



Spring 2018

# Gender and Food Access in Adams County: Food Provisioning, Identity Formation, and Survival

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## **Abstract**

This project analyzes food access issues in Adams County, specifically within the setting of South Central Community Action Programs and the Gleaning Project through the collection of individual testimonies. Budget, time, transportation, health, and household composition emerged as common themes that affect food access within this rural community and limit choice and agency, and also serve as a major influence in the process of food provisioning and identity formation, especially in terms of motherhood, parenting, and caregiving. In most cases, due to these systemic shortcomings, individuals and families navigated multiple solutions to these challenges in order to sustain themselves and to be active members of their communities.

## **Keywords**

gender, food access, food insecurity, Adams County

## **Disciplines**

Family, Life Course, and Society | Food Security | Food Studies | Rural Sociology

## **Comments**

Written for WGS-400: Senior Seminar. Presented at Gettysburg College's [Celebration](#) (Colloquium on Undergraduate Research, Creative Activity, and Community Engagement) in Spring 2018.

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# Gender and Food Access in Adams County

Food Provisioning, Identity Formation, and Survival

Emma Korowotny

WGS 400

8 May 2018

“I have the audacity to believe that people everywhere can have three meals a day for their bodies, education and culture for their minds, and dignity, equality, and freedom for their spirits.”

- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

“If more of us valued food and cheer and song above hoarded gold, it would be a merrier world.”

- J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*

## ABSTRACT

This project analyzes food access issues in Adams County, specifically within the setting of South Central Community Action Programs and the Gleaning Project through the collection of individual testimonies. Budget, time, transportation, health, and household composition emerged as common themes that affect food access within this rural community and limit choice and agency, and also serve as a major influence in the process of food provisioning and identity formation, especially in terms of motherhood, parenting, and caregiving. In most cases, due to these systemic shortcomings, individuals and families navigated multiple solutions to these challenges in order to sustain themselves and to be active members of their communities.

## INTRODUCTION

Food systems in the United States perpetuate social inequalities through the means of production, distribution, and consumption. Food is an essential aspect of society, as it physically sustains populations and fosters the growth of future generations, and it also brings together families and communities and serves as an essential element of identity formation. Across the country, barriers to access for households to fresh, nutritious, and culturally appropriate foods include budgeting, time, and transportation constraints, and clear trends also indicate the ways in which geographic and social location of households affect access. The responsibility of food provisioning, or the process of planning, purchasing, and preparing meals, disproportionately falls into the hands of women within households due to constructions of gender related to expectations of motherhood, care, and domestic labor. Numerous policies and organizations work to alleviate the effects of food insecurity, although very few approaches acknowledge the interdependent factors that affect individual experiences within food systems and especially that of gender in rural settings. This project's focus on storytelling and in-depth

interviews of community members in the context of Adams County, Pennsylvania, will provide a more in-depth analysis of the structural forces at play and the power of grassroots efforts that aim to break down social inequalities. Budget, time, transportation, health, and household composition emerged as common themes that affect food access within this community and limit choice and agency and also serve as a major influence in the process of food provisioning and identity formation, especially in terms of motherhood, parenting, and caregiving. In most cases, due to these systemic shortcomings, individuals and families balanced multiple solutions to these challenges in order to sustain themselves and to be active members of their communities.

#### *Food Security in the United States: Statistics and Data*

In recent years, issues related to food insecurity within the United States have seen increased public awareness in addition to interventions by government and non-governmental organizations. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) classifies a household as food insecure if “...at times throughout the year [they] were uncertain of having, or unable to acquire, enough food to meet the needs of all their members because they had insufficient money or other resources for food” (Coleman-Jensen et al. 2017). This definition contains several key elements that captures the nuances of experiences with food insecurity and therefore the opportunity for wider classification, including the idea that food insecurity can affect members within a household differently, that access issues can be seasonal or cyclical, and they often go beyond simply budgetary constraints. In year 2016 12.3% of households were reported as being food insecure. Therefore around 41.2 million people lived in a food insecure household. However, household characteristics tend to influence likelihood of being food insecure: 16.5% of households with children reported being food insecure, while single-mother headed households

reported at 31.6%, single-fathers at 21.7%, black households at 22.5%, and hispanic households at 18.5%. (Coleman-Jensen et al. 2017). The USDA does not make available statistics that break down rates of food insecurity of single-headed households by race, but other data indicates that single-parent headed households are more likely to be female headed, and the highest rates of single-parent headed households are black, hispanic/latino, and Native American (United States Census Bureau 2016; Kids Count Data Center 2016). Other studies have reported similar rates in addition to other factors that influence food security, including geographic location, education level, budgeting and pricing, and overall household composition (Nord 2013; Miller et al. 2014).

Perhaps most importantly, in terms of geographic location, households in both more rural and urban centers reported the highest rates of food insecurity, as these areas tend to have higher concentrations of poverty as opposed to suburban areas. In addition to the implications of intersections of race, class, and geographic location on food access, an overwhelming body of literature is dedicated to these issues in urban and metropolitan contexts due to higher rates and density of poverty and its correlations with racial inequalities, although more recently, a renewed focus on rural settings has been evident (Burke 2012, 358-360). The parallels between these two contexts should be studied in more detail, as they serve as examples of how food systems in the United States prevent access to specific populations. However, it is difficult to separate out any single factors as determinants of a household's ability to consistently access fresh and nutritious food, as causes are often intersecting. In terms of rural food insecurity, one important and yet often overlooked population is that of migrant workers, especially given the context of Adams County and its significant migrant population working in its agricultural industry. It is reported that nationally "...migrant and seasonal farmworkers (MSFWs)... the majority of whom are

Latino, experience even more disparate rates of food insecurity; studies have found them to be more than 400% more likely than the general public to lack the consistent ability to meet food needs...” (Kiehne and Mendoza 2015, 397, 404, 405), which is both ironic and shocking, as they are essentially growing and harvesting food for other people. Additionally, a significant body of research has chronicled the subsequent health risks associated with persistent food insecurity, such as increased likelihood of obesity or diabetes, as well as the meal sacrifices many parents make so that children can have more. However, many aspects of food insecurity cannot necessarily be quantitatively measured, such as levels and the effect of mental stress (Schmidt et al. 2016, 608).

A wide range of government assistance programs are currently available that are both locally and federally funded, including forms of both food and cash assistance. Perhaps the most well-known program is SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), formerly known as food stamps. A growing body of anthropological research dedicated to studying the ways in which popular perceptions of welfare and SNAP reveals that they are usually inaccurate and can actually serve to perpetuate the systemic ideology of the welfare system and food aid, which oftentimes punishes women and single parents who struggle to balance family care with being a productive member of the workforce (Dickinson 2014). This notion is especially significant when one considers the fact that “black women and Latinas are more likely than white women to be single mothers” which again highlights intersections of race, class, and experiences with food insecurity (Glynn 2016).

In highlighting the lived experiences of those caught within the welfare system, the diversity of experiences with food insecurity can be more widely understood, including the ways in which food is socially and culturally significant. Studies have found that “...although states

differ in the composition of their safety-net packages, we find no evidence of a significant difference in the effectiveness of food versus cash programs...” (Schmidt et al. 612), which points to the fact that in most cases, no single catch-all solution to food insecurity can exist on national or local levels, and that a combination of federally funded programs, community-based solutions, and other initiatives can perhaps combine to effect the most change. However, many of these initiatives work within current systems in order to alleviate this more immediate problem rather than working to eliminate poverty on a societal level.

### *Theoretical Frameworks*

Several prevalent approaches and frameworks dedicated to alleviating food insecurity within the context of the United States have recently emerged. Intersecting systems of inequality, including that of race, gender, class, nationality, and others, are all at play in the industrialization of food systems and discussions of food access, which includes the “market-driven relocation of groceries into the suburbs” as well as the increased accessibility to unhealthy, cheap foods. This generates the need for what is known as food justice, which includes localized solutions and especially those that empower and encourage development in terms of “agricultural production, healthier consumption, local politics, and economic self-determination” (Morales 2011, 150-151, 169).

Food justice-oriented and rights-based approaches to alleviating food insecurity, which arguably generate more direct change, also have the potential to bring about a complete ideological shift in government programs. Despite the fact that federal spending on food assistance has continually increased, the number of food insecure households continues to remain around 12%, with some fluctuations due to cyclical and economic factors (Coleman-



Jensen et al. 2017), which points to a failure of these programs to address the structural barriers to access and the need for more intersectional and local solutions. The most significant of these government programs include SNAP, the National School Lunch Program, and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), among others. However, it is widely argued that these programs tend to focus on the idea of individual failure or inadequacies and food as a commodity rather than approaching the issue via the ideologies of social responsibility and food as a basic human right, such as through food pricing and quality (Anderson 2013, 114-115). A shift towards this ideology would promote social justice and individual agency rather than the more temporary fixes that are available today.

Perhaps the most significant movement in terms of rights-based food justice frameworks would be that of food sovereignty, which is defined as “...the peoples’, Countries, or State Unions’ RIGHT to define their agricultural and food policy...” and takes different forms depending on community context, which promotes autonomy and agency (Grey and Patel 2015, 433). Food sovereignty serves as a way to deconstruct systems of power that are intertwined with food systems and creates the space for communities to reclaim their power and expand participatory solutions involving food access, acquisition, and distribution, as well as the promotion of localized knowledge and history (Mares and Peña 2011; Werkheiser et al. 2015). In other words, food sovereignty is directly related to power, and “in particular, the power of... even small local communities... to exercise control over their food economies” (Navin 2015, 89). However, the context of the United States poses unique barriers to realizing the aims of food justice, as policy tends to prioritize the needs of farmers and the agricultural industry and a lack of emphasis on the local impact on low-income consumers (Winne 2008, 177).

Feminist analyses of food systems and insecurity also align with the research associated with rights-based solutions. This framework critiques the ways in which dominant neoliberal regimes across the globe have worsened issues of food insecurity through the industrialization of farming and food production; its emphasis on the ways in which gender influences food production, access, and consumption and brings about another essential layer in understanding and combating these issues (Sachs and Patel-Campillo 2014). As previously mentioned, the intersections of gender justice and food sovereignty are highly relevant to this project, as social constructions and expectations of gender have a significant influence on individuals' experiences and interactions. Within many Western countries, femininity is constructed as inherent subordination and vulnerability, while masculinity is associated with strength, independence, and the ability to provide. However, the blame for shortcomings in food access often falls on women due to their immediate roles in the domestic sphere. In addition, the continued industrialization and privatization of food systems have heightened this emphasis on individual abilities and failures rather than on systemic inequalities (Gilson 2015, 20, 30). The systemic and therefore cyclical "undervaluing of women and girls... in many societies creates and sustains social patterns in which women (and girls) have less access to resources..." which reaches far beyond simply food, as health, overall well-being, and educational and career outcomes are also impacted (Watson 2015, 125-126).

Beyond food access, the idea of food provisioning, which "involves physical, mental, and emotional labor, [and] includes planning of meals, procuring food, preparation of meals, and cleaning up after meals," is also influenced by constructions of gender and community and individual identity formation. Ideals of mothering and motherhood, and especially expectations of caregiving abilities and "nourishment for loved ones...can also add to the physical and mental

strain of food provisioning” (Som Castellano “Alternative Food Networks” 2015, 463).

Additionally, income and budgetary constraints influence a household’s ability to consistently access fresh and nutritious food, and the inability to do so is often seen as individual failure to “achieve normative ideals of food provisioning” as well as parenting and especially mothering (Som Castellano “Receiving Assistance” 2017, 3-4).

Dominant images of women and mothering in the domestic sphere reinforce this burden of food provisioning and women as the “gatekeepers” to family consumption and nutrition (McIntosh and Zey 1998), and from a more neoliberal perspective, these acts are also treated as an evaluation of citizenship and nationbuilding, as mothers’ roles as nurturers impact the future of society (Dionne 2016). Concepts of food provisioning are also influenced by the so-called “family meal discourse” which is perpetuated by media and especially advertising. The common language of family meals and the need to “bring them back” has heavy implications of “mothering rhetorics” that again evoke feelings of guilt and individual inadequacy rather than emphasizing systemic inequalities or government responsibility, and also perpetuates the ideal image of the white heterosexual middle class families as being the standard or the ideal (Kinser 2017, 32, 34, 37). Food consumption and provisioning reaches far beyond simply a means of survival: it is a performative act which has individual, social, and cultural implications. In addition to ideals of motherhood, many dominant yet unspoken “rules” about food consumption relate to race, class, and gender hierarchies and also intersect with issues such as body image, control, and oppression (Counihan 1992).

Despite the diversity of experiences with food insecurity within and among communities, demonstrated common themes include shame, weakness, or deficiency, which can be compounded by immigration status, cultural obligations, and negative public discourse

(Carney 2014). As previously discussed, given the “sacrificial” way in which women and mothers are expected to act, female members of food insecure households tend to neglect their own health and nutrition in order to provide for their dependents. For example, it is reported that lower income women and single mothers are more likely to be obese due to their prioritizing of dependents’ nutritional needs (Martin and Lippert 2012). Clearly, as a result of gender expectations and caring rhetoric, food insecurity is experienced differently by men, women, and their families.

### *Adams County, Pennsylvania*

This research project expands on the literature available that relates to the influence of gender and food insecurity within more rural settings in the United States, and specifically that of Adams County, Pennsylvania, as a means to bring to light the ways in which local organizations are breaking down barriers to access. According to the USDA, rates of food insecurity in Pennsylvania in 2016 were reported at around 12.5%, which is near the national average of 12.3%, and Feeding America reports rates in Adams County at around 8.9% (Coleman-Jensen et al. 2017; Gunderson et al. 2017). As a largely rural area in the south central region of the state with significant agricultural production, food insecurity still affects many households despite these below average rates. Due to the issues surrounding food access in the area, the Adams County Food Policy Council was established in 2009 as a community initiative and consists of a conglomerate of community members, organizations, and local farmers with the aim of ensuring “access to a safe, nutritious, affordable and adequate food supply within a sustainable system which promotes the local economy.” This includes activities such as the Healthy Options program, encouraging the Farm to School Network, as well as grant writing and other policy

initiatives that work towards closing the food gap through locally beneficial means (Dailey et al 2015, Adams County Food Policy Council).

One of the prominent organizations involved with the Council is the Gleaning Project of South Central Pennsylvania, which was established in 2009 as a network of growers, volunteers, and organizations that repurpose and redistribute potential food waste from local harvesters to community groups and families experiencing food insecurity (The Gleaning Project of South Central Pennsylvania). The scale of this reclaimed food “waste” in Adams County alone, which is hundreds of thousands of pounds each year, demonstrates the fact that our food systems are not failing to produce, but rather are failing to distribute in equal or just ways as a result of the systemic determinants of where and to whom harvests reach, such as geography and potential for profit (Watson 2015 122, 124). The Gleaning Project has operated under the jurisdiction of South Central Community Action Programs (SCCAP) since 2013. SCCAP offers several programs in both Adams and Franklin Counties dedicated to community empowerment and ending poverty through various approaches; other programs include Circles of Support, which helps families out of poverty through planning and decision-making guidance, their Food Pantry, which offers eligible families the opportunity to “shop” once a month for everything from toiletries to bread, and Work Ready, which assists individuals receiving welfare or cash assistance develop the skills and training to maintain employment and achieve more stability, often in tandem with other SCCAP programs (South Central Community Action Programs). The context of Adams County’s food justice network, and the Gleaning Project specifically, demonstrate the concepts of feminist approaches to food sovereignty, sustainability, and empowerment on local levels, and this project aims to utilize this setting as a means to assess the

successes and shortcomings of these frameworks while also lifting up the voices of individuals and their experiences with food insecurity.

## METHODOLOGY

The structural barriers to access that our food systems generate, especially in the United States, have far-reaching effects beyond simply what's on the table, and through mixed methods this research project aimed to capture these effects in ways that statistics and quantitative data fail to do. Data was collected through contacts at the Gleaning Project of South Central Pennsylvania in the form of participant observation, which allowed immersion in the organization and served to counter the effect of my positionality as an outsider through building relationships with participants before beginning the interview process.

Interview participants were recruited over several weeks through interactions at the Gleaning Project's Produce Stand, and their testimonies were collected via one-on-one semistructured interviews in which they were asked to talk about their lives within the community, the different challenges they face related to food provisioning, and the Gleaning Project's role in helping to alleviate any of those struggles, if at all. Additionally, due to the sensitive nature of food insecurity and social perceptions, many individuals were willing to share a brief statement rather than an interview. These statements were also collected during this time and also analyzed with the same approach as the in-depth interviews. Beyond these interactions at the Produce Stand, participants were also recommended through SCCAP's Work Ready program, as there tends to be overlap with the produce stand, as well. All participants included in this research were given a pseudonym for the purpose of this paper and to maintain anonymity.

This interview style was suggested in coordination with the Gleaning Project's needs, as these testimonies will be utilized as a supplement to grant writing and fundraising and serve to further understand the nature of food insecurity within Adams County and how organizations can better serve the community's needs. In addition, this mode of participatory action research, in combination with other methods, aimed to promote collaboration and critical reflections on the Gleaning Project's role in the community and to help to continue the breakdown any sort of hierarchies or barriers that may exist (Williams 2014).

The recruitment process did not have a significantly gendered aim, although the subsequent data analysis utilized a gendered framework. Feminist standpoint theory was applied to data analysis as a means to uncover the different social determinants that affect participants' experiences and perceptions. This framework emerged from the work of several prominent feminist scholars, including Nancy Hartsock and Patricia Hill Collins, and serves to highlight the ways in which knowledge is produced through individual experiences as a result of positionality and social structures and rejects notions of universality or singular "truth." One important framework that also emerged as a result of feminist standpoint theory is the notion of intersectionality, coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, which emphasizes the ways in which different aspects of one's identity, such as race, class, and gender, are inseparable and interact to influence experiences and knowledge. These theories were applied to highlight the physical, emotional, and social stressors associated with food insecurity that affect households and communities across generations and their effect on individual identity formation.

My positionality as an outsider also played a role in my interactions and interviews. I do not come from an affluent background, but I have never personally experienced food insecurity, nor have I ever lived fully on my own and had to manage a household or care for dependents.

Additionally, as a twenty-one year old, health concerns are not central to my daily life. My upbringing in suburban Connecticut affected my prior perceptions of life in more rural areas, and my position as a white woman and Gettysburg College student and researcher also likely widened the gap between myself and community members, which made me more reliant on gatekeepers such as SCCAP staff and volunteers. I tried to limit my “student-like” appearance by leaving my backpack and Nalgene at home, and I dressed more casually to match that of other SCCAP staff and volunteers in order to seem more approachable.

My main means of recruitment and observation was by offering food samples at the Produce Stand, which provided individuals with recommendations as to how to use the assortment of items available during a given week (which was odd at times due to the time of year), and also gave me the opportunity to engage in a more casual way. Although the recipes that I prepared were not necessarily complicated, ranging from roasted Brussels sprouts and butternut squash to curried potatoes, veggie casserole, and even broccoli slaw, many expressed a common thread of disbelief that I had made them, especially among older people that I interacted with. I know that I am a competent cook despite my age, so I had to stand my ground, and more than a few men told me that my abilities in the kitchen would be an asset to anyone’s family someday. This resituated myself within my own research and reminded me of the ways in which constructions of gender and food provisioning affect how I am perceived by others within the context of the Produce Stand as well as in different social settings. However, overall and with time, I was able to build rapport especially through sharing recipes and stories about food and cooking. Although axes of difference cannot be eliminated, my awareness of my own have hopefully generated a more nuanced research process and analysis.



## FINDINGS

The following section explores several interrelated themes that emerged from the data and the ways in which they demonstrate the nuances of food insecurity and situate individual experiences within broader systemic contexts, including the influences of budget, transportation, health, household composition, and time. Race, gender, and other elements of social location were major influences on these experiences. The vast majority of contributors to this project were white except for two interview participants who were of mixed backgrounds. Although race was not explicitly discussed in my interactions, interviews, and general data collection, it likely affects the ways in which poverty and food insecurity are experienced due to intersecting aspects of oppression and discrimination. For example, white participants face specific barriers to food access due to income and class inequalities but also experience degrees of racial privilege. Additionally, female participants confront different pressures than males in their food provisioning efforts within broader social contexts due to implicit biases and socialization, and therefore through my interpretation of their testimonies.

I tried to capture the intersectional nature of these axes of difference during data collection and analysis, and took measures to acknowledge the ways in which my own social location and implicit bias affect these processes. Each participant shared many unique and insightful aspects of their lives in Adams County that contribute to their challenges with food provisioning, and their stories demonstrate the ways in which food serves as a means to provide care and sustenance for loved ones and is also a performative aspect of identity formation.

### *Geography and Transportation*

Many participants cited transportation as either a barrier to overall access or an added challenge to food provisioning, as it affects when, where, and how often one shops, as well as how much can be purchased at a time. Many of those who lived within range of what limited public transportation is available in the Gettysburg area noted the time commitment needed to take the bus: for example, Brianna, a single mom of three, stated,

“If you’re relying on public transportation, then it’s gonna take at least two hours of your day up of just trying to get to a store and back even if it’s just for a couple of things...sometimes you don’t wanna keep making trips so you wanna get enough for the week and you can’t because it’s hard to get it all back to your house...”

This highlights several aspects of the intersections of transportation and food access: given the rural setting of Adams County, public transportation has a narrow range and is less reliable, making only a handful of stops with long wait times, which limits choice in terms of where one can shop. Additionally, as this participant stated, taking public transport to the grocery store means that you can only purchase what you can carry, and when shopping for a family, that often means making multiple trips per week which compounds the time commitment.

Similarly, Ramona, a single mom of two, discussed how her kids’ young ages placed further pressure on grocery shopping and the time commitment of public transport, as they often added stress to the process or left her to block out specific times where she could go on her own while her kids were at school. In addition, Ramona also discussed the process of choice in where she shops, citing the different pricing, selection, and rewards programs in addition to location as factors in her decision. She said that despite living within walking distance of Kennie’s, a locally-owned grocery store chain, she felt that their prices were “just a little bit too expensive” so she most often opts to go to Weis, which is further away but accessible by public transportation. However, Ramona did say that she stops in to Kennie’s “sporadically” because

she finds paying the higher price to pick up a few things at her convenience is more beneficial than the time commitment involved in getting to another store.

Both Ramona and Brianna lived within the Gettysburg Borough limits, which poses specific challenges related to food access that are different than that of families who live in less central areas of Adams County. For example, Emily, a single mother with a two year old son, discussed how having to rely on others to get to the grocery store severely limited her choice in terms of shopping and cooking. At the time of the interview, she was living with her older sister and her children, and she was working on getting her license and saving for her own car. This left her at the mercy of her sister's work schedule, store preferences, and specific food preferences if she was unable to go with her. "It's really hard for some of us," she said, "especially...if you live in the middle of nowhere...other people aren't always reliable." She cited her sister's preference for sugary drinks and more hispanic-style food, and the overall lack of produce in their house: "I'm sick of the stuff they get... my sister just gets whatever... I wanna be able to get, like, salads and stuff." Emily lacks the ability to choose when, where, and what groceries she is able to purchase due to her living situation, which further limits her autonomy in parenting her son and making the nutritional choices for him that she would prefer.

Age, physical abilities, and mobility emerged as a common subset of factors within the issue of transportation. For example, another participant, Kurt, also lives in a more secluded area, and attributed both his own physical disabilities and the cost of gas as limits to the number of trips he makes into town for both grocery shopping and running errands, which affects what he and his family are able to eat. Given his girlfriend's own health issues, Kurt is the primary shopper and cook in his household, and he was the only male participant who claimed this role, aside from those who were single. He described his cooking style as "anything you can make in

big batches and that lasts long,” which further limits choice and can add to the stress associated with trying to plan efficient trips into town with budgeting constraints. In addition to these specific experiences, many elderly or physically disabled community members I met at the Produce Stand cited limited mobility or their reliance on caretakers determining when and where they shop, including their access to the Produce Stand and the SCCAP Food Pantry. From the standpoint of food sovereignty, this demonstrates the ways in which disabled or elderly community members are marginalized in terms of food access, as these participants lacked the power or agency to regularly obtain fresh and preferred foods due to transportation and geographical constraints (Navin 2015, 87).

### *Budgetary Strains*

As demonstrated by these testimonies, transportation intersects with many other factors to determine experiences and challenges related to food access. Of these factors, different aspects of budgeting and income, which are also affected by health and access to assistance programs, seemed to appear most frequently in participant testimonies. For example, as noted by Ramona, store prices affect where she chooses to shop but is also balanced by time commitment and different sales or promotions. Despite being generally more expensive than the other options in the Gettysburg area, Ramona explained that she often goes to Kennie’s just for produce due to their Fruit and Veggie Bucks program, which is a program that is both federally and locally funded and allows anyone with a Kennie’s card and active SNAP EBT account to receive up to five fresh items per day at half price (Adams County Food Policy Council). However, in Ramona’s case, this also means that she has to continue to go to other stores as well in order to get all of the groceries and supplies for her family: in her case, this program eases budgeting in

some respects but may actually add to the time commitment associated with grocery shopping and food provisioning. One participant pointedly expressed the frustrations of many in terms of produce and pricing, noting that “fresh food is always the most expensive, but it’s the most important,” which highlights the fact that in many cases, individuals do not choose to eat unhealthily, but their options are severely limited due to pricing and income and despite any preferences they may have.

Participant health and cost of healthcare was commonly described as a major strain on household budgets, which further contributes to food access barriers. A significant body of research is dedicated to the long-term health effects of persistent food insecurity, such as diabetes in adults and developmental issues in children, as well as the strain on mental health and overall wellbeing (Kiehne and Mendoza 2015, 404). However, one common thread that also emerged during my fieldwork that was not evidenced in current literature was the reverse: the effect of health or medical conditions on individual and household food security. Through my interactions at the Produce Stand, I found that several participants cited disability or illness limiting their job opportunities, as well as the added burden of having to pay medical bills affecting their household income, overall budget, and ability to shop. For example, Kurt discussed that after suffering from an accident, it continues to be difficult to find work despite being a fully trained mechanic: he felt as though many businesses see him as an insurance liability, but he still has to somehow keep up with medical bills and physical therapy while still finding room in the budget for food, fuel, and utilities, all of which are basic means of survival. Similarly, many participants shared that they were living in relative stability (“doing alright”) before an unexpected illness or accident completely changed their financial situation and continues to affect them even being now years removed.

This trend speaks to the shortcomings of our healthcare system and how the costs of care and treatment reach far beyond simply the dollar amount, in addition to the ways in which food access and healthcare are deeply interconnected and tend to hurt more vulnerable populations, such as those with lower income. It can be argued that our healthcare system perpetuates inequalities in the same ways as that of food systems in the United States, including an ideology centered on individual rather than social responsibility: health and access to nutritious food are not often treated as basic human rights but as something that is to be earned (Anderson 2013, 115). This approach fails to recognize structural barriers and inequalities by reducing them to individual or household inadequacies, even those that are out of one's control, such as a health diagnosis.

Assistance programs and policies often alleviate some budget constraints but often cause greater challenges to those who may be just beyond qualification. For example, in terms of budget constraints, only one participant cited what is known as the food gap as a barrier to access, which refers to households that may have a base income that is too high to qualify for assistance but may face extraneous circumstances that still influence their ability to pay for food consistently. Linda, who is in her sixties, described how she and her husband are raising their eleven-year-old grandson. However, because her husband's income is too high to receive SNAP, they often struggle to afford groceries and therefore seek out other options such as the SCCAP Pantry and the Gleaning Project's Produce Stand to widen the variety of fresh food that is available to them. As with other participants, including Kurt and Ramona, this highlights the nearly impossible balance between both budgeting and time constraints in terms of individual and household choice, but also speaks to broader structures such as federally funded SNAP and its inability to address diversity of experiences with food access issues and insecurity and the

subsequent gaps created as well as shortcomings of the local food system (Anderson 2013, 114-115). The fact that only one participant described this experience should not mean that it should not be recognized, as it is likely indicative of this project's limited sample size, and this benefits gap is a commonly discussed issue within broader community contexts (Adams County Food Policy Council).

Similarly, participant Emily noted her living situation as a barrier to receiving federal assistance: she described how, as head of household, her sister was unwilling to fill out the proper paperwork authorizing Emily to qualify for SNAP on her own, which she attributed to the fear of "getting her own benefits cut down." Emily's story and living situation plays into the technicalities of the SNAP system and further limits her access and choice in terms of food, which is further constrained by her already limited budget.

Individuals and families who qualify for SNAP or similar programs still face budgeting limitations. During her testimony, Brianna described the work that goes into planning how and where her household foodstamps were to be spent, and how her plans were frequently interrupted by other circumstances despite her diligence. For example, in addition to Giant and Weis, she explained how she tries to shop in bulk occasionally so that she gets more value and longer use out of what she can buy. She described her planning and budgeting tactics of trying to avoid added stress:

"I just make it a priority so that way it doesn't interfere with anything else I have going on. So I know that when it's that time of the month to receive the stamps or anything I plan it out like at least a week prior instead of just like one night and then it'll be the wrong budget... I just like to take my time with the budget day by day... [but] sometimes I kind of go over my budget...there's time where we eat out because some places will take stamps, like Sheetz will take your food stamps and you go and buy cold subs. And sometimes there was a month where we ate out a lot because I was so busy or I didn't

have time to go home and I didn't have time for anyone to take me to the grocery store so we just ate out a lot so that killed our stamps... [so then] I was out of food for a few days.”

Brianna's experience highlights the processes of budgeting and decision-making that are often disrupted by other obligations or situations out of her control. As a single mother, she is pulled in many different directions, including in terms of her children's schedules, looking for employment, domestic needs, or other family obligations, all of which limit the time available to plan, grocery shop, and cook. This quote also demonstrates the delicate navigation between meeting immediate needs with that of the long term, or more specifically Brianna having to feed her family given available time and funds versus budgeting out her SNAP benefits so they last through the month.

Brianna's decision to eat out serves as the most efficient and immediately beneficial way to feed her family, and her choice is by no means extravagant, but given the other factors in her life, she can be left with no means to purchase food by the end of the month, which is when she turns to the Produce Stand and the SCCAP Pantry. This points to the ways in which food insecurity can be nonpersistent or cyclical due to determinants that may fluctuate or change, especially “distinct sets of household resources, income sources, employment opportunities, and competing demands of nonfood needs,” among others, and have been demonstrated in similar studies across the United States (Nord 2013, 126). In this instance, Brianna and her household are essentially punished for being unable to manage a nearly impossible balancing act of meeting family, community, school, and work obligations while still somehow getting nutritious and well-rounded meals on the table to share.

Food insecurity is a “managed process [as] families strategize and diligently work to avoid hunger. That responsibility, however, falls more heavily on women given traditional



discourses about family life and ‘women’s work’ that place greater expectations on women for feeding and nurturing their family...” (Martin and Lippert 2012, 1754). Brianna’s position as a single mother and head of household affects the ways in which she must tirelessly plan and budget in order to feed her family, and her experiences as well as other participants such as Ramona, Linda, and Emily, are reflective of this “managed process.” However, as will be demonstrated in the following section, the burdens of food provisioning and seeking alternative means of survival are not solely felt by women and single mothers.

### *Household Composition and Negotiations*

Budgeting and income constraints clearly intersect with household structure and composition as determinants of food access and security. All households operate differently depending on numerous factors including family structure, number of breadwinners and dependents, cultural expectations, and others. Household composition and dynamics were a major determinant of means of food access and provisioning among participants and should be considered within the wider context of the other themes discussed. For example, Ramona described how as a single mom, she frequently has to shop with her two young children, which is often a stressful and exhausting experience:

“[When I take] my kids to the grocery store...They don’t act right, they don’t listen. So in the middle of grocery shopping, I just wanna quit and leave because of how my kids are acting. So it’s a lot of pressure, and sometimes I’m just hurrying and I forget things because they’re...being loud and running around and it’s just a lot of work.”

As a single mom and sole breadwinner, Ramona must do all of the planning, budgeting of time and money, and shopping and cooking, while also parenting her children and their sometimes erratic behavior during the time-consuming trip to the grocery store via public transportation.

The emotionally and physically draining nature of this experience is likely directly related to expectations of motherhood and the social tendency to shame or deem unworthy any mothers who display or admit to feeling this stress, as well as a double bind associated with parenting in public: a mother yelling at her children is perceived as too harsh, while one who lets her children act freely is seen as too lenient or weak.

In addition, Ramona's experiences are likely influenced by the so-called family meal (FM) discourse that perpetuates expectations of mothering and feeding families through media representations and advertising. The ideal "mother" is often depicted and assumed through the lens of "a heterosexual, White, middle-class life, with all the conceivable privilege that could be associated with it, but also fails to account for the everyday struggles associated with social location and the barriers to family time and meal provision confronting mothers" (Kinser 2017, 37). These challenges include those that Ramona describes throughout her testimony.

Similarly, Brianna expressed her awareness and acceptance of the additional pressures that being a single mom contributes to the process of food provisioning, noting that as a mother and the caretaker of her children, "it's just what you have to do, you know? My kids' gotta eat, I gotta eat..." This attitude gets at the intersection of food as a physical necessity and expectations of mothering and family, as providing food for loved ones helps with survival and also shows care and investment in others' overall wellbeing. Brianna also discussed in her testimony how her two daughters will eat almost anything, while her son is picky and "just wants to eat cereal all the time," leading her to have to decide between letting her son eat what he prefers, which may not be as nutritious as she would like, or having him potentially refuse (and therefore waste) the food that she prepares for him. She seemed to be unquestioning of her responsibility and obligations as a mother despite the added pressures, including taking into consideration the

preferences of her children. Individuals who plan and cook must acknowledge the preferences, dietary restrictions, nutritional needs, and whims of dependents and other household members. Meeting everyone's needs or preferences is seen as "success" in terms of caregiving, especially within gendered constructions of domesticity and motherhood and no matter a family's social positionality (Castellano "Receiving Assistance 2017, 4; Kinser 2017, 32, 34-35).

Emily described similar problems, as her household structure often makes her the main cook for her child and her sisters' children: "sometimes it's stressful because you have kids criticizing you if it's not done the way they're used to, because their mother does it differently than I do." Food provisioning goes beyond simply preparing food for one's family, as it also encompasses having to satisfy tastes while meeting nutritional needs, and there is a certain level of power and expectation evident in that process. Emily's situation is also unique in that she has to negotiate her own agency within the confines of her sisters' home, including their sometimes conflicting preferences for food and meals, as previously discussed. Emily is trying to develop her identity as a young mother and establish good habits for her son, but must also acknowledge her sisters' wishes for her own children.

Other female participants expressed similar negotiations within household structures. Debbie, a woman in her sixties, explained that despite the fact that her financial situation and illness forced her to move in with her daughter, she opts to do most of the cooking for the two of them. This can be interpreted as her showing care for her daughter and wielding agency despite the "inverted" power dynamic of their household situation where parent is dependent on child. Another participant, Julie, who lives with only her husband, described her enjoyment of shopping and cooking, especially as a retired person: "I do have a lot of time on my hands," she said, which gives her more freedom to shop at different stores, make stops at the SCCAP Pantry

and Produce Stand when needed, and more easily meet the needs of her household, which is helped by her relative physical mobility and access to a car. When asked if she did the majority of the cooking in her house, Julie quipped back, “Do I do all the cooking? Yeah, if I left it to my husband... for one little thing that he has to make he’d put fifty things in [to wash].” This funny remark indicates her role within the domestic sphere despite the fact that before retirement she and her husband were both breadwinners, as well as the level of control and organization that she prefers despite any extra work that it may entail.

Other participants, such as those who live alone, cited different approaches to food access and provisioning. Jim, a single man in his late fifties, discussed how he usually hunts deer as his main source of protein throughout the winter, as he is able to use the many cuts of meat in different ways and store it for long periods of time. He emphasized how his hunting makes him less reliant on the Food Pantry and Produce Stand and therefore more independent, especially as a person on a fixed income. Jim said that he only comes when “absolutely necessary,” despite the open access to the Produce Stand and monthly access to the Pantry, referencing the broader community need and in turn downplaying his own in a show of masculine independence. This testimony plays into the ways in which food is gendered, as men are often expected to consume in ways that make them appear “big, powerful, free, and dominant” (Counihan 1992, 62): Jim’s mentality can be interpreted as that of a masculine “breadwinner,” especially in terms the agency and power exercised through hunting and his focus on meat as a main source of protein. Jim only has to meet his own needs or preferences rather than those of dependents or spouses, making his stress related to food access different than that of single mothers, for example, although planning, hunting, and storing venison may well be as time consuming as grocery shopping via public transportation.

Another participant attributed his frequent (almost daily) stops to the Produce Stand to his helping to care for six grandchildren: his wife usually cares for them while he is at work, so he stops to pick up produce on his lunch break, citing the sheer volume of food needed and the subsequent cost of keeping growing kids well fed. As the apparent main breadwinner, he takes on additional food provisioning duties through his stops at the Produce Stand and spoke of it as an errand that assists his wife in her domestic duties. Other contributors noted the different ways that they get “creative” in reducing costs and waste, such as hunting, canning, preserving, preparing in large batches, and freezing foods: men were largely more focused on cooking in large quantities, while women were more likely to discuss canning, pickling, and preserving. Single women were largely concerned about cost and access to produce and nutritious foods, while single men did not go into the specifics of food and health, focusing on simply “getting food on the table.”

Charlie, a twenty-six year old male participant spoke about how he had nearly failed Family Consumer Sciences class in high school simply because he did not think he needed to know how to cook, but now as a single man he has become tired of his limited range of meals. He gratefully sampled the food I had that day and took recipe cards for multiple dishes, asking myself and other SCCAP volunteers for cooking tips and recommendations. These examples demonstrate how gender constructions and household composition impact the ways in which we interact with food: Charlie likely did not see the connection between cooking, nutrition, and survival as a teen, and viewed it as a more womanly or motherly act rather than something a guy does, leaving him with limited options as a single head of household. In addition, women are more likely to be seen as “gatekeepers” to nutrition and meals than men due to constructions of femininity, motherhood, and domesticity (McIntosh and Zey 1987, 130), which was evident even

in instances of people who live alone or those without children. This rhetoric clearly influences attitudes towards food and therefore consumption from a social and cultural standpoint.

### *Reflections on SCCAP and the Gleaning Project*

My interactions and observations at the Produce Stand as well as the longer interviews created the space for participants to reflect on their experiences with SCCAP and the Gleaning Project and how they view its role within the community. Many participants were directed over to me after being prompted by Pantry staff (“she wants to know what the Pantry and Gleaning means to you”), which most often generated brief responses such as “it is a blessing” or “I am grateful,” while others provided more insights directly related to their lives and experiences. This variation of detail is likely due to how they were prompted and personal attitudes towards their struggles: some view it as a personal failure or inadequacy, while others were more outspoken about structural barriers.

Participants such as Brianna and Ramona cited how the Produce Stand helps where SNAP and other assistance programs fall short (“it gets you to the next month”), which mirrors the experiences of those on fixed incomes due to retirement or disability as well. One mother remarked on the ways in which the Produce Stand works in tandem with the Pantry during especially hard months: “The Pantry fills in the gaps when we run out, but we can only come once a month, so then the Produce Stand fills in those gaps.” Her teenage son also added his insights: “Food’s expensive in Gettysburg, anyone who lives here knows it.” As previously discussed, this interaction demonstrates the multiple means in which households obtain groceries due to cost limitations and the Gleaning Project’s position within those means, and this young

participant's comment suggests a wider community acknowledgement of these common barriers to food access.

One of the most frequent praises of the Gleaning Project was its wide variety of fresh, local, and nutritious food. Many participants raved about the apples and squashes in the fall, and more than one person seemed lost in thought for a few seconds after talking about the peaches available in late summer. There was a general interest in the recipes that were offered as well: one participant in particular returned nearly every week having tried the recipe that was sampled the week before and happily shared his satisfaction with being able to cook a wider variety of dishes. The Produce Stand increases access and choice without the extra costs that are often associated with fresh and local produce and in turn creates opportunities for improved health and nutrition, which has long-term societal benefits (Anderson 2013, 121).

Another common remark was how access to the Produce Stand allowed community members to help those beyond simply their household: several people shared that they often pick up produce for elderly neighbors or friends with limited mobility or to save the trip for those with less time. A strong sense of familiarity and community was almost always present despite the struggles that cause individuals to seek out SCCAP's services, and many expressed solidarity in their remarks by using language that emphasized the collective rather than individual isolation or failures, as evident in what was said by the mother and son duo. One participant spoke about how she had moved to Adams County in recent years because she found that this area offered more support and resources than her previous community in Maryland, especially as a person with numerous health issues and limited means. "Life is expensive," she told me with a sigh, but she then said that she no longer felt alone in her struggles, even beyond being able to eat more nutritious food.

As demonstrated, some participants were more than willing to share the details of their stories and struggles with me, while others were more hesitant: a common tendency in the statements provided about the Gleaning Project and the SCCAP Pantry was the use of more general language rather than speaking directly from the first person. One male contributor noted that these services “mean a lot for the community, friends, and neighbors,” while additional statements emphasized the scale of community need or highlighted the struggles of others, such as one woman’s concern for those who “can’t even make it to [the Pantry/Produce Stand]...they can’t get around or they work during these hours.” Both of these instances can be interpreted as a downplaying of personal struggles or concerns due to either shame or care for others. When one considers gender constructions and expectations, however, it can be argued that the remarks made by this male participant can be coming from more of a “breadwinner” mentality, focusing on physical or concrete ways that others are provided for, while the woman’s perspective reveals more of a socialized feminine caregiving stance in her concern for people’s access and availability of these services.

Given the timing and political context of this research, it would be irresponsible to not include the comments participants made about the proposed changes to SNAP programs that were announced by the Trump Administration in early 2018, which include a transition to pre-packaged meal boxes delivered to people’s homes. Although these changes have not been put into effect, participant Julie’s bewildered exclamations mirror the sentiments of many that I interacted with: “What happens when you need milk and bread and things? They’re gonna mail that, too? [...] It screws us over.” Through the lens of food sovereignty, these proposed meal boxes curtail the already limited choices of SNAP recipients, eliminating individual agency and the right to access fresh food while also evoking sentiments of shame: boxed milk is not exactly



seen in the same light as fresh milk, especially when it is delivered to your home by the government. These potential changes on the federal level reinforce the ways in which local solutions can provide households with more choice; in terms of the Gleaning Project, this organization works within the system, taking advantage of its flaws that generate significant amounts of potential waste in order to grant many with limited resources fresh produce options, although they cannot exactly solve the milk issue that Julie focused on. Considering the current administration's concern with cutting back spending and regulation as well as government presence in citizens' everyday lives (Twitter not included), these SNAP changes seem highly counterintuitive and ignorant of the nuances of food access issues.

## LIMITATIONS

This research poses several limitations. Due to the reliance of the Gleaning Project on local growing seasons and the timing of the academic year, this sample may not be fully reflective of the community members that come to the Produce Stand, as there is wider variety and quantity of food available in summer and fall months. This project was confined to the spring semester which meant that I was unable to more fully integrate myself into the context of the Gleaning Project and remained an outsider in many ways, which may have affected data collection during interviews and testimonies. It should also be noted that the anonymous statements were collected at the Produce Stand, which is an open and fairly public space, and many participants were directed over to me by Pantry volunteers; both factors likely influenced how and what was shared with me, especially considering the sensitive nature of food insecurity.

Additionally, this project's limited focus on Adams County was further narrowed to individuals who seek out SCCAP programming and services, which makes these findings more

directly beneficial to SCCAP and the Gleaning Project and are more reflective of individual experiences and therefore less generalizable, although they do align with larger trends.

Additional research within this setting could include more interaction with the broader Gleaning Network, including growers, volunteers, and other receiving organizations. Although I was able to collect some brief statements from male community members, all of my in-depth interview participants identified as women as a result of availability and willingness; further research could benefit from including the insights of men, trans\* folks, and those with gender identities beyond that of the binary, as well as non-heteronormative individuals and households. Lastly, many community members speak Spanish primarily or more proficiently than English, which limited my access and interactions with them: given more time, I would have sought out a translator.

## CONCLUSION

### *Sharing Stories: Food as a Bonding Experience*

Despite the hardships and emotional and physical stress that are caused by food access and provisioning, the time I spent in the Gleaning Project's space created the opportunity for the sharing of memories and experiences of family meals, cooking tips, and favorite recipes. After discussing the challenges of food insecurity, I always tried to ask participants what types of foods they liked to eat or prepare for their families, and with a clear change in tone and body language, many happily shared their thoughts. Upon my admittance that I had never had acorn squash, one woman sat down next to me and described several ways to prepare it, ranging from the more healthy and simple oven roast to the slathered-in-butter-and-brown-sugar approach: "Dr. Oz doesn't recommend the butter one, but it's delicious," she said. Another woman talked about her enjoyment of cooking for her husband and sharing meals with him, describing her use

of the Brussels sprouts and potatoes that were available on the Produce Stand the week prior. After our conversation, she hugged me as well as the other Pantry volunteers, expressing her gratitude by saying “you’re doing good.”

I was moved by the ways in which many participants reminisced about their childhood and family meals. I spoke at length with Mary, a woman in her sixties, about the restaurant her parents owned locally when she was growing up, describing the different menu specials that would have locals and tourists filling the place to capacity. Her time at the restaurant allowed her to bond with her parents and learn all of the different tasks necessary to run the business, and it also fostered her love of cooking, and especially her enjoyment of preparing holiday dinners for extended family. Today, Mary lives with her son and struggles with physical disabilities, and unfortunately their apartment lacks a full kitchen. However, she expressed optimism in eventually moving to a new place with a better kitchen so that she can once again prepare big meals for her family and pass that tradition on to her son. Brianna also talked about how her mother taught her how to cook, and how she feels comforted by her recipes even though her kids’ favorites are not always the healthiest, such as baked mac and cheese.

Sharing stories puts a more human face on this politically charged issue and also highlights the commonality of the human experience, demonstrating the ways in which we seek out comfort and show care for others through the acts of cooking and having meals together. Even within the rural setting of Adams County, social constructs and expectations of gender and caregiving, as well as systemic constraints related to geography, time, household composition, and elements of choice play into aspects of food provisioning and food access, but despite these challenges, many are willing to go to extraordinary lengths in order to provide for loved ones. Quantitative data and statistics are an important element in understanding food access issues, but

these findings indicate the ways in which individual voices highlight experiences that are often overlooked, if only within the context of Adams County, SCCAP, and the Gleaning Project.

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