced a fraction of the eggs consumed in Chicago. Total Illinois egg production, which is concentrated in the northeastern and southwestern parts of the state, is equivalent to 150% of the city’s consumption. Needless to say, the bulk of Illinois’ eggs are not routed solely to Chicago. The local giant in poultry and therefore a major source for the Chicago market is Indiana. Iowa and marketing sectors. In 1979, 1,245,000 farmers participated in 1,110 co-ops in Illinois, Michigan, Indiana, Wisconsin, and Ohio.

Private corporations also affect the movement of food from producer to consumer. An example of such a company is Heinold Hog Markets, headquartered in Kants, Indiana. Heinold, a subsidiary of DeKalb AgResearch, handles 6% of all U.S. hogs from producer to packer. It operates 90 markets in the Midwest for producers and sells to packing houses through three sales offices in Indiana, Illinois, and Missouri.

Related corporations handle similar functions vis-a-vis cattle and other livestock at public stockyards in Kansas City, Omaha, Sioux City, and the national stockyards in St. Louis. In Illinois, smaller market places are located in Joliet, Springfield, and Peoria. Despite the demise of the Chicago stockyards, the majority of Illinois’ USDA certified meat packing plants are in the Chicago area.

The distribution of dairy products in the United States is determined by Federal Market Order Areas (FMOA). The Chicago FMOA includes two-thirds of Wisconsin and the northern part of

Chicago is not as easily accomplished as determining the kinds and quantities of food produced in the metropolitan area. Federal and state agricultural census surveys do not include the destination of farm commodities. As such no accurate data exist on the origin of most of the food consumed by Chicagoans. However, general assumptions can be drawn based on production data from Illinois and its neighboring states, including Wisconsin, Iowa, Indiana, and Michigan.
Illinois (see Figure 2). Almost twelve million milk consumers live in the FMOA, one-quarter of which represents the Chicago market share. Wisconsin produces 93% of the milk consumed with the remaining 7% produced in northern Illinois. Although enough milk was produced in the SMSA in 1978 to provide 40% of the fluid milk consumed in Chicago, part of that quantity was converted into other dairy products.

The fruits and vegetables that are consumed in Chicago are marketed through the South Water Street Market and through contractual arrangements with food processing companies (such as Green Giant, Libby, McNeil and Libby, and Campbells) and retail supermarket chains (such as jewel and Dominick’s). The South Water Market only provides fresh produce for smaller, independent retailers and for Chicago-area restaurants.

Based on the number of container unloads of fruits and vegetables, Illinois’ share of Water Market produce has declined by 60% since 1972- At the same time, fresh produce production in Illinois dropped. Between 1979 and 1980, production declined 18% while it only dropped 6% from 1974 to 1979.

The market share of five Midwestern states (Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Minnesota) at Water Street has also declined by 30% since 1972 from 17-2% of total unloads to 12%, turning the market into more of an interregional terminal.

As one might expect, most of the fresh produce sold at Water Market originates in the Pacific and Southeastern regions of the U.S. However, a significant amount (30% or more) of potato, cabbage, squash, beet, mushroom, cranberry, and blueberry unloads originated in the Midwest in 1980. Because this data only accounts for produce marketed on Water Street and does not include the large quantities of goods that pass directly through retail chain warehouses, the origin of all Chicago produce cannot be pinpointed. However, based on Illinois and Midwest production statistics, a reasonable assumption is that a large share of Chicago’s produce is grown outside of the Midwest.

### Fresh Food Production Decreasing

Several factors may account for the reduction in Illinois produce unloads at Water Market: 1) conversion from fresh market crops to processing vegetables; 2) an increase in direct producer-to-consumer marketing; 3) an increase in contract growing for supermarket chains, 4) an overall decrease in vegetable acreage due to urban and rural sprawl; and/or 5) conversion to less labor intensive, cash crops such as grain.

Between 1978 and 1980, Illinois production of processing vegetables and fresh market vegetables declined 27% and 21% respectively. According to the Illinois Crop Reporting Service, a major cause for the decline was due to lower acreage levels and in some cases, lower yields. Without surveying truck farmers, it is impossible to know if acreage decreased due to conversion to non-farm uses or to other crops.

The Chicago area may witness a reversal in the trend of decreasing local produce production if fuel prices continue to increase after the current oil glut. Between 1963 and 1975, the trucking industries share of inter-regional produce transport increased from 64% to 83% of the market marking a subsequent decrease in shipments by rail. Extreme or prolonged increases in gasoline prices would result in higher prices for imported produce. Such an economic


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Company(ies)</th>
<th>Crops</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bevildere</td>
<td>Green Giant</td>
<td>Peas, sweet corn, freezing facilities for a number of items</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Chicago</td>
<td>Campbell Soup</td>
<td>Mushrooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gibson City</td>
<td>Stokely - Van Camp</td>
<td>Lima beans, sweet corn, peas, kidney beans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Havana</td>
<td>Green Giant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Del Monte</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nicklaus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Libby, McNeill &amp; Libby</td>
<td>Green beans, pumpkin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoopston</td>
<td>Stokely Van Camp</td>
<td>Lima beans, sweet corn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Joan of Arc</td>
<td>Asparagus, sweet corn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milford</td>
<td>Milford Canning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morton</td>
<td>Libby, McNeill &amp; Libby</td>
<td>Asparagus, sweet corn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Princeville</td>
<td>Joan of Arc</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rochelle</td>
<td>Del Monte</td>
<td>Lima beans, peas, pumpkin sweet corn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DeKalb</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mendota</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rock Island</td>
<td>Heinz</td>
<td>Tomatoes, cucumbers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rossville</td>
<td>Rossville Canning</td>
<td>Asparagus, sweet corn</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

climate might encourage a shift back to close-to-market produce production. Illinois has traditionally ranked among the top ten states in acreage of vegetables harvested for processing. In 1972, 110,000 acres were devoted to producing vegetables for processing. which total Chicago food consumption was determined for a variety of commodities. These projections are very generous: consumption data are based on every Chicagooan's diet meeting the USDA standard. In reality, a large portion of Chicago's population is Undernourished. Another factor not taken into account is ethnic diversity. The USDA data do not make allowances for cultural variations in diet. Despite these limitations, CNT projected the amount of farm acreage placed the state sixth in the nation. In 1976, the total acres had grown to 113,300. Between 1976 and 1978, total acreage dropped to 95,200. By 1980, the number of Illinois acres harvested for vegetable processing had decreased to 74,400. Over two-thirds of Illinois, vegetable acreage is concentrated in the northeastern part of the state, including the SMSA.

Production for processed foods is concentrated in the northeastern part of Illinois. By Chicagoans in one year is 1.2 million acres were used for agriculture in the SMSA. The total farmland needed to produce the food consumed by Chicagoans in one year is approximately 920,000 acres. Based on this projection, the six-county metro-area could provide a substantial portion of the raw commodities consumed both directly and indirectly by Chicagoans. Of the approximately 920,000 acres, 93% would be used for grain production with the remaining 7% being planted in fruit and vegetable crops. 25% of the grain crop would be for human not included for the production of cheese and ice cream. (Data was not available for the conversion of fluid milk to other dairy products.) The data included in Table 3 are based on crops and livestock that are indigenous to Illinois Agriculture. Citrus fruits, rice, and seafood are a few of the commodities that not produced in Illinois because of climatic constraints and therefore are not included in the land projections.

Based on the available data, the generous consumption projections and the partial land estimates, the six-county metro-area has the potential to produce a major portion of the food consumed in Chicago. Although the potential does exist, the food produced in the SMSA does not all end up in Chicago. Over 7.1 million people live and eat in the metroarea. Obviously, a large share of the farm commodities end up in the stomachs of Chicago suburbanites.

Most farmers are more concerned with the prices they receive for their goods than the final destination of those goods, particularly given the current depression in the farm economy.

Chicago SMSA Land Requirements

Using 1980 population data for the City of Chicago and the last available U.S. per capita consumption data (1979), consumption 52% for meat production; 5% would be fed to chickens for egg production, and the remaining 18% would be used as livestock feed for the dairy herd. Land estimates are necessary to produce most of Chicago's food. A summary of the land estimates can be found in Table 3.

As of 1978, slightly more than one million acres were used for agriculture in the SMSA. The total farmland needed to produce the food consumed by Chicagoans in one year is approximately 920,000 acres. Based on this projection, the six-county metro-area could provide a substantial portion of the raw commodities consumed both directly and indirectly by Chicagoans.

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Perhaps a more appropriate question to ask when examining the SMSA agricultural base is how large an area is required to feed all the people residing within that area and what changes must occur in the market place to encourage farmers to sell their commodities to local consumers, manufacturers, and wholesalers.

**Chicago's Food Marketing Sector**

Some of the largest national and multi-national food and agribusiness corporations in the U.S. are headquartered in Chicago, including DartKraft, Beatrice Foods, Quaker Oats, McDonalds, Esmark, International Harvester, and John Deere & Company. 0f Chicago's ten largest corporations, five are food or agriculture related.

The processing of many commodities is now controlled by a few top firms. As market concentration increases, corporations (an dictate what food is available based on) marketplace profitability rather than on the nutritional needs of consumer and can dictate what price we must pay for it. In addition, a market that is highly concentrated in large corporations is less adaptable and resilient in times of economic, social, or political stress and tends to be slower in responding to consumer needs and concerns.

Because manufactured foods come to Chicago from all over the U.S, it is difficult to pin-point local concentration. Nationally, 50% or more of the market for the following commodities is

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**TABLE 3. Summary of estimated farmland required to produce most of the food consumed in Chicago**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMMODITY</th>
<th>EST. FARMLAND</th>
<th>1978 SMSA REQUIRED ACRES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meats</td>
<td>446,000</td>
<td>NC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eggs</td>
<td>44,400</td>
<td>NC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milk</td>
<td>155,900</td>
<td>NC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grains</td>
<td>211,200</td>
<td>878,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruit</td>
<td>9,200</td>
<td>1,153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fresh Veg.</td>
<td>38,700</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processed Veg.</td>
<td>14,990</td>
<td>11,702</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>920,390</td>
<td>1,074,999</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---
controlled by the top four firms. Canned specialties, cereals, flour, biscuits, crackers, cookies, sugar, chocolate, flavorings, vegetable oils, and coffee.

Concentration among wholesalers varies among different types of firms (merchant wholesalers, manufacturer’s sales branches, and agents, brokers, and commission agents) and the commodities they handle. Wholesalers who handle meat and produce tend to be less concentrated than general grocery wholesalers. Dairy and grain trade are the highest concentrated branches of wholesale food trade.

Thirteen per cent of the city's work force is employed by the food industry. Between 1967 and 1977, the number of firms and employees in Chicago's food manufacturing and retail sectors steadily declined, adding to the area’s unemployment and shifting the source of Chicago's processed foods to more distant locales. The number of food manufacturing establishments decreased 19% during that period with a 22% drop in employees. Overall, Chicago lost 31% of all its manufacturing jobs and 13% of the firms. While the number of all retail food stores (specialty markets, produce stands, grocery stores, etc.) dropped 39% and the number of jobs decreased by 13%, full-line grocery stores reduced in number by 41% but increased in the number of employees by 8%, pointing to the increased concentration in retail sales among larger, full-line food stores. Data for Chicago wholesale firms is not available. Between 1963 and 1972, the number of wholesalers in Cook County declined by 25% but the number of jobs increased by 13%.

Overall, Chicago lost more food manufacturing plants and retail stores than did the total manufacturing and retail sectors. However, fewer jobs were lost in the food industry. In general, food companies have decreased in number but increased in size resulting in greater concentration of the market.

The third installment of The Food Files will discuss some of the implications of these shifts in the food marketing sector. We will take a closer look at consumer access questions at the retail level and at retailing alternatives such as food cooperatives. The special problems facing the hungry poor of our urban centers will also be reviewed.

A market that is highly concentrated in large corporations is less adaptable and resilient in times of economic, social or political stress and tends to be slower in responding to consumer needs and concerns.

The fourth and final installment will review the state of the art in urban food planning in other locales. In addition, we will examine some new suggestions urban residents could undertake to assure a continuing supply of quality, affordable food in the future.

For More Information

This second installment was condensed from a longer report authored by Paige Chapel. Copies of the full 30-page report, complete with footnotes and additional charts, are available for $2.00 from the Chicago Food System Research Project, Center for Neighborhood Technology, 570 W. Randolph, Chicago IL 60606. (312) 454-0126

Many thanks to Ken Anderson for his major research contributions for this article.
special report: The Food Files -- III

In the first two installments of The Food Files, we have taken a look at forces and trends affecting the urban breadbasket beginning with the farmer, continuing through the marketing sector and ending with an overview of metropolitan agriculture with an eye towards better planning in the food industry. While many in the industry consider Chicago's food system to be a model for the rest of the country, we have also learned that the system which serves so many so well does have gaps in its delivery system.

This third installment analyzes why some 20 percent of Chicago's population is not served well by our urban breadbasket. Paige Chapel's lead story reviews the problems of consumer access for inner-city communities that pertain not only to Chicago but to many other urban centers as well. Then we look at two programs established to deal with hunger (food stamps and pantries) and why both approaches have some shortcomings. Finally we have a quick look at food cooperatives for the elderly.

Let Them Eat . . . What They Can Get

by Paige Chapel

Hunger is an issue that most Americans associate with the swollen bellies of Biafran children. It is not the kind of social malaise we would expect to find in a city where America's amber waves of grain are bought and traded daily.

Yet hunger is a state of existence for a growing number of urban Americans. To understand the complex forces that affect access to food, we must look at who is hungry and how they are served by the food system.

Although Illinois is the agricultural exporting capital of the nation and Chicago is a major world center of the food industry, starvation in Chicago is increasing at an alarming rate. In 1979, an estimated 500,000 Chicagoans were -statistically hungry-- that is, without food aid, they would have suffered from severe malnutrition. According to a more recent U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) estimate, the hunger count has grown to 650,000.

Chicago's Hunger Bill

Translated into everyday numbers, this means one out of every five Chicagoans is in need of food assistance. As unemployment and inflation continue to increase and government food programs are cut, bread lines and soup kitchens will become more common sights in U.S. cities. Until that time, hunger in the city will remain invisible to the public at large.

While not solving the problem of hunger, the food aid provided by federal, state, and local governments, as well as by private community groups masks the severity of the situation. In 1981, Chicagoans spent more than $310 million on direct food aid for the city's poor through the Food Stamp Program, Women, Infants, and Children Supplemental Food Program (WIC), the City's Emergency Family Food Program, and through private food pantries. When compared to the $3.2 billion Chicago consumers spent on food at home in 1981, the cost of alleviating hunger was equivalent to 10 percent of our food bill. And that's only the top of the grocery basket.

To get a more complete picture of the cost, the plethora of smaller public and private food programs would have to be included as well as the substantial cost of administering them. Yet the problem still remains. Despite the hundreds of millions of dollars spent on reducing starvation, one-fifth of Chicago's residents continue to suffer from inadequate diets.

The Menu

One reason often cited for hunger is that poor people don't know how to buy food or don't know enough about nutrition. But when the buying patterns of low-income consumers are compared to those of other shoppers, the two market baskets do not vary substantially. In reality, few Americans consume what the USDA deems a healthy, well-balanced diet.

It is wrong to assume that only the nation's poor do not know how to eat well. A case in point is junk food. While it is often asserted that low-income consumers squander their food dollars on junk food, several USDA studies have shown that they spend no more than other shoppers.

The only major difference between the low-income and the average American diet is in the consumption of meat. Based on data from the federal Food Stamp Program, low-income shoppers spent 35.2 percent of their food dollars on meat compared to 32.8 percent spent by consumers as a whole.

In general, poor families buy cheaper cuts of meat, fewer fresh fruits and vegetables (but more canned goods), and fewer dairy products than the majority of American families. If low-income people are starving it is not because they are inferior shoppers but because they eat basic, sub-standard American meals like the rest of us, only in smaller quantities.

The Budget

One factor that does affect the quality of the low-income diet is the inflexibility of the family budget and the instability of food prices. Food is one of the few basic necessities over which consumers have some financial control. For low-income shoppers, the money left after the big bills are paid (rent and utilities) must be stretched to cover the weekly grocery list. If food prices jump one week, they do without or with less of certain foods. Unlike most Americans, their diet often reflects the fluctuation in the cost of living at a gut level.

Another consequence of an inflexible food budget is the inability to take advantage of savings from bulk buying. Although purchasing food in quantity may be cheaper in the long
run, it requires a greater outlay of cash. With limited capital, many low-income shoppers spend more for less food.

In response to a cry by low-income blacks that they were being overcharged by neighborhood grocery stores, a number of local organizations have conducted studies on food prices in different areas of Chicago. By comparing the prices of identical items at similar types of stores, they concluded that food prices did not vary significantly between neighborhoods based on race, income, or location. What these groups failed to examine was how much prices varied between different types of stores and how those stores were distributed throughout the city.

In 1980, the Chicago Urban League determined that where a consumer shops can significantly affect his/her grocery bill. The best values were found at smaller chain stores, which were slightly cheaper than the large chains, followed by independent food stores. As might be expected, convenience stores had the highest food prices.

**The Market**

The history of the retail food industry illustrates the significance of the Urban League's not-so-surprising findings. In the last twenty years, large supermarkets have replaced smaller neighborhood grocery stores by offering cheaper prices and better services to customers. That trend began to reverse in the aftermath of the 1968 riots. In 1970, 133 chain stores operated on Chicago's predominantly black South and West Sides. By 19811 only 56 stores remained.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Store</th>
<th>Total # of Food Stores</th>
<th># of Stores in Black N'hoods</th>
<th>% of Stores in Black N'hoods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All food stores</td>
<td>1918</td>
<td>617</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small chains</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large chains</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent stores</td>
<td>1715</td>
<td>576</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convenience stores</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Chicago Urban League, *Grocery Food Prices: Race, Neighborhood, and Other Determinants* Chicago Urban League 1980

As the large chains left the inner city for more profitable suburban and higher income areas, many neighborhoods were left without competitively priced supermarkets and in some instances, without food stores of any kind. The result: area residents must buy food at few smaller, independent and higher priced stores that survived the original influx of the larger chains. In order to shop at stores with cheaper food prices, those with no means of private transportation must pay a premium for getting to and from distant supermarkets. The Urban League's 1980 report on food prices reflects the seriousness of the situation (see table). While 40 percent of Chicago's population is black, only 32 percent of all food stores are located in predominantly black neighborhoods. More importantly, blacks are served by less than one-fourth of the city's chain stores-those stores with lower prices and greater product variety. And the situation continues to worsen.

Earlier this year, A & P, once a major chain in the area, closed thirty Chicago supermarkets, 14 of which were on the city's South and West Sides. To the majority of Americans, the lack of food stores may not present the urgency of a natural disaster or a war, but to the nation's poor, inadequate access to food is a reality that threatens their daily existence.

**Conclusion**

It is an absurd contradiction that in the midst of the nation's breadbasket there is a serious food crisis that is unrecognized by all except those who lack the capital and clout to change it. Although programs currently exist to deal with the situation, the solutions have tended to be piecemeal. New and vigorous political action is needed to address these issues.
Problems of inner-city food marketing are serious but changeable. As a result of federal consumer food aid programs being cut, supermarket chains pulling out of the inner city, and development grants for urban businesses being dropped, high quality, affordable food in the city is becoming less and less accessible.

The Community Nutrition Institute's guide to alternative marketing strategies functions as a guidebook to possible improvements in the food market on a community level. The goal of this "how-to" manual was to "bring together all of the pieces of information in a clear and concise manner for the purpose of instructing and informing community-based consumer organizations." It acts as a guide for community groups to finding an antidote (remedy) to urban food access problems.

The authors note that "without any doubt, the inner city presents a difficult and risky environment for food retailing." The guide provides ideas and alternatives to the reader, in each case presenting a case study and action checklist to further aid community groups in the implementation of similar actions. Resources are listed to guide groups to contacts that may be helpful.

The first step is saving what is already there. Ideas and ways that a community can save a floundering supermarket are identified, indicating that cooperation and discussion with store managers and/or the city officials can lead to a joint venture takeover that will save the supermarket from closing.

After a supermarket has left the neighborhood, a joint venture supermarket is one viable solution. "Together the community group and the supermarket firm (with the help of government agencies, private lenders and technical consultants) attack the planning, financing and operating problems which are unique to the inner city. The joint venture supermarket is a special solution to a unique set of problems." Here the guide points out the importance of a committed and well-organized neighborhood group. The neighborhood group plays a vital role in financing and control of the
neighborhood supermarket throughout the whole process.

Supermarket consumer cooperatives, the idea of member control for member profit, are recognized as being the "largest and most sophisticated" form of food co-op. Another way to meet the food buying needs of a low-income population, co-ops have a unique set of problems that all participants must be aware of. Specifically, "the supermarket co-op must maintain a delicate balance between its dual role as a membership organization and a business enterprise."

Farmers look for a better profit and new markets for their goods, and consumers look for higher quality food that costs less; hence, the Farmer's Market. Such "direct farmer to consumer markets give both what they want by cutting out the in-between costs of food packing, shipping, handling, processing, wholesaling, distributing, advertising, and retailing." Farmer's Markets also aid in the localization of food production and distribution, an important factor in our increasingly vulnerable food system.

Other ideas are presented at the end, portraying comprehensive programs as well as highly innovative ideas such as computerized pre-order co-ops.

There are solutions. Marketing methods exist that can make access to higher quality, lower priced foods possible. One clear common point is emphasized throughout: that community group support and consistency is a vital factor in any of these endeavors.