

Cultivating a Local Food Culture in Phoenix



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INTRODUCTION

This project is part of a broader effort to examine the diversity and usefulness of urban agricultural projects for community development in downtown Phoenix. More specifically, our research was designed to help promote local food culture in Phoenix by developing both greater awareness among, as well as collaboration between, social enterprises in the Roosevelt Row corridor. In concurrence with our faculty and community mentors, Vanna Gonzales and Kenny Barrett, we engaged course material on sustainability, social innovation and community development, worked with the Growhouse urban garden and Gila Farm Cooperative, and interviewed five restaurants in the Roosevelt Row corridor. Based on in-depth interviews and limited participant observation, we were able to better understand key actors' perceptions of and interests in developing new partnerships between local restaurants and growers.

In addition to helping local urban gardens, CSAs, and organic farmers better understand the needs and interests of local restaurants, our in-depth interviews with restaurateurs shed light on their feelings toward the community, local/organic produce, and their contribution to the developing food culture in Phoenix. Drawing on both primary and secondary sources, we were able to get a better picture of this evolving food culture, and analyze the key challenges and opportunities for integrating the needs and interests of local growers and restaurants, as well as the key social, economic and cultural benefits. In the following three sections we provide background information about the modern day food culture, a brief history of the local/organic food culture in downtown Phoenix and food as a social enterprise; as well as information and analysis of our interviews.

SECTION ONE: FOOD AND COMMUNITY

Urban Isolation from Food

The modern-day city presents both great opportunity and great challenge. While economic development blooms, community cohesion and connectivity to nature fade. The urban environment is often so far removed from the natural environment that quality of life is low and human health jeopardized. Food must be transported many miles from rural farms to the city, contributing significantly to greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution in order to nourish city-dwellers. Those who can afford it have a myriad of healthful options. However, those in financial hardship are limited to food that is affordable. The problem is compounded in areas defined as “food deserts”, where low-income residents without a nearby grocery store are slated to consume cheap, highly processed foods from the convenience stores and fast food restaurants in the area, and fated to suffer the health consequences of such a diet. Urban communities desperately need reliable access to nutritious, affordable food for the sake of human and environmental health. What better way to achieve this than by re-integrating sustainable food systems into local communities.

Sustainable Community Food Systems

Integration of food production into urban communities is both beneficial and doable. "Urban agriculture is about far more than growing vegetables on an empty lot... It's about revitalizing and transforming unused public spaces, connecting city residents with their neighborhoods in a new way and promoting healthier eating and living for everyone" (Knight, 2010). Structures which facilitate this integration include community gardens and local farms

which may be patronized by community members via farmers markets, grocery stores, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), and local restaurants.

A plethora of benefits emerge from creating sustainable community food systems. An obvious benefit is the access to fresh, healthy food a local garden or farm would provide. Not only does this support and promote the physical health of community members by enabling them to consume nutritious food, it also promotes mental and social health in the community. Urban agriculture fosters psychological well-being by allowing contact with nature in a primarily man-made environment. It also fosters neighborhood social ties. “Community gardens, in particular, bring residents together into a denser network than their urban roles normally allow, decrease isolation through sharing of seeds, tools, knowledge, ideas, produce, culture, and recipes, and offer a participatory approach to community development” (Okvat & Zautra, 2011).

Environmentally, urban agriculture enables abatement of urban heat island effect and improvement of air quality, while contributing to beautification of the city and increasing property value (Okvat & Zautra, 2011). It also minimizes the environmental impacts of food production by significantly reducing the number of miles the food must be transported before it is consumed.

By truly fostering a connection to the land, urban agriculture provides communities with a sense of ownership and “home”. Social cohesion is enhanced as community members are brought together to work side-by-side in community gardens, form relationships at the farmers market, and have the commonality of shared food sources. Through proximity to, participation in, and education about food cultivation, community members are empowered to be proactive about what they eat and equipped to lead more sustainable lives.

Food as Social Enterprise

Driven by the social mission of improving quality of life, sustainable urban agriculture can make a significant contribution to community development. However, maintaining local gardens and farms requires resources. Though charitable donations and government subsidies are helpful, the long-term success of an urban agriculture organization depends upon its ability to procure a consistent amount of funding. This can be achieved by generating revenue through the sale of the produce grown. In doing so, urban farms and gardens take the form of social enterprises—organizations achieving social goals through business methods.

Sumner and Llewelyn identify a number of challenges organic farmers face, including difficulties in food production, storage, marketing, regulation and the community. “To meet these challenges, they have returned to their roots in the social economy and come together to create, join, and spread a range of social economy organizations, such as co-operatives, public sector nonprofits, and nonprofit mutual associations” (Sumner & Llewelyn, 2010:294). By working together, these organizations can pool resources and ideas, attaining “a form of collective power that they would not have individually” (Sumner & Llewelyn, 2010:294).

The crux of the success of a social enterprise is attaining consumers’ willingness to pay. As underscored by Mulgan, “Social entrepreneurship...rests on its ability to create value and the extent to which people or individuals with the means to pay recognize the value” (2006:87). Social enterprises, including those centered on urban agriculture, need a reliable consumer base in order to achieve long-term sustainability. One such potential consumer base is local restaurants. Restaurants are an ideal consumer base because they need consistent, continual amounts of fresh produce—exactly what local growers are hoping to supply. In order to tap the potential of direct partnerships between local growers and restaurants, it is vital to discover

restaurants' attitudes toward locally grown produce, and identify barriers to their willingness to pay and solutions to the issue of those barriers. This will shed light on how agricultural social enterprises can best be sustained, and consequently contribute to community development in the area.

Phoenix's Present-day Food Culture

The idea of a burgeoning food culture in Phoenix is a fairly recent development. Phoenix's inhospitable climate and layout as a center for business and education have traditionally distanced it from the source and sense of ownership of its food. However, over the last five years, new trends have been emerging, reshaping Phoenix's potential for a local food culture. (K. Barrett, Personal Communication, April 23, 2012).

It is interesting to note that much of the discussion and emergence of a Phoenix food culture is happening in a geographical area that is designated by the United States Department of Agriculture as a food desert. Food desert, here, is defined as a "*low-income census tract* where a substantial number or share of residents has *low access* to a supermarket or large grocery store" (USDA, 2009). Living in a food desert adversely impacts human and community health, and is associated with susceptibility to obesity, heart disease, diabetes, and other diet-related heart disease. Helping to alleviate this lack of access to affordable, nutritious food is the Phoenix Public Market, an urban grocery store, and the associated Open-Air Market, a farmers market which was founded in 2005; both are operated by the local nonprofit, Community Food Connections (Phoenix Public Market, 2012). Equally important are the growing numbers of

of urban gardening projects and CSAs.¹ Roosevelt Row's Grow House (<http://www.rooseveltrow.org>) and Gila Farm Cooperative (<http://gilafarm.org>) exemplify this development.

The Growhouse

A key player in the fostering of community health and quality of life in downtown Phoenix is Roosevelt Row Community Development Corporation. Roosevelt Row centers its revitalization efforts on the geographical area extending along Roosevelt Street, and creates and sustains programs which build capacity within this community and support local artisans' businesses. One such program is the Growhouse, an organic community garden cultivated in the yard of the GROWop, a house turned boutique and artist collective. Begun in 2008 by Kenny Barrett and Kelly Placke as an informal "art experiment" in urban beautification, the Growhouse was adopted by Roosevelt Row in 2011 as part of the A.R.T.S program (Adaptive Reuse of Temporary Space). The garden grows an assortment of vegetables which are distributed to garden volunteers, sold at the Open-Air Farmers Market, and used by FNB restaurant in Scottsdale.

The Growhouse is a center for community education concerning sustainable living, healthy eating, farming in the urban desert, and edible landscaping (Growhouse 2011). Nonetheless, through the addition of organic matter to the soil and the installment of a consistent, efficient watering system, the Growhouse continues to sink its roots into the ground. It seeks to continue increasing efficiency of land use by experimenting with ways to grow more pounds of vegetables per square foot each year. Eventually it could become a demonstration site for such

¹ For more information about the location of these gardens, see the AZHomegrownSolutions website (<http://www.opengreenmap.org/en/greenmap/azhomegrownsolutions-phoenix-metro-area>)

techniques. The Growhouse also hopes to expand the area of land set aside for community members to grow their own organic produce. One of the biggest challenges faced by the Growhouse is having fertile soil and consistent water (K. Barrett, Personal Communication, April 23, 2012).

Thanks to the involvement of hundreds of community members and volunteers, the Growhouse is able to realize its goals of urban beautification, local food cultivation, and community education. Through its dedication to these goals, the Growhouse is contributing to the cultivation of a local food culture. In order to continue furthering its potential as a vehicle for community development and integrate into the existing food culture while promoting a preference for locally grown food, the Growhouse hopes to expand its connections with local restaurants as a potentially reliable consumer base. Making its produce more available and more desirable will require recognizing and responding to local restaurants' motivations and barriers to purchasing more locally grown produce.

Gila Farm Cooperative

Another organization cultivating urban gardening in the Phoenix area is the Gila Farm Cooperative, which is affiliated with the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in Phoenix . The International Rescue Committee (IRC) is a major international non-profit organizations whose primary mission is to help refugees forced to flee from their homelands to political conflict and/or natural disaster (IRC, 2011). Since 1994, the IRC in Phoenix has helped resettle over 12,000 refugees by providing assistance related to civic integration, economic empowerment, and health and well-being. In an effort to promote these goals, the IRC supports a variety of urban gardening projects and more recently Gila Farm Cooperative. Established in 2011 and

managed by Jessica Woiderski, the Gila Farm Cooperative is an organic farming cooperative which enables Uzbek, Togolese, Iraqi and Somali-Bantu refugee farmers, who individually would struggle to make a profit and sustain their enterprises, to achieve collective power and resilience. Their commitment to sharing resources and working together not only benefits them financially, but also socially. They are able to interact in a setting where they feel a sense of belonging and gain personal satisfaction and self-confidence from their work, all while ensuring they have income and access to nutritious food.

The refugee farmers who are members of Gila Farm Cooperative cultivate land on Gila Farm as well as several garden locations in and around Phoenix. Currently, their main area of activity is their Community Supported Agriculture Program (CSA).² Through the CSA, they pool their harvest to supply individual consumers and farmers markets with fresh produce. By growing and supplying organic produce in the Phoenix area, the Gila Farm Cooperative contributes to the local food culture in Phoenix, enhancing connectivity and health in the community.

Similar to the Growhouse, however, securing a reliable consumer base is one of the biggest challenges this organization faces. Though they currently do not sell to local restaurants, they are a key potential client base for them. Since local restaurants have a consistent demand for fresh produce, forming long-term partnerships between local organic farms and restaurants can link supply and demand and mutually benefit those involved. However, this necessitates identifying local restaurants perception and understanding of the local food culture; identifying the barriers which limit the amount of locally grown produce purchased by local restaurants; and developing ways to overcome them, thereby creating a stronger local food culture in Phoenix.

² Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is a partnership between local farmers and community members who support them by paying for their farm fresh produce upfront, typically, for a regularly scheduled weekly or month food pick-up or delivery.

SECTION TWO: INTERVIEWING LOCAL RESTAURATEURS

For the purposes of our research, we interviewed restaurateurs within the Roosevelt District, a popular arts district located on the Northern edge of downtown Phoenix. Using a purposeful sampling technique, we recruited interview participants from restaurants most likely to concern themselves with local, organic produce (see Appendix One). The restaurants selected, Pizzeria Bianco, Athenian Express, Pita Jungle, Tammie Coe Cakes, and Carly's Bistro, offer a wide variety of cuisine to a broad range of clients. Because these restaurants are well known, and well established, they were also deemed most likely to play a role in shaping the local food culture.

Working with our faculty advisor and community mentor, we asked interviewees approximately twenty questions related to: 1) background about the restaurant and local food culture, 2) information about their use of both organic and locally grown produce and, 4) ideas about what could be done to enhance the relationship between local growers and restaurants. In addition to asking closed ended questions pertaining to the type and amount of local and organic produce being offered, we also asked a variety of open-ended questions to help get a better sense of restaurateurs' perception of the local food culture in Phoenix, for example, if they thought one existed and how this effected their menu choices, as well as their sense of the importance of organic and/or local produce, and how this manifested itself in their restaurants. For a complete list of questions, see Appendix Two.

In addition to the prescribed interview questions, we also employed a data table to gather information about the restaurants' most frequently used vegetables and fruits and the quantity that the restaurants order each week. Some of the representatives provided us with the prices and

sources of their produce, on the basis of questions we asked concerning what they might expect from local gardeners and growers compared to other producers (See Appendix Three). The interviews ranged from 30 minutes to an hour, and were recorded with the consent of the interviewees.

Restaurants Perceptions of the Local Food Culture

Though the restaurants we interviewed had varying ways of characterizing the local food culture, all agreed that the Roosevelt area has begun to gain a stronger identity as a Phoenix locale known for its restaurants. One restaurateur who lives in the area indicated that she thought that a real food culture had begun to emerge in the last half decade, and that it has continued to gain energy. As an example, she pointed to local restaurants that had been inspired by the development of the slow food movement as well as greater public awareness of the importance of local establishments and their role in the community. While the former has spawned greater creativity, particularly in terms of developing fusion food, the latter has helped facilitated a more reliable consumer base (Carly's, Personal Communication, April 2, 2012).

Another restaurateur agreed that people are becoming more conscious of what qualifies as good food in Phoenix. Noting the difficulty in getting a loyal following unless you are a neighborhood place or have a specific niche (Tammie Coe Cakes Café, Personal Communication, April 5, 2012), she felt this trend had helped overcome the “buzzy”-ness that marks downtown Phoenix's food culture—namely, that a lot of hype and business gather around new food spots, but only last until the next new thing comes. Characterizing Phoenix's food culture as fresh, new, and more contemporary, a third restaurateur emphasized the fact that Phoenix residents are notably health-conscious and concerned about the source of their food,

though she expressed uncertainty about whether Phoenix residents' preference for fresh, organic food reflects a unique element of Phoenix's food culture or whether it's simply a sign of a broader shift in the culture and times (Athenian Express, Personal Communication, April 17, 2012).

Restaurants' Contribution to the Local Food Culture

Having interviewed both long standing and more newly established restaurants, all of which offer a wide variety of cuisines to a diverse consumer base, we hoped to get a better sense not only of how restaurateurs perceived of the local food culture, but also how they saw their restaurants as fitting into it. Were they aware of other actors and/or organizations in the area contributing to the local food culture? Did they prioritize and/or seek out locally grown and/or organic produce and if so how?

Carly's restaurant has been in business for over seven years. It is a relatively small restaurant that offers a wide range of food and beverages to a predominately local clientele. Its co-owners are local artists/musicians who are very much inserted into the local community. Talking about the founding of the restaurant, one of the co-owners indicated that among their key motivations for opening the restaurant was to provide a place where friends and residents of the area could get fresh, affordable food in a casual atmosphere (Carly's, Personal Communication, April 2, 2012).

Motivated by both a business and social rationale—articulated as wanting to serve the best product (i.e. food that “tastes really fresh”) and also wanting to support the environment, Carly's buys most if not all of its produce regionally, either from California or Arizona. Early on, the restaurant encouraged their produce purveyor to increase his supply of organic offerings,

and currently indicate that about 50% of the produce they buy is organic. Though the restaurant gets most of its produce from a local family owned produce purveyor, Willie Itule Produce, it also supports local growers. Fresh, organic produce is showcased in the specials, such as the “farmers market salad,” that are offered on the menu and they buy a wide variety of specialty items such as herbs, flowers, oranges, from a variety of local farmers at the Phoenix farmers market. Throughout their busiest period (February through May) as well as their slowest months (August and September), their specials, though seasonal remain on the menu. Indicating a desire to increase their supply from local producers, one of the co-owners indicated the importance of buying local, even if not organic, particularly if these efforts have social purpose (Carly’s, Personal Communication, April 2, 2012).

This express commitment to the local community also manifests itself in other ways. Carly’s co-owners have established the kind of flexibility that allows them to be supportive of other local businesses—for example, by stocking beer, bread, and coffee produced locally. They are also active members of local first Arizona and the Roosevelt Row merchant association, an organization which supports a sustainable business community in Roosevelt Row, through which they are involved in a number of food events such as the Pie Social and food truck events. Additionally, they participate in a number of non-food events, including fund raising with Autism Speaks, as well as serving as a local meeting spot for a number of nonprofit groups.

Several blocks west of Carly’s on Roosevelt Street is Tammie Coe Cakes Café. Tammie Coe Cakes Café, has existed for seven years. Like many local restaurants, this location received a lot of hype and business when they first opened. However, according to our interviewee, unlike many other locations that loose business when the next new thing opens, Tammie Coe has been able to cultivate a loyal following due to their ideal neighborhood setting (Tammy Coe

Cakes Café, Personal Communication, April 5, 2012). As the location caters to the local demographic as well as individuals working downtown, through word of mouth and reputation, they are beginning to gain more attention. Additionally, they are involved in Devoured and such food festivals as the Pie Social, Scottsdale Culinary Festival, and Caramel Palooza. They are also in the process of joining Roosevelt Row and are working to become a voice in new developments in downtown Phoenix.

Tammy's purchases their local produce through McClendon's and the Public Market, but never in large quantities. If possible, they always buy quality, locally grown food. They purchase approximately 70% of their produce from local growers. Although ten percent of their produce is purchased from Oregon, the vast majority is grown in Arizona. Compared to other restaurants interviewed on Roosevelt Row, this restaurant showed the least concern for barriers preventing local restaurants from purchasing more organic since seventy-five percent of their shipments are organic. The amount of local produce bought does not vary seasonally and the menu stays the same year-round. Although not the case at present, Tammy's would like to transition to a more seasonal menu in the future.

Their busiest time is around the holidays in November and December and the slowest time is June and July. During their busiest months, although the amount of produce they purchase tends to remain steady week to week, volume fluctuates based on demand. While they pay more for local/organic produce, the quality more than makes up for the price. The only factor they cited as keeping them from purchasing even more locally grown produce was the prices. "What we can do, if our customers demand it, we could try to cater to that. If that's what they're asking for, then that's what we would like to provide." (Tammy Coe Cakes Café, Personal Communication, April 5, 2012).

Athenian Express is located slightly south of Roosevelt Street, very close to the downtown location of the Phoenix Farmer's market. The owners have operated Athenian Express for nine years. One owner is of Italian descent, but has learned a lot about Greek culture. The other owner, described as "the backbone of the restaurant, is a native Greek who moved to the USA when he was thirteen (Athenian Express, Personal Communication, April 17, 2012). Based on the owners' perception of Phoenixians as more health-conscious and concerned about where their food comes from, they identify Athenian Express' contribution to the local food culture as a commitment to serving a lot of healthy food choices, particularly gluten free, vegetarian and vegan options. As the location caters to the local demographic as well as individuals working downtown, through word of mouth and reputation, they are beginning to gain more attention. They are also considerably embedded within the local community. In the past they have hosted meetings for Roosevelt Row and have donated food/samples upon to request to art groups/galleries, nonprofit groups like the Girl Scouts.

When it comes to purchasing food items, however, they indicated that for most of the year their produce comes from outside of Arizona. They indicated that only about 10% of the produce they purchase is local while 90% comes from outside of Arizona. Similarly, they didn't have a lot of organics on their menu. Only the spring salad mix was mentioned as being organic. While they indicated that they are amenable to buying locally grown produce if it is affordable; they are not willing to pay double the normal price for produce just because it is organic because keeping food affordable is for them, a primary concern. Much like Tammy's, the factors that motivate them to buy local are freshness, quality, and availability of amount needed. They mentioned that if they see locally grown produce that looks good, is in good condition, and is being sold for a good price, they'll buy it.

Regarding the source of their food, Athenian express does not appear to be dedicated to any one store or food purveyor and is therefore open to taking advantage of different options and potentially buying from a variety of local farms. Though they buy most of their food outside Arizona, they indicated that they often contribute to local farmers markets, and consequently local producers, by purchasing locally grown watermelon, cantaloupe, honeydew, strawberries, oranges, lemons during the summer. Because they don't have a lot of storage space, they mentioned that it is important for them to purchase produce nearly every day of the week. This helps them get the freshness they desire. Consequently, they suggested that one action local growers could take would be to cultivate a more direct connection with local restaurants. From their perspective, this would help ensure that the desired quantity of specific produce could be delivered. They also indicated that it would be "very important that growers provide a price list of available produce." (Athenian Express, Personal Communication, April 17th, 2012).

Like Athenian Express, located less than a quarter of a mile away, Pita Jungle caters to people that are looking for low-cost healthy alternatives to fast food. Pita Jungle says that they don't see themselves fitting into the food culture in Phoenix in so much as it is perceived as a place where people consume a lot of fried foods and have a pretty unhealthy eating regimen. Consequently, they feel that what makes them different from other restaurants is their fresh organic produce; they have no factory made produce and there are no microwaves in any of the Pita Jungle locations (Pita Jungle, Personal Communication, April 17th 2012). This commitment to health is further reflected in their work with Phoenix Children's Hospital to whom they dedicate several walls in the restaurant in their effort to promote community.

Unlike Pita Jungle, however, approximately 90-100% of their produce comes from Arizona. Though they mentioned that they purchase a few things from Flagstaff, they mostly stay

local. They order produce every day, adjusting levels of shipments ordered every month according to demand. In March, their busiest month, they have much more need, whereas in the summer, they have much less demand as many more people are out of town or on vacation. Though their menu comes from their corporate headquarters, and therefore rarely changes, according to our interviewee, they are always testing new foods which they sometime put on the specials menu. Because Pita Jungle believes everyone loves fresh produce yet it's hard to come by, they see basing their business on fresh, organic items is a good way to go. According to our interviewee, "Any restaurant that cares about the freshness and quality of their food should buy locally" (Pita Jungle, Personal Communication, April 17th 2012) which is why they are willing to pay more for local and organic food.

Of all the restaurants we interviewed, perhaps the most deeply committed to locally grown, organic produce is Pizzeria Bianco. As evidenced by the large crowds who line up sometimes for hours to get a seat, it is one of the most popular restaurants in downtown Phoenix. Originally told that opening a pizza place in the Roosevelt Row Corridor would be a bad idea, the owner and general manager, who has been working for the restaurant since 1997, have proven otherwise. Approximately 90% of their produce is locally grown, while the remaining 10%, largely attributable to mushrooms, comes from the state of Washington where they are grown.

Thus, for well over a decade, the restaurateurs of Pizzeria Bianco have turned their preference for local, organic produce into a huge asset and key to their success. For them, purchasing only organic for their restaurant is "a big deal" as is making sure there is no produce in their restaurant older than a day or two. As put by our interviewee, there is "no secret to our success. It's just all fresh!" (Pizzeria Bianco, Personal Communication, April 17th 2012). In

addition to emphasizing freshness, they attribute the quality of their menu to the hard work of key individuals. They get one of their key ingredients, tomatoes, from the garden of John Scott who grows them year round. Therefore, even in the off season Scott is able to grow fresh tomatoes in his heated greenhouse. Besides the tomatoes which they can get year round from Scott, they get the rest of their produce from Bob McClendon, a well-known purveyor in Phoenix and most importantly, make an effort to purchase according to season. In the winter they gravitate to above ground vegetables and fruits and in the summer they prefer more root based vegetable and fruits due to the heat. As with the other restaurants in the Roosevelt row area, Pizzeria Bianco slows down in August and September because people are out of town for the summer; however, they don't slow down enough to have less shipments of produce. They're normal shipment order is twice a week and if anything is a day or two old they will throw it away.

Pizzeria Bianco pays more for organic produce because they believe there are no shortcuts to success. "You have to pay to play. If you do it right it's not that hard." (Pizzeria Bianco, Personal Communication, April 17th 2012). They also see few if any barriers to buying locally with the understanding that if you want quality you need to go out there and get it. Parallel to what other interviewees mentioned, they suggest that local growers spread their name.

SECTION THREE: ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

Though being able to offer fresh, quality produce appears to be a central concern for restaurants, the awareness and use of local, organic produce in downtown Phoenix is still evolving. A challenge some of these restaurants face is persuading the owners to buy more local organic produce. Tammy's mentions that, "It's an issue of hierarchy" (Tammy Coe Cakes Café,

Personal Communication, April 5, 2012). Certain restaurants are committed to local organic produce alone, and base their entire menu off of it while other restaurants appreciate local, quality produce, but they do not show the same level of concern for organics. Smaller restaurants that have only been around for a few years may have less knowledge of organics or may value other things more, such as keeping food affordable, taking pride or offering a wide range of foods, and honoring the ethnic heritage of a specific cuisine. Other restaurants have a longer history in the downtown area, giving them a more stable consumer base, or niche which attracts customers, who they then can focus on catering to.

Given the diversity of experiences represented in our interviews, it is important to highlight what restaurants consider the key barriers to buying more local, organic produce as well as the opportunities they see for overcoming these barriers, both in terms of what producers can do as well as the restaurants themselves.

Barriers

Our interviews with local restaurateurs revealed several common barriers preventing restaurants from purchasing more locally grown produce. These barriers include insufficient quantity and consistency, high prices, and lack of local purchasing know-how. It is interesting to note, however, that the restaurateurs we interviewed differed in their perception of the degree to which each of these barriers is relevant to their own restaurants.

Insufficient quantity and consistency: Restaurateurs indicated that throughout most of the year, they are in need of large quantities of produce on a consistent basis. Many of the restaurateurs expressed concern about the ability of small local farms/gardens to consistently meet their demand, and thus expressed some hesitancy about contracting with them, particularly

relying on them exclusively. Yet, this view seemed to be based most often on an understanding of their experience with local farms/gardens at farmers markets, where a restaurant could easily buy out an entire stand in one purchase.

High prices: Though at least one of our interviewees indicated that fresh, organic produce is well worth the high price that must be paid for it, most of the restaurateurs we interviewed are adamant about keeping their prices low. Given the fragile state of the economy, it is not surprising that a common concern of theirs is that if they purchase more locally grown produce they will be forced to raise menu prices or take a loss in profits, or both, a view grounded in the belief that locally grown produce is significantly more expensive than the produce from their current suppliers.

Lack of know-how: With good intentions, many restaurateurs revealed that they are not that familiar with reality of local farmers, as exemplified in the following quote:

Yeah, I'd be very willing to participate if it were available for us to maybe talk to people about [buying directly from local farms], but is it feasible? I don't know... Maybe saying, yeah, we promise to buy from you if you're able to produce this amount and sell it at this set price. You know, but I know that's probably not the way it works. I don't really know much about farming (Athenian Express, Personal Communication, April 17th, 2012).

With limited understanding of how to buy locally, and limited time to investigate local gardens/farms and methods of acquiring local produce, some restaurants do not buy locally simply because they are unaware or uncertain of how to go about doing so.

It is also interesting to note the discrepancy between those restaurants who identified barriers to purchasing more locally grown produce, and those whose deep, philosophical commitment to local, organic produce was so great that the idea of barriers preventing its acquisition was foreign and considered largely irrelevant (i.e. Pita Jungle and Pizzeria Bianco).

One factor that helps explain the position of restaurateurs who viewed few if any barriers is that the percentage of organic Arizona-grown produce their restaurants purchase is already nearly one hundred percent. Because these restaurants take such pride in their philosophy concerning fresh, organic, locally grown food, and associate it closely with quality, this component of their menu is considered a nonnegotiable part of their identity. They also appear to cater to a clientele that is both willing and able to pay more for a meal out than other restaurants such as Carly's who is committed to ensuring that people who live in the neighborhood can also afford to eat their, or restaurants like Athena Express, who compete for lunch clientele with fast food restaurants that typically offer a much lower price point.

Opportunities for Overcoming Barriers

Though these barriers are significant in limiting the amount of locally grown produce restaurants are willing and able to purchase, in recognizing them, steps can be taken to overcome them. In order to supply sufficient and consistent amounts of produce to local restaurants, local gardens/farms could specialize in growing a few crops in large quantities, rather than small amounts of many types of produce. To ensure that this produce will be purchased—and to reassure restaurants that they will receive the quantity they need—local gardens/farms could be contracted by restaurants, CSA-style, to grow a particular crop or crops. A CSA model may also be useful in uniting multiple local farms/gardens and consolidating their growing capacity and marketing power to better meet the demands of restaurants while providing produce at lower prices than would otherwise be possible.

Another response to restaurants' fear of excessively priced locally grown produce is simply to provide them with more accurate information. This strategy concurrently mitigates the

problem of restaurants not purchasing locally merely because they do not know how to. As mentioned by several interviewees an important step is for producers to get people to know who they are, and this often takes a concerted, and persistence effort over time. The latter plays a large role in marketing. While it's likely that the beginning of a marketing endeavor will start slowly, it is persistence in promotion that plays a large role in determining whether or not people will purchase the produce offered. Moreover, this can be as simple as walking into a restaurant and sitting down with a general manager and asking them if local/organic produce is important to their menu and if they are willing to try new things. Given that we have found a number of restaurants receptive to this message, growers could be more proactive in explaining who they are, particularly as they relate to the local community and its goals, as well as making direct connections with local restaurants and providing them with a produce catalogue and price list. It is also important that growers make their produce accessible, either by offering free or inexpensive delivery, having a local pick-up place, or having a nearby purchasing location. Another possible method for local growers to make their produce available in a way in which restaurants are familiar is to sell to restaurants through a local produce purveyor. This would free growers from having to be their own middle-man.

Though ideally restaurants that are embedded in their local communities would be dedicated to buying produce locally, the reality is that the barriers described above limit the quantity of local produce many restaurants buy, even if they would like to do so. Thus, it may be in the best interest of local farmers/gardens to target restaurants that already possess a philosophy committed to local and organic produce. They would be able to offer a supply that meets these restaurants' niche demand for locally-grown produce at certain times of year, rather than have to convince other restaurants of the merits of all their produce and assume the responsibility for

supplying large quantities of it—a position which puts a great deal of reputational pressure on them to perform. One obstacle that must be acknowledged is that restaurants with a philosophy dedicated to buying locally most likely already have trusted suppliers of local produce (which has allowed them to cultivate their philosophy thus far). Consequently, local farms and gardens hoping to expand their consumer base may be turned away, since these restaurants do not need additional suppliers. One way to overcome this would be for local gardens/farms to offer one or more specialty items which cannot be purchased from the suppliers from which the restaurant currently buys. By developing a specialty or niche, local gardens and farms can be competitive without having to compete against the global produce market.

CONCLUSION

Though it is still in its initial phases of development there appears to be a burgeoning awareness of the importance of fresh, local produce in the Phoenix area. Though the characterization of Phoenix' food culture is quite varied, it is important to note that values associated with fresh, healthy, organic food, and perhaps more importantly, the willingness of people to act on them, extends beyond gardeners, farmers, and individuals who frequent local farmers market. Restaurants too, are aware of the importance of fresh local produce for their consumers, and increasingly for their communities. Most restaurants we interviewed said they were willing to pay more for local and organic produce as long as it was of high quality. Though not all of them are interested in organic fruits and vegetables, because many of these restaurants are buying a substantial portion of their produce within Arizona, often on a daily basis, there is a considerable opportunity for local growers to increase their consumer base among a diverse array of local restaurants. By figuring out how to introduce themselves and get

their fresh produce in front of these restaurant owners and managers, they can play a substantial role in accelerating the advances already made in crafting a healthier, local food culture in Phoenix.

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APPENDIX ONE: Letter of Consent***Crafting a Local Food Culture in Phoenix: a community-based research project***

We are conducting research for the *Social Enterprises: Innovation, Justice, and Community Development* course taught within the School of Social Transformation at Arizona State University. The team for this project will consist of: Allison Weidemann and Seth Sterling. The purpose of the project is to foster collaboration between local restaurateurs and local organic farmers, increasing the consumer base for organic farm-based business in Phoenix. In addition to examining how urban gardens in downtown Phoenix are run and how they are beneficial to the community, we are approaching local restaurants to better understand their perception of and interest in the produce grown in local urban gardens. This research will shed light on how local restaurants—including yours—can best benefit from the fresh, locally-grown produce they cultivate and in turn help local growers understand needs and interests of local restaurants. We are undertaking this project in conjunction with ASU professor Vanna Gonzales, a faculty member in Justice and Social Inquiry and coordinator of social economy Arizona, and community mentor, Kenny Barrett, the project manager of Roosevelt Row Community Development Corporation and co-founder of The Growhouse.

If you decide to take part in this project, you will be asked to participate in a 30-60 minute interview, audio-recorded for accuracy. We plan to ensure confidentiality by employing pseudonyms and/or numerical indicators in our final write-up of the interview data unless you give us express verbal consent from you to use your name and/or your restaurant's name.

Taking part in this project is entirely up to you, and no one will hold it against you if you decide not to do it. If you do take part, you may stop at any time without penalty. In addition, you may ask to have your data withdrawn from the study after the research has been conducted.

If you want to know more about this research project or would like a copy of this consent form, please contact either our faculty supervisor and/or community mentor. Dr. Vanna Gonzales can be reached by email Vanna.Gonzales@asu.edu or telephone (480) 965-7631. Kenny Barrett can be reached at kenny@rooseveltrow.org

Sincerely,

Crafting a Local Food Culture in Phoenix: a community-based research project

A. Consent Statement

I agree to participate in a 30-60 minute interview for the project described above

Signature

Date

B. Audio Consent

While the interview may be conducted without audio recording, being able to review and reference what was said is tremendously helpful for the write up. Upon completion of the project, the tapes will be given to our faculty supervisor and disposed of immediately. Your signature below indicates that you consent to an audio tape of this interview.

Signature

Date

If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact either our project's faculty supervisor or community mentor. Thank you for your participation!

Vanna Gonzales, Ph.D.
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APPENDIX TWO: Interview Questionnaire

CRAFTING A LOCAL FOOD CULTURE IN PHOENIX



DATE:

TIME:

RESTAURANT:

INTERVIEWEE(S):

INTERVIEWER(S):

PART A: Profile of interviewee

1A. I'd like to start by asking you to tell me a little bit about your background and experience with ___restaurant name___

PART B: Perception of food culture in Phoenix

1B. How would you describe the food culture in Phoenix and how do you see your restaurant as fitting into this culture?

2B. Do you see your restaurant as contributing to creating/growing the food culture in Phoenix and if so how?

3B. Are you or your restaurant involved in any local events and/or educational projects around food? If so can you tell me a little bit about your involvement and how often you participate?

4B. What other local actors/organizations, if any, do you collaborate with in these events/projects?

PART C: INFORMATION ABOUT PRODUCE AND LOCAL PRODUCERS

1C. Do you seek locally grown produce to cook and/or serve at [insert restaurant name] and if so what motivates you to do so.

IF THEY SAY NO TO 1C, SKIP 2C QUESTION

2C. Approximately what percentage of the produce you purchase would you say is locally grown?

3C. Approximately what percentage of your locally grown produce would you say comes from

- i. Phoenix?
- ii. Arizona?
- iii. Outside of Arizona?

4C. How important to you is it that this produce is organic?

5C. How much of the produce you buy would you say is organic? (if they provide exact percent write it down and circle correct category below. If they are having trouble then offer the following breakdown and circle the one that best describes their situation)

- i. 0-25%
- ii. 26-50%
- iii. 51-75%
- iv. 76%-100%

6C. Where do you typically buy your local produce?: (see what they offer up first and then probe with following categories)

- a) grocery store
- b) local farm
- c) community garden
- d) farmers market
- d) other

NOTE SKIP QUESTION 7C IF INTERVIEWEE INDICATES THEY DON'T BUY FROM b, c or d in Q6C

7C. How long has [insert restaurant name] been buying directly from local farmers?

8C. Does the amount of local produce you buy vary seasonally and if so how?

9C. During the course of the year, what is typically your busiest and slowest month?

10C. During your busiest month, how often do you buy your produce?

11C. During your slowest month, how often do you buy your produce?

12C. Do you (or would you) be willing to change your menu according to seasonal produce that is available locally? And if so in what way?

13C. Do you pay more or would you be willing to pay more for locally grown and/or organic produce?

14C. What do you see as the principle barriers preventing your restaurant from buying more of your produce locally?

15C. What role can [insert name of restaurant] and/or local growers play in eliminating these barriers?

16C. What specific action and/or strategies do you think local organic farmers and/or community gardens could take to encourage you to buy more local produce?

17C. What other developments would encourage [insert name of restaurant] to buy more local, organic produce in future?

APPENDIX THREE

PRODUCE CHART: Summary of data gathered from supplementary questionnaire*

Top Ten Most Used Vegetables in descending order	Approximate Quantity (lbs) used per month during peak season	Approximate Quantity (lbs) used per month during slow season	Price per lb
a. Tomatoes	500	400	
b. Cucumbers	500	400	
Mushrooms	300	250	
c. Onions	750	600	
a. Heirloom tomatoes			
Broccoli			
d. Potatoes			
Cauliflower			
e. Red peppers			
Swiss chards			
Escarole			
f. Carrots			
a. Tomatoes	80 cases		\$9 per case
(e.) Green bell peppers	36 cases		\$15 per case
b. Onions	50 sacks		\$9 per case
c. Cucumbers	34 cases		\$17 per case
d. Potatoes	1500 lbs		\$10 per case
e. Red peppers	24 cases		\$17 per case
b. Cucumbers (pesticide free)	100lbs	80lbs	\$0.76
Green beans	12lbs	8lbs	\$3.49
Beets	24lbs	18lbs	\$5.99
f. Carrots (organic)	40lbs	20lbs	\$1.20
a. Tomatoes (pesticide free)	150lbs	120lbs	\$4.49
<p>See next page for further data</p>			

Top Ten Most Used Fruits in descending order	Approximate Quantity (lbs) used per month during peak season	Approximate Quantity (lbs) used per month during slow season	Price per lb
Bananas	200	150	
Strawberries	200	150	
a. Apples	300	200	
Melons	200	150	
Grapes	200	150	
a. Apples			
Citrus			
Lemons	100 lbs	80lbs	\$0.98
Top Ten Most Used Leafy Greens in descending order	Approximate Quantity (lbs) used per month during peak season	Approximate Quantity (lbs) used per month during slow season	Price per lb
a. Romaine Lettuce	450	350	
a. Romaine Lettuce			
Lettuce (leaf green)	70 cases		\$10 per case
Spring mix			
Mixed Greens (Organic)	165 lbs	140lbs	\$1.60
Baby spinach (organic)	140lbs	100lbs	\$1.60
a. Romaine	80lbs	60lbs	\$1.50
Basil (organic)	32lbs	26lbs	\$2.29

***NOTE:**

- Different colors represent different restaurants' data.
- Not all restaurants completed the chart in its entirety, so some data is missing