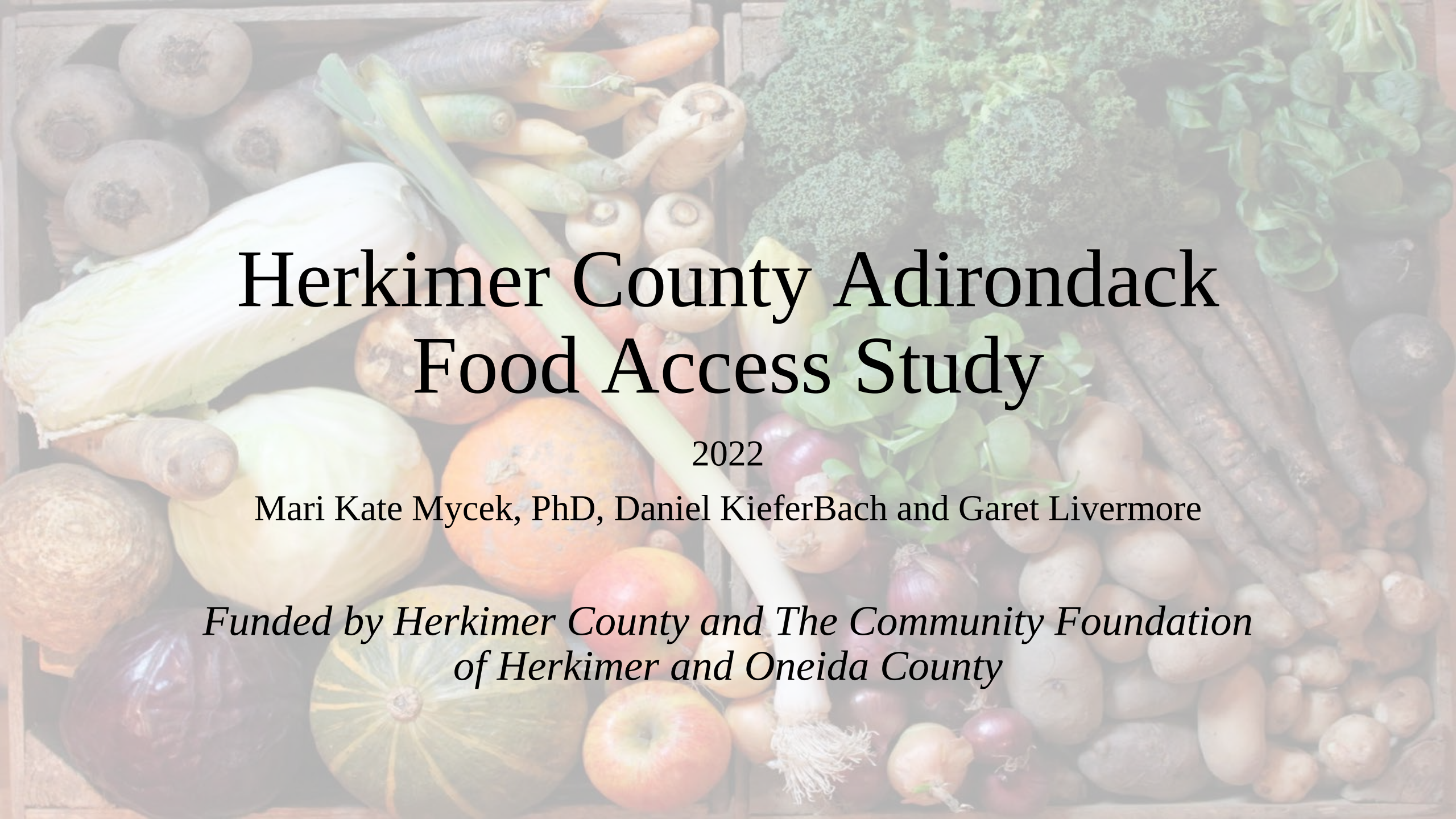


Herkimer County Adirondack Food Access Study

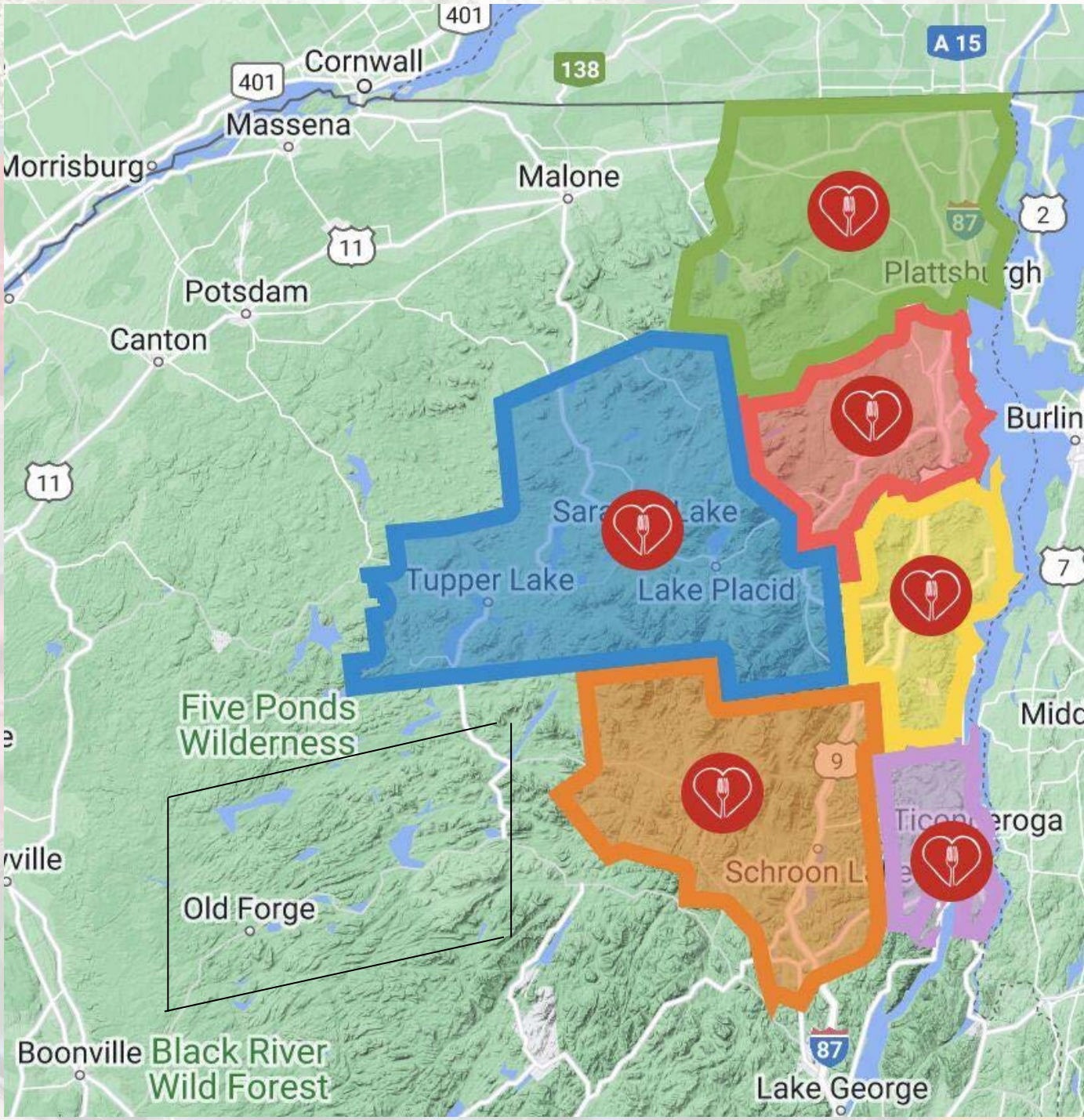
2022

Mari Kate Mycek, PhD, Daniel KieferBach and Garet Livermore

Funded by Herkimer County and The Community Foundation of Herkimer and Oneida County

Introduction

- Access to fresh, healthy, local food = thriving, happy communities
- ADK Park has historically low food security and access
- Western ADK portion of park is siloed and left behind
- CCE Herkimer County, Herkimer County, and LivingADK, conducted community-based research to understand existing food access in this “left out” region



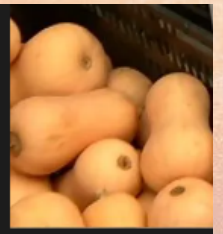
Research Question and Goals

- What are the food sources that people are accessing in this Central Adirondack Regional Corridor (CARC) region?
- What barriers do residents face in obtaining the food they need to live healthy, happy lives?
- Is there an effective local solution that we can help promote to address some of this?
- How can we strengthen local supply chains to increase access (by partnering with Mohawk Valley producers, farmers, and other organizations throughout the Adirondack Region working on similar initiatives)?

Data Collection

- Resident Survey
- Participant Observation
- Interviews

Survey seeks input on local food in the Adirondacks



Farmers market food

by: Jay Petrequin
Posted: May 3, 2022 / 12:37 PM EDT
Updated: May 3, 2022 / 12:38 PM EDT

SHARE

MOHAWK, N.Y. (NEWS10) – The Mohawk Valley Economic Development District (MVEDD) is working to gather information on nutrition and food stream issues as faced by the valley's neighbor to the north. A survey on local food in the Adirondacks is live now, created in cooperation with Cornell Cooperative Extension and LivingADK.

FRIDAY, JULY 15, 2022

Increasing Access to Local Food: Feedback wanted

by Garet Livermore 1 Comment

By Garet D. Livermore, executive director, Cornell Cooperative Extension Herkimer County

Obtaining fresh food in the Adirondacks has always been a challenge. Between the cold climate and the poor glacial soil riddled with stones and boulders, farming in the Adirondacks is, at best, a difficult proposition. The indigenous people of the region, the Mohawks of the Haudenosaunee nation had large settlements in the rich river valleys that surround the Adirondacks that supported large farms that grew the "three sisters" (corn, beans and squash) that sustained their communities. When they came into the central Adirondacks, they brought these food staples with them to supplement the fish and game of the mountains.

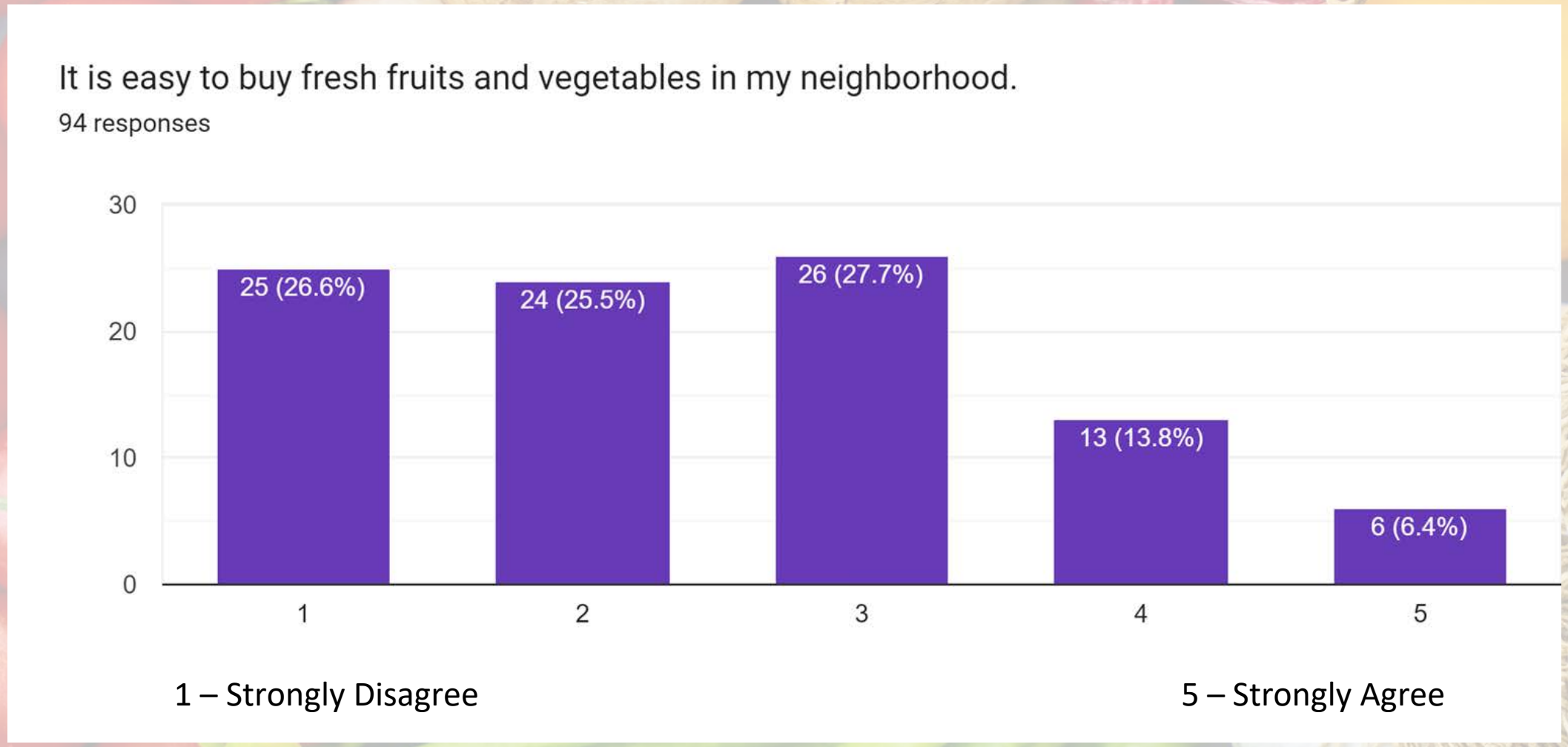
Survey Findings

- Launched April 2022 – October 2022
- Promoted locally and online
- We received 101 responses to the survey. After quality control, seven responses were removed because they did not meet the study criteria, leaving a total sample of 94 responses.

Survey Respondents - Who are they?

- Most of the respondents were yearlong residents (N=62), which was our goal, given that we were most interested in how residents navigate foodways all year.
- Most of the respondent’s were women (N=73)
- Wide range of yearly income
- More older than younger participants (>56, N=58)

Survey Findings



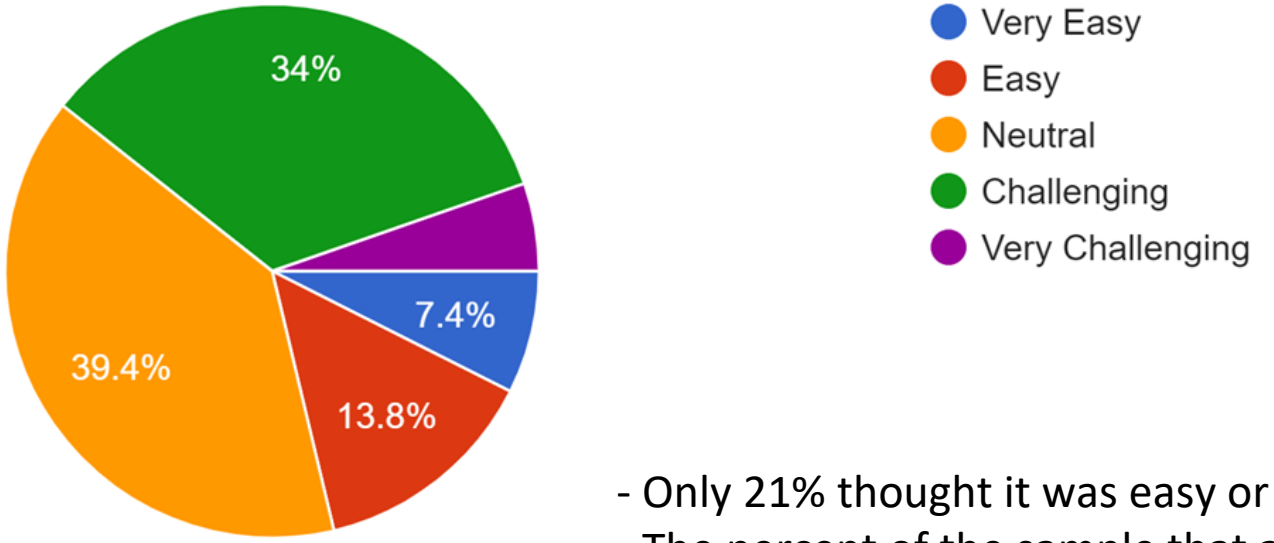
1 – Strongly Disagree

5 – Strongly Agree

Survey Findings

How challenging is it for you and your family to access the food you need?

94 responses



- Only 21% thought it was easy or very easy
- The percent of the sample that answered challenging is much higher than state and national averages

Barriers to Access

- Respondents income was not a significant predictor of reporting challenges to food access (price alone is not the problem)
- Seasonality is much more of a factor when it comes to residents' ability to access food. Whereas seasonal residents had an average of “neutral” for the question, regarding challenging to food access, year long residents were decidedly negative, indicating an average of “challenging.”
- Residents deeper into the park on average report feeling more challenged, with the most residents indicating challenges in Long Lake.

Are you a yearlong/all year resident?	Size	Mean
No	32	0.000000
Yes	62	-0.241935

Age

56-65 year olds reported having higher levels of access to food, lowest were 66+ and 26 and below. This was a result that we were surprised by, but found interesting and worthy of looking closer into in the future

Age	size	mean
26-40	11	-0.272727
41-55	22	-0.136364
56-65	27	-0.444444
66+	30	0.100000
less than 26	4	0.000000

Barriers to Access

- We asked participants how easy or challenging it was for them to access the foods their family needed, in their own words.
- The responses varied depending on where the participant lived and their wants and needs for good. Some central themes did emerge in the open-ended questions that can help us contextualize their responses and challenges.
    - *Distance to Food Choice*
    - *Limited Choices*
    - *Quality Concerns*
    - *Winter*
    - *Cost*
    - *Age*

Distance to Food Choice

- 61% of the open ended responses mentioned the distance to any food source as challenge
- Within those answers, many talked about the distance to affordable and quality fresh produce was even farther

“I drive either 60 or 120 miles round trip in order to access the better/local produce.”

“Driving to Utica every week for affordable, fresh, quality food, fresh produce is hard to come by in town, select few options at the local store in old forge.”

“decent all-year food stores are at least 30 min drive from our town”

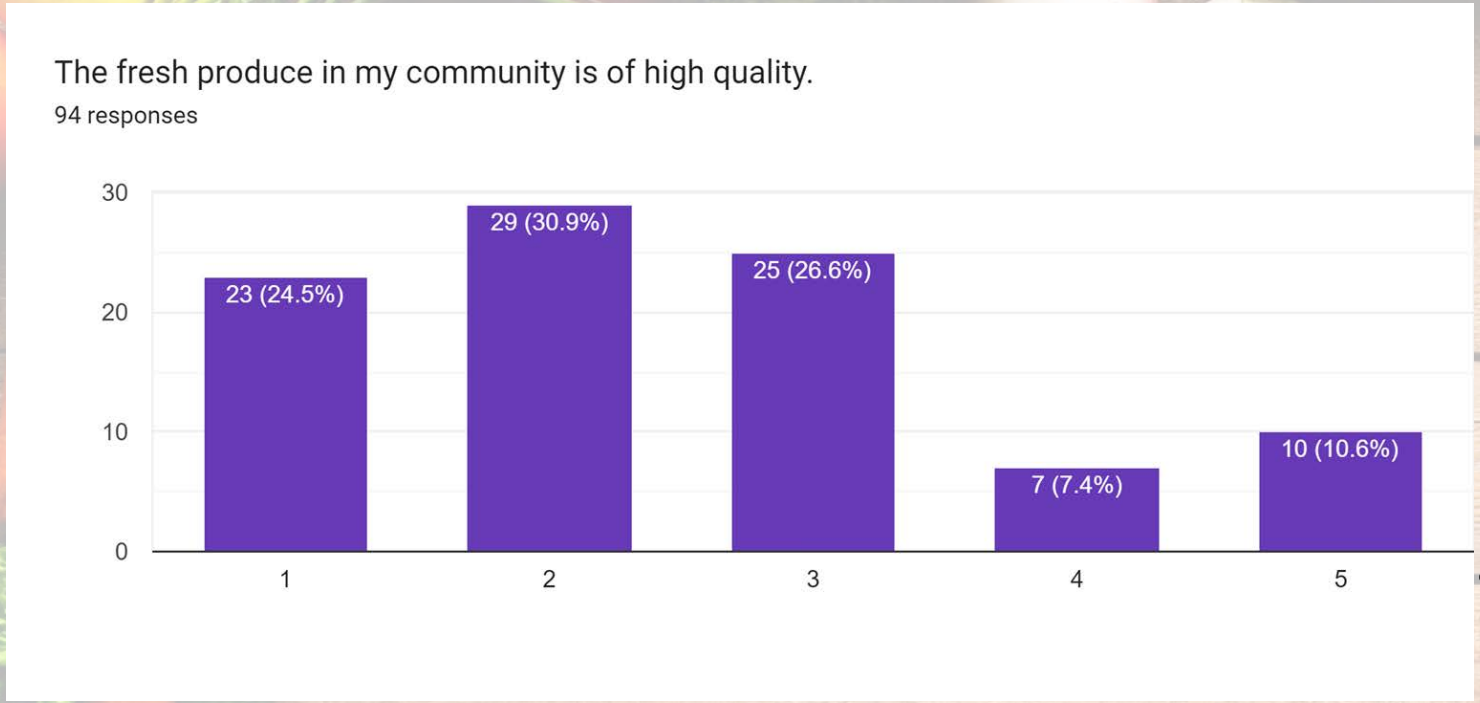
“12 miles to a small grocery store, 25 miles to a bigger one, 75 to a large supermarket. Local fresh food only available July and August.”

Limited Choices

Those who answered the question “how far do you travel to get to the place where you get most of your food” as “11-30” minutes overwhelmingly discussed the limited options and quality concerns at the store they shopped at. Folks are traveling to the small grocery stores within the region rather than those who are traveling between “30-60” minutes to the larger grocery stores to access different choices. Those who decide to stay local face unique challenges and those who travel farther are also facing unique challenges.

“We do have a grocery store here in town but the prices are high, set for tourism not locals, and the options are limited. When we lived in Raquette Lake it was near impossible as the tiny grocery store they have is extremely limited and only open about 10 weeks a year. Shopping for us and where we shop depends on the season too. We rarely shop at the local grocery store in town and will most often do bigger shops less frequently in Utica 60 miles away to get more options at a better price.”

Quality Concerns



1 – Strongly Disagree
5 – Strongly Agree

Participants also discussed the challenges they faced in getting what they wanted in terms of quality, especially as it relates to fresh fruits and vegetables. This was especially stark during the off season for full year residents.

"local store prices too high and produce quality is not great"

"When we are in the Adirondacks, we typically bring most of our food with us from our primary home. We find it easier to shop there, particularly for fresh foods. We do frequent the farmers market and farm stands in and around old Forge, but make an effort to use the local grocery stores only when we absolutely need some thing."

Seasonality/Winter

A unique aspect of this study population is their geographic location, which is an incredible tourist draw during the summer months. During the winter months, harsh conditions make travel to grocery stores even more difficult, as well as suppliers delivering food to retailers and restaurants.

“The lack of a year-round grocery store nearby makes it very difficult. We drive 70 miles for a grocery store with good produce in the winter, and fill in with one of the smaller stores (all 30 miles away). We also are starting to rely on HelloFresh and other delivered food, which is expensive and not great quality, but convenient and saves on gas costs.”

“summer time and into the fall - no problem, winter into spring - can be problematic. old veggies, so got to use it fast. canned goods are real pricy here”

Cost

While there were many different factors that people cited in their struggles to get the food their family needs, cost was a factor for some. Looking at the respondents who discussed cost being prohibitive, they were mostly talking about the local grocery stores. In the open-ended questions, many wrote that the costs of foods were prohibitive at local grocery stores. This was discussed by people who shopped there regularly, and those who decided to drive to Utica to stock up at large chain stores that have more competitive pricing.

"Driving to Utica every week for affordable, fresh, quality food, fresh produce is hard to come by in town, select few options at the local store in old forge."

What does this mean?

Residents and tourists alike are leaving the area to buy food, traveling far distances to find fresh, quality produce at a reasonable price.

Respondents rated quality and freshness as the most important quality of the food the look for, with nutrition a close second. **Cost and convenience were not as important, which are great indicators when thinking about local solutions and what respondents want.**

Interviews

- We spoke with local grocery store owners and farmer's that travel to the Old Forge farmer's market and deliver CSA boxes to Old Forge.
- The main barrier for everyone was distribution networks.
- Farmer's were not making enough of a profit/have a big enough customer base to travel the long distance. Marketing efforts to expand their customers have been unsuccessful.
- Local grocery store owners rely on corporate distribution networks that do not have local products, because that is what is most efficient and affordable.

Interviews

- Grocery store owners valued local food and expressed interest in buying more.
- They also told us about past efforts to bring in more local produce and it falling flat because of supply, distribution, and consistency.
- They expressed that they are doing whatever they can to keep the food on the shelves during this busy time and would welcome more local produce, but do not have the time, knowledge, or capacity to make it happen. They have a consistent supply and routine with their distributors and that is what they do.
- Small local producers are not able to provide the same size and delivery options as the corporate suppliers, and are not able to package the food in the way the grocery stores need to be able to sell how they normally do.

Research Question and Goals

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Discussion

- 70% of respondents buy most of their food from the grocery store.
- 78% of respondents said they would be more likely to buy local vegetables and fruits if they were available at the grocery store
- The grocery store owners told us that when they do have local products, they sell out even though they are priced at a premium
- Farmer’s have produce to sell and do come to the farmer’s market weekly
- Grocery store owners want local, better produce

Conclusion

- There are customers willing to pay a premium in this market, especially in the summer. This variable supply/demand is a challenge and an asset.
- Both grocery store owners and farmer’s have an interest in expanding the market.
- Current distribution efforts are not working
- Next steps:
  - speak with restaurant owners to create a larger market for local producers
  - event to bring together stakeholders from stores, farms, consumers

Follow Up

- All of the results, summary, blank survey and this presentation can be found at https://www.livingadk.org/impact/food-security

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Hamilton Helps

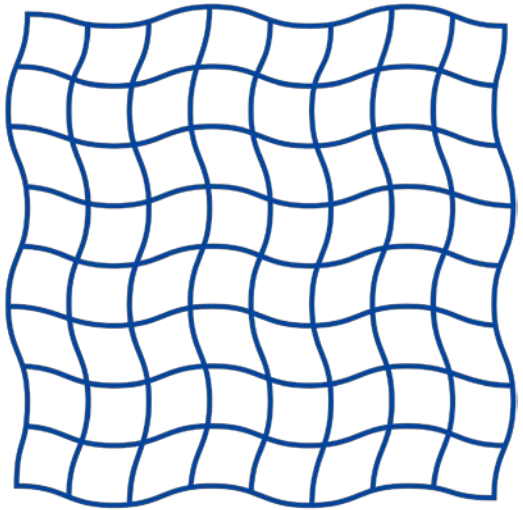
Healthy, Local Food Connections!

Hamilton Helps: A Brief History

- Founded in 2020 as response to the community's needs in the emerging COVID-19 pandemic.
- Aided in various projects in Hamilton County: grant writing for local non-profits, meal transportation, mask distribution, and
- The Hamilton Helps Healthy Food Vouchers Program!

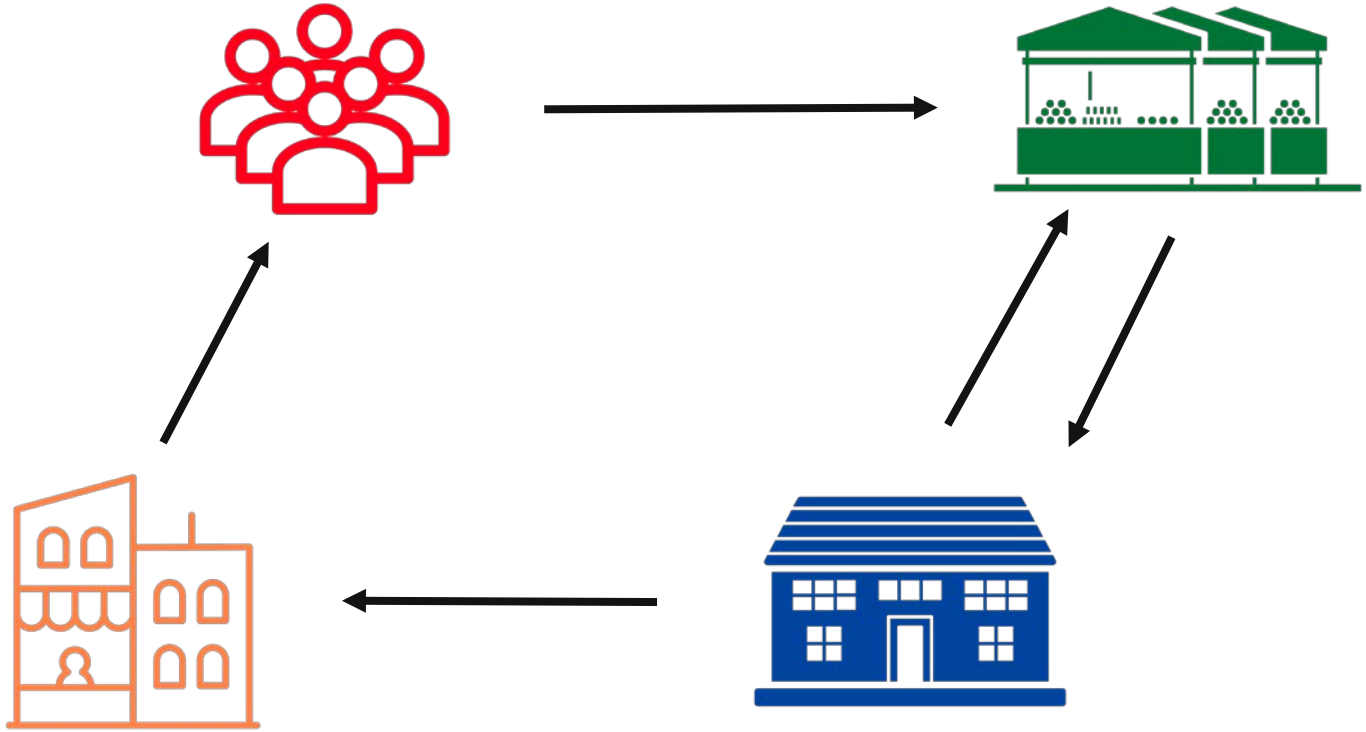
Mending a Local Food Network

- A structural issue:
  - Social
  - Geographic
  - Food infrastructure



Healthy, Local Food Connections!

- $20 booklets distributed to about 200 people.
- Distributed through partners in Hamilton County: Community Action, Senior Meal Sites, Inlet Food Pantry.
- Distributed to people our partners know, no means testing or proof of need, just mutual dignity.
- Redeemable at Hamilton farmers markets in Indian Lake, Speculator, Long Lake, and Inlet!



Lessons learned, so far.

- A need for public-private partnership: particularly public health, social services, and regional non-profits like Blue Mountain Center.
- A need to bring voices and experiences together to problem solve, learn from each other, and replicate. Example of Long Lake Market.
- Continuing along the path of mutual dignity. How do we both maintain dignity and increase aid, support, and talk about that work in settings like this?