

Envisioning Food Security:  
Resident Perspectives from a Colorado Neighborhood

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On my honor,  
I have neither given nor received  
unauthorized aid on this thesis.

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Spring 2020

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## ABSTRACT

Food security in the U.S. presents an enormous paradox: although we are the wealthiest country in the world, some 14.3 million U.S. households experience food insecurity annually. Food security in the U.S. has become a topic of increasing scholarly concern over the past few decades; however, there remain gaps between academic knowledge production and applied interventions to improve food security on the ground. Government and academic publications alike have called for more participatory, localized approaches that address the needs of specific communities. The present study employs a qualitative, community-based methodology to explore what residents envision as food security in their neighborhood and what this implies for potential interventions. I analyze 14 semi-structured interviews and one focus group (N=25) from the Meadows Park neighborhood in Colorado Springs, Colorado. I found residents envisioned food security as economic and physical access to healthy foods and neighborhood well-being, and I argue that the success of food security interventions hinges upon meeting this vision. In this study, I center participant perspectives to generate a resident-driven vision of food security that can inform proposed neighborhood interventions.

Keywords: Food Security, Community-Based Research, Neighborhood, Envisioning

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Despite concerns about feeding the global population, the world currently produces enough food to feed every one of its inhabitants (UN FAO et al. 2019). Conditions of hunger and food insecurity are socially produced, as resources, including food, are distributed according to power structures. Food security is a matter of social equity, affected by race, class, and gender, among other factors. Past studies have found that people of color, low-income people, and women are more likely to face food insecurity (CDFI 2012; UN FAO et al. 2019). Moreover, disparities in food security hold long-term consequences, with food insecurity associated with a number of negative health outcomes (Gunderson & Ziliak 2015).

El Paso County, Colorado, is not exempt from these larger dynamics. In acknowledgement of county-wide disparities, local stakeholders organized a Food Systems Assessment (FSA) in El Paso County to inform food security interventions and policy. This project was facilitated through a community-based partnership with a local non-profit and a county public health organization. When I joined the FSA in fall 2019, they were concentrated on qualitative research in the four most food insecure neighborhoods in Colorado Springs, the largest city in the county.

In this paper, I focus on one of these neighborhoods: Meadows Park. Drawing on qualitative analysis of 14 interviews and one focus group with neighborhood residents, I ask, what do residents envision as food security? I found that residents see food security as a) access to fresh, healthy and nutritious foods, b) economic access, meaning that healthy, quality foods fall within the household budget, c) physical access, meaning safe and reliable options for transportation, and d) neighborhood well-being, meaning strong social networks and food education. Along the way I explore what residents identify as barriers to this vision of food security, as well as the creative strategies residents employ to make their visions a reality. I then

apply these insights to existing food-security interventions, considering how resident perspectives can inform future initiatives.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Lack of consistent access to healthy foods poses a challenge for communities across the U.S.; in 2018, 14.3 million households in the U.S. faced food insecurity (Coleman-Jensen et al. 2019). Scholars suggest that such figures underestimate the number of U.S. families whose quality of life is negatively affected because of food-related worries (Coleman-Jensen 2010). These undercounts mean that federal food assistance does not meet the actual level of need in the U.S. The resulting gap has created demand for localized responses to food insecurity, such as the FSA in Colorado Springs (Edge & Meyer 2019).

This national context reflects global food anxieties surrounding the potential effects of global climate change on food production and a simultaneously increasing world population (Wheeler & Braun 2013). Such concerns have led supranational organizations such as the United Nations Food & Agriculture Organization (UN FAO) and national organizations like the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to call for increased action, research, and policy change to promote food security. Moreover, publications from such organizations state the need for participatory, community-based initiatives to address food insecurity (UN FAO 1996; Cohen, Andrews & Kantor 2002.) The present study forms part of one such initiative, aiming to enhance the platform of resident perspectives on the food security interventions earmarked for their neighborhood.

### *Food Security: Social Production & Material Effects*

The concept of *food security* remains discursively contested among academic, state, and social movement actors. According to the USDA, “Food security means access by all people at

all times to enough food for an active, healthy life” (USDA 2019b). While *food access* refers to the capacity to procure adequate food, *food security* is food access sustained over time. In 1996, the UN FAO officially incorporated the term into its rhetoric in an effort to go beyond *undernourishment* – individual calorie deficit – and address the broader social forces that create hunger. The term food security was meant to capture hunger as fabricated, not by a lack of food, but rather by sets of social, economic, and political conditions that prevent consistent access to the food that already exists (UN FAO 1996; Patel 2012). However, non-state actors such as La Via Campesina<sup>1</sup> argue that the term has been incorporated into official discourse in a way that elides a critique of power in the food system, creating food policy that band-aids food insecurity through entitlements, rather than promoting structural reform. La Via Campesina developed *food sovereignty*, the right of communities to define their own food and agriculture systems, as an alternative approach to food policy that has become popular in academic and social movement circles. Food sovereignty aims to shift control of the food system<sup>2</sup> away from corporations and towards communities, addressing undernourishment and food security at the source: unequal power dynamics (Patel 2012; Hospes 2014). However, a food security framework remains dominant in government works, as showcased by its centrality to FSA, a project of the county public health office. In this paper I use a food security framework to remain consistent with the FSA, while also employing structural analysis informed by food sovereignty discourse.

Power dynamics in the food system mirror broader social hierarchies. In the U.S., food deserts—geographic areas lacking proximate food retailers—consistently co-vary with race and

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<sup>1</sup> La Via Campesina is a widely-recognized international peasant workers movement founded in 1993. They focus on food sovereignty, advocating for gender equity, peasants’ rights, and the decentralization of food systems.

<sup>2</sup> The food system refers to the complex, social-ecological system comprising the chain of human activity from food production to consumption. Conceptualized as multi-scalar system it operates along social, economic, political, and environmental dimensions (Tendall et al. 2015).



class (Treuhaft & Karpyn 2010). Food deserts appear more frequently in areas with low-income populations and populations of color (Treuhaft & Karpyn 2010; Walker, Keane & Burke 2010). Relative to White people in the U.S., Black people are 2.49 times more likely to live in a low supermarket access area, and Latinx people are 1.38 times more likely (CDFI Fund 2012). Residing in a low-income area increases the likelihood of having low supermarket access by 2.28 times (CDFI Fund 2012). Even when food retailers are present, studies show they provide less fresh or nutritious food than stores located in higher-income and predominantly White areas (Treuhaft & Karpyn 2010). Moreover, across the globe, women experience food insecurity at a higher rate than men (UN FAO et al. 2019). In the U.S., households with children have higher rates of food insecurity (Coleman-Jensen et al. 2019), and women caregivers often manage household food procurement and are assumed solely responsible for children's nutrition (Cook & Frank 2008). The present study operates at the neighborhood-level—where disparities often take shape due to the continued segregation of U.S. cities by race and class (Iceland & Wilkes 2006)— and includes perspectives from women and women caregivers in particular.

To understand the mechanisms by which social characteristics impede food security, recent literature moves away from the term *food desert* towards broader understandings of food access. These analyses address the food environment (geographic, physical, and economic factors) along with foodways (the social processes that surround food acquisition and consumption) (Cannuscio, Weiss & Asch 2010). Qualitative studies have highlighted the complex array of social, environmental, and economic factors that influence food procurement including transportation access, arrangement of household finances, availability of culturally appropriate foods, knowledge of health and nutrition, cooking ability, and more (Whelan et al. 2002; Wiig & Smith 2008; Coveney & O'Dwyer 2008; Freedman, Blake & Liese 2013; MacNeill

et al. 2017; Moak et al. 2017). Food security is informed by structures at many levels: from federal policies to neighborhood geography to household resources and preferences (USDA 2019b). Adding to this trend in the literature, this study includes resident perspectives on multiple components of food security, including transport, finances, health knowledge, cooking ability, and the social processes embedded around such factors.

Though socially produced, food insecurity takes material effect on the body. Food insecurity has become an issue of political concern through its association with negative health outcomes (Gundersen & Ziliak 2015; Lee et al. 2012; Laraia 2012). Some public health literature suggests that a lack of nutritional knowledge among low-income families experiencing food insecurity contribute to unhealthy diets (Wiig Dammann & Smith 2009). As public health scholarship increasingly turns towards structural frameworks, however, scholars have argued that to improve public health, we should shift from individual-level interventions to preventative interventions that improve living environments, such as the food environment (Weiler et al. 2014; Lee 2002; David & Messer 2011; Corburn 2007). Produced in part by a public health agency, the FSA frames food security as a public health concern.

#### *Improving Food Security: Assessments and Interventions*

There are a number of models presented in both scholarly and government literature for assessing community food systems and proposing interventions. Scholars suggest effective assessments are guided by community stakeholders, and interventions should be tailored to a particular community's context and desires (Pothukuchi 2004; Freedman et al. 2013; Breckwich Vásquez et al. 2007; Moak et al. 2018; Cohen et al. 2002). The FSA in El Paso County, designed by a range of community members to address questions and opportunities specific to the locale, follows this call for participatory, custom-fit approaches.

Past interventions suggested or tested by scholars include: introducing mobile markets, starting community gardens, opening large food retail locations, increasing the shelf space dedicated to fresh foods in pre-existing stores, and increasing access to transportation (Wrigley et al. 2002; Bodor et al. 2002; Breckwich Vásquez et al. 2007; Coveney & O’Dwyer 2009; Moak et al. 2018). Literature indicates benefits to having multiple interventions in a single community, as different community members may face different kinds of food insecurity or may prefer different sorts of resources. Scholars suggest that “traditional” interventions such as federal food assistance and charitable initiatives like food banks, can and should coexist alongside “alternative” grassroots efforts that focus on community ownership of food production and distribution (Edge & Meyer 2019; Pothukuchi 2004). In fact, research indicates that building redundancy into a food system is not inefficient, but rather promotes food system resilience (Tendall et al. 2015). Employing an asset-based approach, the FSA aims to identify gaps that new interventions can fill, working alongside existing efforts.

### *Local Background*

El Paso County lags behind others in terms of health. In 2019, El Paso stood 35th out of 60 Colorado counties for health outcomes (County Health Rankings 2019). Moreover, negative health outcomes are geographically concentrated; there is a 16-year difference in life expectancy across census tracts Colorado Springs. Following a desire to improve county health outcomes and in recognition of health disparities, El Paso County Public Health (ECPH) partnered with local stakeholders including Colorado Springs Food Rescue (CSFR) to begin the FSA. In 2018 they produced Phase I of the FSA, which focused on quantitative analyses and mapping (El Paso County Public Health 2018). During winter 2019-2020, CSFR researchers worked on Phase II, collecting qualitative data from the four most food-insecure neighborhoods of Colorado Springs

(identified in Phase I). From this data, ECPH and CSFR hope to identify barriers to food access, existing assets, food-access strategies used by residents, and solicit community input on potential interventions to improve food access. An important piece of the FSA for stakeholders is to demonstrate to potential funders the community desire for, and viability of, interventions promoting food security in these neighborhoods.

These four neighborhoods are located in southeastern Colorado Springs, a historically Black and Latinx as well as lower-income area of the city. In this paper, I focus on perspectives from the Meadows Park neighborhood. Home to 5,469 people, Meadows Park is located just south of downtown Colorado Springs, hedged in on all sides by three major thoroughfares (Social Explorer 2020). The neighborhood is a lower-income area; according to the 2018 American Community Survey 5-year estimates, the median household income in Meadows Park, \$31,069, is less than half of the median household income in the county (Social Explorer 2020). Furthermore, 31.81% of Meadows Park families live in poverty, including nearly 60% of all children in the neighborhood (Social Explorer 2020). Meadows Park is also more racially diverse than the county as a whole, though still majority-white. The neighborhood is 62.97% White, 12.89% Multiracial and 12.87% Black, as well 22.09% of Hispanic or Latino ethnicity (Social Explorer 2020). As a lower-income area that is home to a larger proportion of Black, Latino, and Multiracial people than other areas of the county, the demographics of Meadows Park align with literature that implicates class and race in food insecurity.

Following scholarly proponents of desire-centered and asset-based research (Tuck 2009; Mathie & Cunningham 2005), I ask, what do residents of Meadows Park envision as food security? Residents envisioned healthy food, economic and physical access to such food, and collective neighborhood well-being as components of food security. I review these findings in

light of existing interventions to improve food security in Meadows Park, considering how resident perspectives can inform future initiatives.

## METHODS

### *Community-Based Research Partnership*

In the fall of 2019, I joined the CSFR team working on the FSA. In anticipation of my senior thesis work, I connected with one of the researchers through a mutual friend and was welcomed on to the team. Throughout this project, I strove to follow community-based research (CBR) practices. Although CBR methodologies vary there are a few essential qualities scholars agree upon; CBR 1) is based on equitable community-academic relationships; 2) values and combines multiple forms of knowledge; 3) is aimed toward actionable change (Stoecker 2012; Wallerstein & Duran 2006). The research elaborated upon in this paper is a small portion of the larger, more long-term CBR project, the FSA.

Following recommendations from the literature, I was transparent with my partners about my personal and academic goals and constraints from the beginning of the project (Prakash 2004; Minkler 2004). I explained I was completing a senior thesis that had to meet certain parameters, including a deadline in Spring 2020, and that this work, with their permission, was something I might share in academic circles. I intended this to allow them to decide how my thesis work could be most useful to them, and how much they would like me to be involved. Together, we decided that I would primarily assist in transcribing and analyzing interviews, while occasionally joining researchers in the field and helping with logistics.<sup>3</sup> I would write my thesis using the data they collected, and center it on a question of mutual interest. In January

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<sup>3</sup> I attended most weekly meetings with the CSFR research team from January through April 2020 and helped with on-going tasks related to the FSA, such as: tabling in one of the target neighborhoods, scheduling a field trip for FSA stakeholders to visit an urban agriculture project, and distributing surveys at a pop-up market trial intervention.

2020, we drafted a written memo of expectations to clarify the parameters of our partnership. Throughout the process, I emphasized that the data belonged to them and that I was open to feedback and to re-evaluate my work and role on the project. It is my aim that these practices helped this project meet goals of equitable partnership and co-learning.

The FSA was designed to solicit the perspectives of target neighborhood residents on food security in their own community. CSFR and ECPH wanted these voices to inform potential interventions and policy changes, knowing that community participation is key to sustainable and effective change. Importantly, the three primary researchers from CSFR all have personal ties to the areas under study, with CSFR headquartered in one of the neighborhoods. The project rested on the collaboration between these community insiders from CSFR and institutional outsiders from ECPH and academia, combining the skills, networks, and resources available to different partners. Through such a design, this project leveraged multiple forms of knowledge towards improving food security in southeastern Colorado Springs.

In CBR literature, *community* can be ill-defined, or used by white scholars as a euphemism for marginalized, poor, or Black and Brown people. For the purposes of this project, community was geographically defined: people living in the four target neighborhoods. Following this definition, I refer to *residents* rather than *community members*, so as not to suggest that Meadows Park can be conceptualized as a single community, and to acknowledge the diversity of communities that exist within and beyond the geographic bounds of the FSA.

### *Positionality*

I come to this research as an outsider on many levels (Hill Collins 1986). As a white woman with familial wealth I have never experienced food insecurity and therefore do not bring to this topic the expertise of lived experience. Privilege deriving from my social position has also

shielded me from structural oppressions such as poverty and racism often linked with food insecurity. Pursuing a higher education degree at a private college some 3,000 miles away from where I grew up, I am very literally an outsider in Colorado Springs. My interest in the intersection of food and social systems stems from precisely this otherness: growing up in a rural, agricultural area where food and farming cultures are the cornerstone of local economy and identity, I have always been intrigued by urban foodscapes. My background shapes what I have found; I see it in my attentiveness to notions like the difficulty of car reliance and the role of social networks in foodways, findings from Meadows Park that I can also relate to. I do not suggest the presence of bias in my work, but rather attempt to properly contextualize my work by allowing the reader to locate my vantage point (Haraway 1988).

#### *Data Collection*

The primary research team consisted of three CSFR staff members. They conducted 14 semi-structured, approximately 25-minute interviews and a focus group of 10 participants in Meadows Park. Most interviews were one-on-one, with the exception of one interview with two participants (N=25). During the focus group participants provided minimal personal information, therefore the tables and descriptive statistics I provide only reference the 15 interviewees. CSFR identified community leaders in each neighborhood who helped them gain entrée into neighborhood communities. Participants were recruited via flyers, word of mouth, informal networks, tabling during community events, and door-to-door canvassing.

There were approximately 22 questions, broken down into categories addressing: perceptions of food retail options, health, current shopping habits, perceptions of local/organic foods, cooking knowledge/ability, and opinions on proposed interventions. Interviews took place in participants' homes, community centers, local businesses, and gathering spaces. After the

interview, all participants were provided a \$25 Visa gift card. All interviews were recorded on the interviewer's mobile phone. The CSFR researchers and I worked together to transcribe interviews verbatim; some interviews were transcribed manually, while others were transcribed using Otter.ai online software and checked-over manually. Some quotes in this paper are edited, minimally, for clarity. I give all interviewees pseudonyms and include no identifying information to protect their anonymity and confidentiality.

### *Analysis*

I worked with CSFR and ECPH to understand what they wanted to know from the data so I could investigate a research question of mutual interest to all partners. During the transcription process and time spent together in the field, researchers from CSFR and I informally discussed what we saw in the data, and I credit them with shaping my analysis.<sup>4</sup> I began analysis by hand-coding five interviews to develop preliminary codes, transitioning to NVivo software as I refined codes and applied them to all data. Using the framework of food security, I broke the concept down into three parts: healthy food, access, and sustaining access over time. I used these three axes to group my codes, asking “What do residents envision?” for each component. Although it remains a qualitative analysis, I also gathered descriptive statistics on demographics, transportation, and use of existing interventions (See Appendix).

In this paper I aim to both counter analyses that would place responsibility for systemic outcomes onto individual behavior, and, at the same time, to avoid a deterministic framing that erases individual agency, resistance, and autonomy. Following Lillian MacNeill et al. (2017), I understand residents and their food environments as “co-creative.” I do not pretend that a food-insecure resident can simply “envision” their way to food security. However, I argue that such

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<sup>4</sup> See footnote four (p.14) for examples of time spent in the field.



visions provide crucial guidance for structural changes, if reforms are to address the food insecurity experienced in residents' daily lives. In this paper I strive to highlight the agency, strategy, and creativity employed by residents of Meadows Park, without minimizing the real and structural challenges they navigate. In asking, "What do residents envision as food security?" I explore residents' desires and imaginations, alongside the barriers they confront, and the strategies they employ to make such visions a reality.

## RESULTS

Residents shared a holistic vision of food security that included healthy food, economic access, physical access, and neighborhood well-being. Healthy food meant freshly sourced, freshly prepared and nutritious meals. Residents portrayed both economic and physical access as necessary to procure these foods. For economic access, residents envisioned the prices of healthy, high-quality goods falling within their household budgets. For physical access, residents envisioned safe and reliable transportation to grocery outlets. Finally, residents envisioned food security as involving the well-being of the neighborhood, describing social and educational aspects. Residents reported using federal food assistance as well as community initiatives to access food. While existing initiatives worked on parts of this vision for food security, they also left gaps, or spaces of potential for future interventions. Compared to past literature, my findings showcase residents' expertise and uncover overlooked dimensions of food security.

### *Healthy Food: Freshly Sourced, Freshly Prepared & Nutritious*

Among our majority-women sample from a low-income area, residents demonstrated broad knowledge about healthy eating and envisioned the ability to create fresh, healthy meals for themselves and their families. These findings conflict with literature on food choice that has identified low-income women as lacking either an appropriate knowledge of nutrition or an

interest in pursuing a healthy diet (Wiig Dammann & Smith 2009; Wiig & Smith 2008).

Contrary to such findings, residents in this study consistently reported seeking healthy foods, emphasizing freshness and nutrition as healthy qualities.

Residents envisioned a healthy diet as comprised of freshly sourced foods, pairing this idea of freshness with items such as fruits, vegetables, and meats. When asked what healthy food meant to her, Gina replied, “Access to fresh foods.” She went on to explain that for her the freshness of the produce section in a grocery store played a decisive role in choosing between grocery outlets. A few residents explained their desire for fresh foods by comparing their access in Colorado Springs to other places they had lived previously. Dierdre, who “grew up in the country” explained, “I miss having all that fresh stuff,” showing she felt her urban location lacked the fresh items available in her rural hometown. Two residents who found it challenging to find fresh meats in Colorado Springs spoke nostalgically of growing up in other parts of the country where hunting was common and fresh game meat was readily available to them.

Additionally, residents envisioned healthy food as freshly-prepared, home-cooked meals that enabled control over what they eat. When asked what healthy food meant to her, Dierdre said, “It means more freshly prepared meals, not pre-made meals,” portraying home cooking as central to healthy eating. Other residents echoed this sentiment, including Emily, who connected cooking at home with greater control over ingredients and thus healthier combinations. She said,

One of the best ways to improve your diet is to make things at home because you have fewer preservatives, fewer fillers. You tend to put healthier ingredients, not that you always do, but people tend to put less sugar and less fats and things in their diet when they're making it themselves.

Emily explained that freshly prepared foods as lead to a healthier diet by nature of the increased knowledge of what meals contain. Residents saw healthy eating as enabled by control over what they put in their bodies.

Some residents also understood healthy food to entail certain nutritional qualities. Emily brought up the federal MyPlate guidelines: “So there's the whole food guidelines, the MyPlate, where you do half fruits and vegetables, quarter grain and quarter protein. So that's what I usually tend to go for.” Not only did Emily share knowledge of nutrition guidelines, she also reported basing food choices off this information. While Emily used federal guidelines to structure her vision of nutrition, other residents employed the same concept more loosely, mentioning “balanced” meals or listing multiple food groups like fruits and vegetables, proteins, or grains as important. Two residents identified themselves as diabetic and connected this to nutrition. Dierdre explained because she is diabetic, she has been exposed to a wealth of nutritional information, and Ellis spoke about regulating food groups that contain fat and sugar in his diet. Overall, residents presented health as a key piece of their vision for food, emphasizing freshness and nutrition, and demonstrating knowledge of and desire for healthy diets.

*Economic Access: Prices, Household Finances, and Caregiving on a Budget*

I found that residents presented economic access as crucial to food security, which adds to the growing body of literature that argues for a more holistic concept of food access that is informed by social and economic contexts, not solely geographic context. Residents envisioned economic access as high-quality, healthy foods falling within the household budget. Residents described personal economic contexts as well as larger economic structures influenced their finances. Caregivers in particular faced tight household budgets, yet they continued to envision healthy eating and developed creative economic access strategies.

*Prices.* Most residents described the price of food as factoring into how or what kinds of food they acquired. Grocery store reputations demonstrated both the perceived link between price and quality, as well as how residents considered both price and health in their evaluations.

Local and organic products were desirable but linked with higher and sometimes prohibitive prices. As residents envisioned home-cooking as central to health, a few residents also identified the price of the kitchen items as a component of economic access.

Residents' opinions on grocery stores weighed price along with perceived quality and health of offerings. I found that the reputation of local grocery stores generally fell into one of three price/quality categories. The first was high-quality health food stores that most residents described as prohibitively expensive, including: Natural Grocers, Whole Foods, and Sprouts. Notably, only one resident gave any indication she shopped somewhat regularly at Natural Grocers, despite its close proximity to neighborhood. Next were good quality grocery stores that were seen as offering decent prices, including: King Soopers, Safeway, Save-a-lot, and Walmart. Residents disagreed on which of these outlets had better prices, and for some this tier was still seen as unaffordable. However, most residents described regularly shopping at one of these locations at some point in time. Finally came cheap convenience stores seen as low-quality and unhealthy: Dollar Tree, Dollar General, The Dollar Store, and 7-Eleven. Residents shopped at these stores only when they could not find transport to shop elsewhere or were so financially limited that it was all they could afford. Residents portrayed these stores as undesirable because they lacked healthy options. In evaluating local grocery stores, residents linked quality, healthy foods with high prices. They also continuously valued health alongside price as they considered their grocery options.<sup>5</sup>

Most residents described local and organic foods as desirable and linked these qualities with higher prices. Residents thought local was a positive quality for various reasons, including knowing where food came from, knowing how it was grown/raised, and supporting the local

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<sup>5</sup> Other grocery stores residents mentioned shopping at were Trader Joe's and Costco. These locations were each only mentioned once, and without enough context for me to confidently categorize their reputation.

economy. Identifying price as the main barrier to acquiring local goods, a few residents envisioned increased economic access to these foods in particular. Ashley expressed her desire to acquire more local foods,

I would love to eat local more, but then for example, I'll go to Safeway and have that local end of the island, and everything's like eight bucks minimum, and it's like, I can't do that.

Ashley knew exactly where she could find the local food items she wanted, down to the very grocery aisle, highlighting economic access as a concern over physical access for local goods.

Similarly, residents characterized organic as a desirable, yet expensive quality. Residents cited liking knowing that their food was grown without pesticides or raised without antibiotics.

Meredith explained the relationship between prices and purchasing organic foods,

Well, I do buy a lot of organic, some things in Walmart, that are at a reasonable price. Even though organic food in some places is just a little bit pricey. But it's looking like they're starting to sell it more. I would buy organic.

Meredith demonstrated how residents factored both quality and price into their food purchasing decisions, often weighing the two against each other. Her budget enabled her to buy some organic foods, but she envisioned she would buy more if the prices were cheaper. For a few residents, the elevated prices of organic foods led them to feel that it was altogether not a positive quality. These residents associated organic labels directly with out-of-reach prices, making them deem organic foods in general as overrated.

A few residents also discussed price as a barrier to obtaining cooking tools or ingredients. Homemade meals were part of residents' visions of healthy eating, thus economic access to kitchen items is part of healthy food access. While most residents had what they needed, a few residents envisioned having more or better-quality kitchen items. Alana mentioned higher quality pans, "I can't cook the way I want a lot because I have shitty pans. So that's the only thing. I

keep telling [my kids], 'buy me some pans, and I'll cook you better food.'" For Alana and others, obtaining kitchen equipment or ingredients hinged on affording it. Alana's perspective also shows she has the skills and desires to cook healthy meals, indicating no lack of interest in or knowledge about pursuing a healthy diet, and implicating economic access as the main barrier to her vision. In sum, prices factored into where and what kinds of foods residents acquired and prepared, with higher prices connected to healthier and higher-quality goods.

*Household Finances.* Residents related economic access to household finances, which varied across the neighborhood. Factors such as employment, income, and outgoing expenses coalesced in different ways for different residents, creating a diverse set of economic experiences. This finding counters essentialized notions of low-income areas that might assume unilateral deprivation and need. In addition, it highlights the role of larger economic structures in creating food (in)security, implicating the cost of living, job market, and wage rates as formative components. Positioning food security as part of a wider economic picture, a few residents also envisioned food access as part of a middle-class lifestyle.

Residents both implicitly and explicitly placed food access in the context of overall household finances. During discussions of food access, some interviewees would, unprompted, begin to talk about other household expenses unrelated to food, alluding to the way household costs shaped food access. Dierdre put this connection into explicit terms, "We haven't had a hot-cooked meal in this house in two to three months. Due to the price of meats and everything that goes on in this house." It was not only food prices that proved prohibitive, but how these prices chalked up alongside "everything that goes on" that placed them out of reach. For poor residents, food costs were placed in competition with other essential household expenses.

In line with previous literature, some residents tied employment and income directly to food security (Whelan et al. 2002). Mark, who was experiencing hunger and food insecurity at the time of his interview, explained his situation in terms of a recent job loss. He said, “Being that I'm laid off I'm only relying on food shelves right now... I usually shop at Walmart when I can, but I haven't had money enough for food stuff, I haven't for months.” Mark explained food access not in terms of prices, but rather his personal financial context—specifically lack of employment and income—that made food prices unaffordable.

A few residents related employment or income to food security in ways that referenced social class. Jane, satisfied with her access to food, described her perception of food security on her street, “Our neighbors, we're all just, you know, the go to King Soopers type.” As explained above, King Soopers forms part of the middle tier of grocery options, seen by most as offering a good price/quality compromise. Jane related her sense of food security to employment and car ownership in particular, “So probably like all four of us in a row over on my street all have work and have car transportation.” Through such qualifications, I see Jane’s description of the King Soopers “type” as referencing American middle-class imagery: a secure job, a car, and shopping at your average local grocery store, all folded into one. Overall, residents envisioned food security as the prices of healthy, quality foods falling within their household budget. These findings demonstrate the importance of personal financial contexts and larger economic structures in determining food (in)security.

*Caregiving on a budget.* Tight household finances and a focus on food prices came with distinct intensity from households with children. The six resident caregivers interviewed, all women, described “stretching” their food budgets (See Table 1). This follows past literature that shows mothers of young children as more heavily focused on the price of food in relation to

other households (Whelan et al. 2002). Caregivers' internal desires and social pressures to provide healthy meals conflicted with economic realities that made acquiring such food difficult. My findings also diverge from past studies, however, as resident caregivers consistently focused on health alongside price, even when under economic duress, and developed creative strategies to provide healthy foods for themselves and their families.

All caregivers envisioned feeding themselves and their families healthful, nutritious meals. In addition to internal desires, some caregivers indicated feeling external pressures to eat healthily, either coming from family, healthcare providers, or simply a generalized sense of social coercion. They explained that even though they desired healthy foods, some expectations proved unreasonable because of financial constraints. Dierdre summarized this feeling, explaining the contradictory burdens she felt; "There are those 'eat healthy' but 'I'm gonna charge you an arm and a leg to get the health stuff you need to eat.' It's kinda pointless." Here she implicated unspecified social pressures to "eat healthy" combined with the reality of what is to her outrageously priced health food as creating an impossible bind. choice of the hyperbolic "arm and a leg" price of healthy foods underscores the pointlessness she pointed to, creating the image of being called upon to sacrifice body parts in the name of health.

Caregivers continued to pursue their visions of food security for themselves even as they experienced limited budgets. Alana described the cost of healthy food as posing a barrier, but contextualized this within the work she already does to ensure that her family eats well,

The only thing that affects me is the cost of it. I could probably feed my family way more healthier if I had money for them... So, the cost is what I'd say. I wish it wasn't so expensive. I would be able to give the kids healthier, balanced meals. But I still cook three, three to four course meals, and they are all you know, meat, grain, protein like I do that every night. I always have.



Here, Alana identified the cost of healthy foods as the primary factor in access that she would change to enable the lifestyle she envisioned for her family. While highlighting this barrier, Alana simultaneously described how she strives to make her vision a reality by cooking well-balanced meals every night, demonstrating both her desire for a healthy diet and her creative agency in the face of financial barriers. A few other caregivers also shared the strategies they used to make healthy foods accessible to them: Dierdre frequented a Safeway where she could use a friend's employee discount; Carolyn went to farmers markets towards the end of the day for discounted prices on produce. Once again, I found that residents consistently prioritized health, even as they experienced economic constraints.

Economic access played a crucial role in what residents envisioned as food security. With higher prices consistently tied to better quality, healthier foods, needs for health and needs to economize could become antagonistic. The affordability of prices depended on household finances, which varied; caregivers in particular experienced tight budgets. Yet, caregivers also showed persistent interest in acquiring healthy foods, as demonstrated by their access strategies. Overall, residents envisioned food security as economic access: the price of healthy, quality foods falling within the household budget.

#### *Physical Access: Car Reliance, Social Networks, and Safety*

In addition to economic access, residents envisioned food security as reliable and safe physical access to healthy foods. In this section, I explore the different strategies residents used to access foods, how transport affected food access, and what concerns residents shared about their transportation. Table 2. shows the types of transportation residents mentioned using to access groceries. Residents overwhelmingly relied on driving to access food, with almost all residents (14/15) using their own car or borrowing a car/carpooling. Walking was the next most

common form of transport, followed by taking the bus, and finally biking as the least common. Overall, residents showed that food security must entail safe and reliable means of transport to access groceries.

*Car reliance and social networks.* Colorado Springs, like many areas of the U.S., is a heavily car-reliant place, with much of the current infrastructure built with car use in mind. In this context it was unsurprising to find that most residents' primary form of transport to access food was by car (French, Story & Jeffrey 2001). For a subset of residents, this entailed borrowing a car or carpooling. Reliable vehicle access appeared to play a role in residents' satisfaction with existing proximity to grocery outlets, and their access to healthy foods. These findings corroborate literature that highlights the role of mobility in food security and reveals car sharing to be a common strategy (Coveney & O'Dwyer 2009; Whelan 2002).

Of the 14 residents who used cars to get to the grocery store, eight drove their own car and six relied on social networks for vehicle access. For example, Dierdre used the neighbor's car to drive to Safeway, while Alana's sister gave her rides to Costco. Of the six social connections used to access cars, four were familial relationships.

Residents' access to a car appears to play a role in their satisfaction with the proximity of existing grocery options. Jane, who owned her own vehicle said, "I like this location. I think all the stores around here are handy," depicting physical access to the grocery store as easy for her. Anne directly linked her reliable access to a car to the physical access she enjoyed; "I'm assuming a lot of people do have to walk, but it's not an issue for me. I can typically drive where I need to go." Residents who owned their own car thus appeared to be satisfied with the existing proximity of grocery stores, finding them easy to get to by car.

On the other hand, residents with less reliable or no vehicle access did not share the same satisfaction. According to Meredith, who used her social network to access a car; “Oh, well, access to grocery stores, no. They don’t have that,” portraying the lack of accessible grocery stores as a simple fact. Mark, who relied primarily on walking, connected his difficulty in accessing groceries specifically to his lack of a car,

So as far as [access] is concerned ... It's just the transportation and trying to get there and organizing that. Part of that is my own issue of not having a car. If I had a car, then even that's alleviated.

For Mark, a vision of food security was also a vision of car ownership. While vehicle access appears to play a role in residents’ satisfaction with grocery access, this variation could also depend in part on where within the Meadows Park neighborhood residents live, as services are primarily concentrated along Nevada Ave., the western side of the neighborhood.

Three residents explained that when they could not find access to a car, this curtailed their ability to acquire healthy food in particular. Dierdre explained, “Our main source of food when I can’t get to Safeway is we get on our bikes and go to 7-Eleven and buy some food. And even that’s not healthy for anybody to eat, live off of even.” Without a car, these residents turned to other means of transportation like biking or walking, limiting their options to local convenience stores. Although such stores were accessible without a car, they were seen as lacking healthy items. In sum, Meadow’s Park is largely car reliant neighborhood, leading residents to envision reliable car access as a part of food security.

*Safety.* Some residents shared safety concerns about walking and taking the bus, the next most common forms of transportation after driving. Two senior residents felt that neighborhood infrastructure made walking unsafe. Additionally, two out of the three residents who took the bus to get groceries shared concerns about the return trip home: one indicating practical concerns

about carrying groceries, and the other describing the potential for violence on the bus. Most of these concerns echoed those voiced in previous qualitative studies, but the concern of violence went further, painting food insecurity as a violent force, structurally and interpersonally.

Dangerous main thoroughfares and poor-quality sidewalks are known food access barriers (Whelan et al. 2002; Coveney & O'Dwyer 2009); two senior residents shared concerns about the safety of walking in the neighborhood due to such infrastructure. Sue highlighted the state of the sidewalks in the area, "It's very dangerous. Because the sidewalks, you know, this is an older neighborhood. So the sidewalks are up an inch or two on a lot of these residential streets. And if I hit it, I'd fall down." Despite living just two blocks from a grocery store, Sue chose to use a public bus and carpool rather than walk. Bonnie shared concerns about crossing Nevada Ave., a major city thoroughfare, to get to a grocery store. She described her thought process while watching people cross the street, "I think 'Oh my, be careful!' Because you know they're crossing one side and then going over to Safeway. And I thought 'Oh no, I'm not doing that.'" She remembered feeling more comfortable walking to get groceries in the past, when there was a store located on the east side of Nevada Ave., closer to the neighborhood. Notably the two closest grocery stores to Meadows Park, a Safeway and a Natural Grocers, require residents to cross Nevada Ave. if walking from the neighborhood. Bonnie and Sue's vision of food security included a safe and comfortable walk to a grocery outlet.

Two residents provided critical perspectives on taking the bus to get groceries. Sue, a senior, took the bus to the grocery store, but called her kids to come pick her up for the return trip with all her groceries. Using public transport to access food can become impractical when returning with groceries, especially for seniors who may have mobility concerns (Coveney & O'Dwyer 2009; Whelan et al. 2002).

One resident shared concerns about the bus that went beyond the physical impracticality of carrying grocery items. Dierdre described the larger context of hunger and food insecurity in Colorado Springs as manifesting violence,

I wish food banks were a little bit more accessible from here. It's hard to go to a food bank when you don't have a car. Can't carry the stuff on the bus either, unless you want a big old fight on the way home, people wanting food too.

In this context, Dierdre's basic needs were placed in competition: the need for food and the need for safety from violence. Her description underscores the collective nature of "food security," as the generalized level of hunger around her made accessing food violent and unsafe. Improving food security for Dierdre and her family thus necessitates improving food security for all the other "people wanting food too." It is important to note that Dierdre was the only resident who shared experiencing this type of violence; it did not appear to be widespread in the neighborhood. I do not aim to characterize neighborhoods or individuals experiencing food insecurity as necessarily violent places or people. However, Dierdre's perspective demonstrates how the structural violence of food insecurity can manifest itself as interpersonal violence, forcing her to weigh getting food against her personal safety. This type of safety concern went beyond the infrastructural concerns identified in previous literature.

The safety concerns residents raised about walking and taking the bus underscore the car-reliant nature of the neighborhood. With alternative modes of transport characterized as unsafe, finding access to a car becomes not only a matter of convenience but of safety. In sum, residents of Meadow's Park envisioned safe and reliable transport as integral to food security.

*Neighborhood Well-being: Knowing Each Other, "Knowing Your Food"*

As part of food security, residents envisioned the well-being of the neighborhood as a social collective. Activities around food, such as acquiring food or growing food, were

understood by residents as social activities. Here I seek to bring to light how food-related acts become social acts, residents' desire for social togetherness, and prioritization of collective well-being. Residents' also envisioned knowledge food systems engendering greater well-being. Valuing factual knowledge about their food along with practical knowledge about how to grow and prepare foods, residents not only wanted this information for themselves but also sought more general food education for their community, especially among neighborhood youth.

*Knowing each other.* Residents' descriptions portrayed food-related activities as closely tied to the social fabric and collective well-being of the neighborhood. Social connections were seen as achievable through food related activities and as supporting food security. Moreover, residents articulated a sense of moral obligation to neighborhood well-being, underscoring the collective and social nature of food security.

When a researcher floated the idea of a community garden in Dierdre's interview, she responded positively because of the social implications she related to a shared garden.

I think that would be awesome. I would go and help, that's just because I like gardening. And I think it would probably bring a lot of the kids together, just cause everybody now-a-days is finding some reason to hate each other... Like I don't leave my house because everybody's so hateful and spiteful, it's not worth it. To me, I enjoyed it better back when I was younger, everybody in my hometown was nice. I knew everybody, they all knew me. They see me riding down the street on my bike they all say 'hi,' you know.

Dierdre saw a community garden as facilitating the social togetherness she desired. She relates her vision of "bringing the kids together" to a nostalgia for her own youth experience of growing up in a small town where "I knew everybody, everybody knew me." Though her experience of not leaving the house due to perceived social divisiveness did not appear to be widely shared, the desires to be known in the community and form social bonds were.

For some, shopping locally offered a way to connect socially. Bonnie, the senior resident who was concerned about crossing Nevada Ave., explained that walking to get groceries was important because it provided her a social experience. Describing her walking route to the community center, Bonnie recalled details about her neighbors' lives, and mentioned seeing "if there's anybody out in the yard," indicating that on a walk she might share social interactions with neighbors. Ellis also described shopping in the neighborhood as a social experience; "I've noticed that when you shop your neighborhood, the people in a shopping center get to know you and sometimes, yes, on a first name basis. And that's kind of comfortable." Like Dierdre, he described the sensation of being known as desirable, and he additionally positioned this as achievable local food shopping. In these ways, acquiring food in the neighborhood went beyond the practicality of proximity and was seen as preferable because it facilitated social bonds among the neighborhood and the sense of being known in a community.

Residents saw social networks in the neighborhood as channels for sharing local knowledge and resources. Ellis placed value on being "neighborly," explaining that when new people arrive, he welcomes them and gives them local information— including telling them about the community center, where an alternative food security initiative is based. As established in the discussion of physical access, many residents relied on social connections to access a car to acquire groceries, another example of how social bonds among residents supported food access. Social networks in the neighborhood were thus depicted as supporting food security.

Furthermore, residents indicated feeling moral obligation towards the neighborhood's collective well-being. A few residents who did not use community initiatives aimed at improving security said this was because they felt that others in the community could use these resources

more than them. Meredith described going to food banks with the intent of getting food, but then deciding there were others needier than her,

But then I see the people that's in there, looking like they really don't have anything to feed their kids. Sometimes I just walk out the line because I don't know, I feel bad, because you don't really have enough to go around at all.

Meredith showed that her empathy for others' in the neighborhood combined with her perception of limited community resources—"you don't really have enough to go around"—led her to prioritize other families' food security over her own. This theme of collective well-being also ties back to Dierdre's description of violence on the bus, due to the general level of hunger and food insecurity around her. These perspectives show that residents' food security hinges upon the general food security of the neighborhood. One resident from the focus group summed up this sentiment, sharing his belief that any intervention in the neighborhood should prioritize inclusivity: "You need to have everyone."

*"Knowing your food."* Residents' vision of neighborhood well-being also included food education. Residents valued knowing their food in various ways; factual information such as where their food came from or how it was produced, along with practical information like how to grow your own food, or how to craft a meal. While residents indicated interest in these topics themselves, they also advocated for general education among the neighborhood, especially for neighborhood youth.

Dierdre connected a lack knowledge about food sourcing and production to consumer passivity in the food system. She envisioned that greater general food education would lead to better production practices,

Knowing your food doesn't have chemicals, that's great, that's fantastic. However, we've grown accustomed to food that is just given to us. If people actually knew where the food was coming from and how it was being made, like, you can go and ask a kid that was



born in the city, ‘oh where does milk come from?’ ‘oh, the store.’ If you really educate and you show them the true belief of agriculture and how our food is grown and how it is made, maybe our food would be produced a lot better, and they wouldn’t continue to take it for granted.

Dierdre described food as “taken for granted,” and portrayed youth as particularly ill-informed. She did not want more food education herself, but indicated that greater general food knowledge amongst the neighborhood would improve everyone’s quality of food. She thus positioned collective knowledge as promoting collective well-being.

Desire to educate the younger generation came from caregivers and non-caregivers alike, portraying food knowledge as a collective asset. Monty, not a caregiver, was passionate about youth empowerment throughout his interview. He saw food education as one way to achieve this,

Just knowing where your food comes from, like, from [farm] to plate type of deal. There should be more restaurants here showing the kids how to do that stuff. You know from the garden, and then how they use it at the restaurant, the pig, the cow. So the kids could know.

Monty envisioned practical food education and skill-building, particularly for youth. In these ways, residents positioned food education as promoting food security by increasing their, and their fellow residents, agency in the food system. Neither Dierdre nor Monty sought individual knowledge, but saw general, collective education as improving neighborhood well-being.

Overall, residents’ envisioned food security as neighborhood well-being, including social and educational dimensions. They shared desire for social bonds, saw socialization as achievable through food related activities, and social networks as structures for resource and knowledge sharing. Residents felt connected to collective well-being, indicating that their food security was tied up with the needs of those around them. Residents also linked general food education to greater agency within the food system and improved food security on a collective scale.

*Existing Interventions: Federal Assistance and Community Initiatives*

Existing interventions to improve food security include federal food assistance and community initiatives. In this section I explore how residents characterized existing interventions, where they converge with residents' vision of food security and where areas of possibility remain. Federal food assistance worked on economic access, and was described as helpful, but insufficient to fully meet participating residents' needs. Some found the programs difficult to navigate, and very few were familiar with Double Up Food Bucks Colorado (the Double Up program).<sup>6</sup> The gap between need and assistance left by federal programs is occupied by community initiatives, including both traditional and alternative models (food banks and CSFR's no-cost grocery program). While residents reported using both, they provided overwhelmingly positive feedback for the latter. I argue that satisfaction with this program comes from its work on multiple components of residents' vision.

*Federal Food Assistance:* Some residents relied on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) to secure food for themselves and their families. Table 3. shows which residents used SNAP/WIC, their knowledge of the Double Up program, and use of community food security initiatives. Out of our sample, seven total used federal food assistance.<sup>7</sup>

While all residents who used food assistance indicated it was helpful to them, many also described it as insufficient to meet their needs. Alana said she had just received her benefits, describing them as a "way big help, obviously." However, participating residents also frequently characterized assistance as insufficient. Dierdre said, "We get 90\$ worth of food stamps for three

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<sup>6</sup> The Double Up Food Bucks program is Colorado's nutrition incentive program, modeled after similar programs in other states. It allows those participating in food assistance programs to get double the amount of fresh, Colorado-grown produce for every dollar they spend (up to \$20 a day) at farmers markets, farm stands, farm boxes, and participating stores (LiveWell Colorado 2018).

<sup>7</sup> Including five who used assistance at the time of the interview, and two who had used assistance in the past. As previous research has found social shame and stigma associated with participation in these food assistance programs, this count may be an underestimate (Moran 2011).

of us. And that lasts maybe a week. And that's just buying cheap stuff." In the interview, Dierdre used "cheap stuff" to signal unhealthy foods. With her benefits, she found it hard to procure enough food to last the month, and even harder to get healthy items. Receiving benefits but running out, sometimes weeks before the next allocation, is a pattern among families reliant on federal food assistance (Wiig and Smith 2008).

Most residents were unfamiliar with the Double Up program, and a few described difficulties accessing information or resources within assistance programs. Only two residents indicated any familiarity with the Double Up program, and one of those was curious about how it actually worked. This finding shows a lack of knowledge about assistance program benefits from, underscored by the fact that the Double Up program is specifically designed to increase access to the fresh, healthy foods that residents desired. A few residents also mentioned having "issues" with food assistance, describing it as difficult to interface with the bureaucratic system. When given information about the Double Up program, Dierdre replied, "Okay, okay that's good to know [...] It's hard to get advice unless you're willing to sit in the office for hours on end, and that's if you can even get in the office," painting an image of a hard-to-navigate bureaucracy gate keeping information. Federal food assistance left room for interventions to improve food access along with knowledge of existing offerings.

*Community initiatives.* Most residents (10/15) used community initiatives aimed at improving food security, including food banks and CSFR's no-cost grocery program (See Table 3). These residents included some who received food assistance and some who did not, again indicating that assistance alone did not meet everyone's needs. In total, six residents mentioned using a food bank, and eight residents said they used the grocery program,<sup>8</sup> including four who

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<sup>8</sup> Since researchers consistently tabled at the Community Center, including during the hours of the grocery program, these numbers may reflect the sampling strategy and cannot be assumed to generalize to the neighborhood at large.

reported using both. This breakdown shows support for the coexistence of traditional and alternative initiatives, as preferences appeared to vary among residents (Edge & Meyer 2019).

Residents who used food banks portrayed them as alternative means to acquire food when money was tight, or they had run out of their assistance benefits; they were thus seen as aiding in economic access. Food banks did not appear to address residents' vision of healthy, fresh foods; residents described getting food that had expired, meat that was too old, and canned goods that had gone bad. Residents shared mixed reviews on the physical accessibility of food banks; one described them as easy to get to, two explained that transport sometimes posed a barrier to getting to a food bank. Overall, traditional initiatives addressed economic access.

All residents who used the grocery program shared enthusiastic support for the initiative. I see the positivity surrounding this program as deriving from the congruence between program offerings and multiple components of residents' vision of food security. Residents praised the quality and price of grocery program foods, which met their vision of healthy eating and economic access. Asked if her surrounding affected her health, Anne replied, "Being able to come here [to the community center], yes. Because my whole family, we're eating a lot more fresh fruits and vegetables... it's really nice that it's fresh." Due to the grocery program offerings, Anne described where she lived as having a positive effect on her and her family's health. She emphasized the freshness of the grocery program food and perceived a link between these offerings and her family's intake of nutritious food groups. Residents shared feeling happily surprised at the combination of high-quality foods and no price tag—which goes against the price/quality association discussed earlier. The grocery program ensures that healthy, quality foods fall within the household budget, supporting economic access and healthy eating.

The grocery program also appeared to support neighborhood well-being by facilitating social bonding. Residents who used the grocery program enjoyed the social aspect of acquiring food there. Polly shared her experience of using the grocery program; “It's warm, the people are warm [...] it's a real community. So, people are very loving, and caring [...]” Using the grocery program facilitated a feeling a social togetherness; as Polly described, it created a warm, loving, and caring community. Residents shared getting to know others at the program, increasing their social network, which allows for resource and knowledge sharing.

In sum, existing programs supported some, but not all, aspects of residents’ vision of food security. Federal food assistance supported economic access, although it did not entirely meet residents’ needs. Thus, residents also relied on community initiatives. Food banks worked on economic access, while the grocery program supported healthy food, economic access, and neighborhood well-being, for which residents shared overwhelmingly positive feedback.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper I take an applied, community-based approach to generate a resident-driven narrative of neighborhood food security for Meadows Park. Residents put forth a comprehensive vision of food security that included healthy food, economic access, physical access, and neighborhood well-being. Residents repeatedly valued healthy food, which they envisioned as freshly sourced, freshly prepared and nutritious. For economic access, residents envisioned the prices of healthy, quality goods falling within their household budget. For physical access, residents envisioned safe and reliable transportation to grocery outlets. Finally, residents envisioned food security as attentive to the well-being of the neighborhood as a collective, with social and educational dimensions.

While many of my findings echo those in other food security literature, a few offer unique contributions to understanding food security at the neighborhood level. Residents demonstrated knowledge of and interest in healthy eating and highlighted the collective dimension of food security. Scholars have identified low-income women caregivers as lacking either nutritional knowledge or interest in pursuing a healthy diet, however, my findings show this does not apply to Meadows Park residents and should therefore not be broadly assumed (Whelan et al. 2002; Wiig Dammann & Smith 2009; Wiig & Smith 2008). Residents, including women caregivers experiencing food insecurity, consistently prioritized health and demonstrated knowledge of and interest in healthy eating and nutrition. Additionally, residents underscored the collective dimension of food security, a theme I have not seen included food security studies which often focus on food access barriers and strategies (MacNell et al. 2017; Freedman, Blake & Liese 2013, Moak et al. 2017). Through a framework of “envisioning,” residents desires and imaginings surfaced in my findings; these visions went beyond their individual food security needs to include the collective well-being of their neighborhood.

This vision can provide a roadmap for community initiatives and policymakers seeking to improve food security in Meadows Park. Here, I review each component of food security as envisioned by residents and identify where future interventions can build off of existing successes or fill remaining space.

- a) *Healthy Foods*. Residents described the grocery program at the community center as increasing access to healthy, fresh, and nutritious foods. These items could be hard to get outside of the grocery program; healthy foods in particular became inaccessible when financial or physical access was limited. Therefore, future interventions should build off the success of the grocery program by providing similar healthy food options.

- b) *Economic Access*. Both federal food assistance and community initiatives addressed economic access. However, residents identified multiple parts to economic access, including the cost of living, employment and income. Interventions that lower other essential household costs besides food, and interventions that enable residents to attain well-paying jobs and maintain job security could also improve food security.
- c) *Physical Access*. No existing intervention directly targets physical access. Although the grocery program is centrally located in the neighborhood, proximity does not address residents' vision of safe and reliable transportation. Future interventions could include increasing car access and car ownership, as well as improving public infrastructure. Investment in safe pedestrian paths including sidewalks and crosswalks could increase residents' mobility and access to groceries.
- d) *Neighborhood Well-being*. Residents framed the grocery program as facilitating social connections and a sense of community. Future interventions should continue this success by intentionally creating spaces for social bonding around food. Additionally, future interventions that promote knowledge of the food system, with particular attention to youth education, could also promote food security.

Residents' holistic, multi-component vision of food security provides important insight for evaluating existing interventions and identifying areas of potential. Furthermore, a similar framework could be applied to other areas of Colorado Springs to inform other local initiatives as well as interventions at the city and county level.

While this study provides important guidance, it is also limited in ways that future research might address. I intended to collaborate further with community partners during analysis, as critical CBR literature identifies collaborative analyses as both beneficial and widely underused

(Cashman et al. 2008). However, my academic schedule and the allocation of community partners' time towards other urgent causes means I performed a largely solo analysis, perhaps limiting the validity of my findings. Continuing to prioritize community knowledge and collaboration in food security research and policy-making can ensure that interventions adhere to the needs and desires of those affected by food insecurity. Additionally, the data in this study were not collected for academic knowledge production, but rather to inform local stakeholders. With a small sample and a localized approach, my findings are specific and applied; future food security studies with a wider scope would contribute more generalizable knowledge to the field.



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## APPENDIX

Table 1. Demographics: Gender, Caregiving and Seniority Among Residents\*

	n	Percent
Gender		
Women	12	80%
Men	3	20%
Caregiver	7	46.67%
Senior	6	40%

\*Residents were not asked directly about their demographic information, these are imperfect data gathered largely by inference. I ascribed residents' genders from name, voice, and any other information they shared in their interview. I identified residents as seniors if they indicated participating in senior programs or specifically referenced their age. I identified residents as caregivers if they mentioned there was at least one child in their care at the time of the interview.

Table 2. Transportation Used to Access Groceries

	<i>Alana</i>	<i>Ashley</i>	<i>Anne</i>	<i>Bonnie</i>	<i>Carolyn</i>	<i>Dierdre</i>	<i>Ellis</i>	<i>Emily</i>	<i>Gina</i>	<i>Jane</i>	<i>Mark</i>	<i>Meredith</i>	<i>Monty</i>	<i>Polly</i>	<i>Sue</i>	<i>Total</i>
Drive own car		■	■	■	■			■	■	■				■		8
Carpool/borrow car	■					■	■					■	■		■	6
Walk		■		■				■				■			■	5
Public bus						■							■		■	3
Bike						■						■				2

Table 3. Use of Existing Food Security Interventions: SNAP/WIC Participation, Knowledge of SNAP Double-Up, and Use of Community Initiatives\*

	Alana	Ashley	Anne	Bonnie	Carolyn	Dierdre	Ellis	Emily	Gina	Jane	Mark	Meredith	Monty	Polly	Sue	Total
Used SNAP/WIC																7
Knew SNAP Double-Up																2
Used food bank/pantry																6
Used no-cost grocery program																8

\*Residents were not asked directly about their participation in food assistance programs during the interview; their participation was inferred when they brought up food stamps or demonstrated interest in the information researchers shared about the Double Up program. They also were not asked directly if they used community initiatives, I only marked those who brought up using these initiatives on their own.