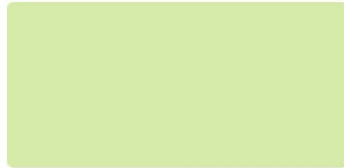
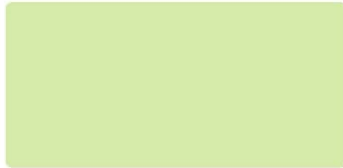
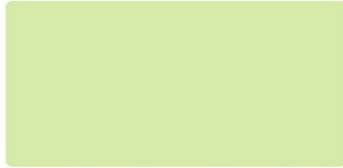
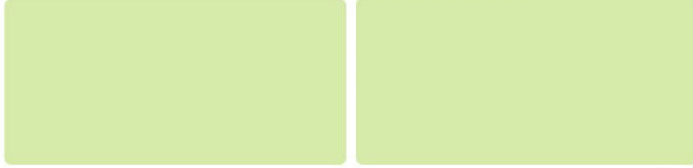




LOCAL FOODS, LOCAL PLACES



COMMUNITY
ACTION PLAN
Crisfield, Maryland
November 2016



Community Story

Crisfield is a small town of approximately 2,800 people located along the Chesapeake Bay at the southernmost tip of Somerset County, Maryland. Crisfield's geographic proximity to the once bountiful Tangier Sound and greater Bay fisheries helped this community gain fame as the "seafood capital of the world," primarily for its oyster and blue crab exports. The community's natural assets related to the working waterfront, recreational access to the Bay, and rich cultural history make it an attractive tourist destination. However, as the Chesapeake Bay's ecological health has declined, the seafood industry that supported many local jobs has declined as well. The community now includes only one major seafood processor/distributor within the town limits. Although Somerset and the surrounding counties have major commercial poultry operations and several row crop (e.g., tomatoes, melons) producers, many Crisfield residents still lack access to fresh, healthy food, employment opportunities, and adequate health care.

Compared to other jurisdictions in the state of Maryland, Somerset County has higher levels of low-income residents and some additional negative health indicators with more than 25% of its population living below poverty and more than 10% of the population under the age of 65 currently without health insurance¹. Also, the community has about 330 units of public housing and an additional 23 households utilizing Section 8 vouchers as reported by the Crisfield Housing Authority.² Local community members estimate that this equates to about 30 percent of the community living in some form of subsidized housing.

The USDA's Food Access Atlas³ indicates that the city of Crisfield is also a Low Income/Low Access community. The Atlas measures factors related to the concentration of low-income households and their proximity to grocery stores. Crisfield's only supermarket is the local Food Lion, located more than two miles away from the



View of downtown Crisfield. Photo credit: Renaissance Planning



Image of MeTompkin shipping box containing fresh soft shell crabs ready for shipping. MeTompkin is a local seafood processing business located in downtown Crisfield that packages and ships seafood worldwide. Photo credit: Renaissance Planning

¹ U.S. Census Quick Facts, Somerset County, MD. <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/24039>

² <http://affordablehousingonline.com/housing-authority/Maryland/Housing-Authority-of-Crisfield/MD009/>

³ USDA Food Access Atlas <http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-environment-atlas.aspx>

community’s major public housing development. This distance presents a challenge for households without access to a personal vehicle. Additionally, many community members cite concerns with the fact that you cannot buy local seafood or fresh produce in town.

Despite the downturn in the seafood economy and other noted challenges, several organizations and community leaders are working to revitalize the town and improve the quality of life for residents. Somos, Inc., a local non-profit organization focused on improving the health, education, and general well-being of Maryland’s Eastern Shore residents, has initiated several new and on-going projects, including:

- **Telemedicine & Telehealth:** Somos, Inc. is working to increase the availability of health care to residents in remote and rural areas, using telemedicine approaches such as live interactive video, remote patient monitoring devices, and on-line discussion groups to cost effectively provide medical support and diagnosis.
- **Free Little Libraries:** Somos, Inc. has installed eight “Take a book – leave a book” boxes throughout Somerset County to encourage literacy. These repurposed newspaper stands were hand-painted by local artists and inmates from the nearby correctional facility. The Little Libraries hope to promote pleasure reading as an indirect means to increase imagination, academic achievement, cultural engagement, and civic involvement among young people and adults.
- **Bayside Harvest Market:** Located in downtown Crisfield, this new farmers market opened on May 7, 2016, and will expand access to fresh food for area residents. The market site is also home to **The Crisfield Community Garden** and the **Garden Dreams Scholarship Fund** – a sponsorship program designed to help lower Eastern Shore young farmers and watermen pursue studies in agriculture or marine biology.

In addition to Somos, Inc.’s work on telemedicine, the Somerset County Department of Health has organized childhood obesity and diabetes prevention and education programs and other public health services. The Department of Health also runs Healthy Somerset -- a coalition of county agencies working to reduce tobacco use, prevent cancer, and promote healthy eating/lifestyles. One of Healthy Somerset’s initiatives is the Trail Mix project created by the Somerset County Department of Recreation and Parks. The Somerset Trail Mix program creates and promotes opportunities for walking, biking, hiking, paddling, and other active recreation within the county. One major initiative includes efforts to develop, fund and build a multi-purpose trail system in the county.

The Somerset Economic Development Commission and the City of Crisfield are also engaged in community development with a focus on revitalizing the downtown economy and leveraging some of the City’s existing assets to attract tourism. The City Dock, located at the end of the main street, is a protected harbor that supports both fishing vessels and cruise ships. The downtown also includes



Main street businesses in Crisfield have benefited from sidewalk and street improvements. Photo credit: Renaissance Planning

Somers Cove Marina that is the largest state-owned marina within Maryland and provides land access for many local and visiting boaters throughout the year.

Located just 2.5 miles outside of downtown Crisfield is Janes Island State Park. The park attracts several thousand visitors per year to its campgrounds and natural amenities including 2,900 acres of salt marsh and 30 miles of water trails. The City also hosts several significant cultural events every year, including the National Hard Crab Derby, the J. Millard Tawes Crab and Clam Bake (the largest seafood festival in Maryland), and the J. Millard Tawes Oyster and Bull Roast that attracts visitors from outside of the county. Two newer events – Freedom Fest (July 4th) and Dock Day – were also established to honor the City’s military and maritime heritage. Despite the presence of boating infrastructure, the local seafood industry, natural amenities, and multiple cultural/heritage events within the greater Crisfield area, the community has yet to realize its full community development potential regarding fostering local business growth, job creation, better public health outcomes, and improved quality of life.

In 2015, Somos, Inc. requested assistance through the Local Foods, Local Places program to develop an action plan to address this untapped potential by promoting the growth of the local food system and creating a healthier, walkable, and economically vibrant community.⁴ The goals of the LFLP program are to create:

- More economic opportunities for local farmers and businesses.
- Better access to healthy local food, especially among disadvantaged groups.
- Revitalized downtowns, main streets, and neighborhoods.

Several partners support the LFLP program. These partners include the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), and the Delta Regional Authority (DRA). Crisfield was one of 27 communities across the United States selected to participate in the program in 2016.

The remainder of this report and its appendices document the LFLP engagement process, the workshop activities, and most importantly, the action plan and next steps for achieving the community’s goals. A major element of the technical assistance included the establishment of an LFLP Steering Committee to help plan the workshop and guide the community’s initial steps to implement the resulting action plan. Over the course of the three planning calls, workshop discussions and post-workshop calls, the community’s goals evolved from those in the initial request for technical assistance to the four shown later in this report and Appendix A, and reflect the holistic, collaborative approach to community development already underway in Crisfield, MD.

Engagement

The technical assistance engagement process for LFLP includes three phases, illustrated in Figure 1. The Assessment Phase consists of three preparation conference calls between the LFLP project team and the local Steering Committee to establish the workshop goals, agenda, logistics, and stakeholder invitation lists. The Convening Phase includes the effort’s capstone event—a two-day site visit and workshops in

⁴ <https://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/local-foods-local-places>

the community. The Next Steps Phase includes three follow-up conference calls, refinement of actions, and documentation of the Community Action Plan.

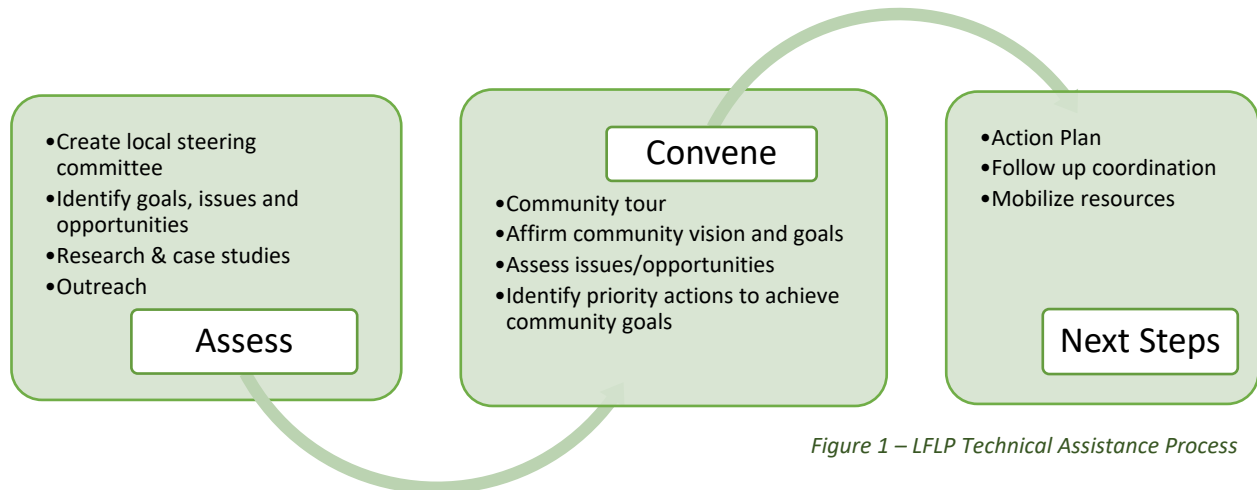


Figure 1 – LFLP Technical Assistance Process

Community Tour

Crisfield’s LFLP workshop took place on May 23rd and 24th, 2016. The first day of the workshop began with a group lunch among the project team and the local LFLP steering committee members. Following lunch, the mayor, Kim Lawson, led a walking tour of Crisfield’s downtown, including a visit to the processing and packing buildings for the MeTompkin Bay Oyster Company. The MeTompkin facility is downtown Crisfield’s last remaining seafood processor of oysters, whole softshell crabs, and crab meat. The group then boarded a bus to visit other sites within Crisfield, including Somers Cove Marina, the Crisfield Housing Authority properties, Janes Island State Park, and the Accohannock Indian Tribe’s Bending Water Park.

Public Meeting

Approximately 40 community members participated in a public meeting on the evening of the first day of the workshop at a local restaurant. The public meeting began with an overview of the LFLP steering committee’s draft project goals and included a facilitated community input session to identify the community’s existing assets, additional goals, challenges, and opportunities available to them. The following highlights workshop participants’ thoughts on the assets, goals, challenges, and opportunities.

Community Assets:

- The welcoming, caring, and diverse people living and working in the greater Crisfield community
- An active group of community members organizing to help foster community and economic development initiatives
- Existing and future business opportunities related to outdoor recreational activities, cultural and seafood assets including:
 - Hunting for deer, duck, turkey
 - Free state-certified bow instructor training
 - Local deer processing facilities with the ability to donate extra meat to public

- Active Farmers and Hunters Feeding the Hungry (FHFH) organization
 - Existing water trails, kayaking and fishing opportunities
 - Janes Island State Park
 - Local natural systems are part of the Atlantic Flyway – a network of ecosystems along the east coast of the United States supporting major bird migrations; these locations are a draw for nature enthusiasts
 - Cruises that depart from Crisfield to tour the Bay and surrounding islands (e.g. America Cruise Lines regularly departs from downtown Crisfield with 70 passengers)
 - J. Millard Tawes Historical Museum – which also hosts elder hostel tours to surrounding Bay and islands
 - Annual Crab and Clam Bake and the National Hard Crab Derby
- The Accohonack Tribe property and tribal members interested in fostering economic development and creating a local cultural center
- The existing local food assets and production potential from both land and sea. The Bay provides opportunities for locally sourced seafood, and nearby agricultural lands provide opportunities for a variety of produce and poultry offerings.
- The community has a strong cultural heritage tied to local foods given a history of the seafood industry.

Community Goals:

- Strengthen the local economy of the greater Crisfield area by fostering the growth of local food businesses, local eco-tourism and ‘experience-based’ tourism businesses.
- Make local foods (local agriculture and local aquaculture) accessible to local people, local restaurants, local institutions.
- Extend the growing season and incorporating more sustainable practices.
- Grow local foods based businesses as a catalyst to strengthen authentic place-based tourism business opportunities.
- Improve public health outcomes through better access (and eating of) healthy foods and creating walkable, bikeable places in the community that promote more physical activity for residents.
- Create walkable and thriving downtown and surrounding neighborhoods that promote more active living and support place-based economic development initiatives.
- Strengthen the capacity of local community members to organize and advance key community initiatives through improved communications and organizational structures.
- Provide more information to residents on how to grow food (including *what* to grow and *how* to grow using sustainable practices).



Image of community members at Day 2 workshop working through actions. Image credit: Renaissance Planning.

- Establish more local production such as beehives and honey production, aquaponics and other small-scale fruits and vegetable production.
- Resolve water quality issues (i.e., workshop participants cited concerns that city water may not be good for small-scale crop irrigation) and create alternative water supplies (e.g., rain barrels, cisterns, etc.).
- Improve transportation options (particularly for those without cars) by making it safe and convenient for people get to daily destinations (jobs, shopping, school, social services, healthcare, etc.) by walking, biking and taking transit.
- Increase knowledge and build support with area watermen and farmers regarding the potential demand for local food.
- Increase the amount of local food sold to residents and tourists.
- Increase the amount of healthy local food sold to and consumed by residents.
- Increase community benefits and opportunities for youth.
- Increase opportunities to purchase local seafood and support the long-term sustainability of local seafood businesses.

Community Challenges:

- No local food pantry and limited grocery store options.
- Lack of communication and cohesion within community including:
 - Not enough collaboration among local, state, and federal government agencies.
 - Non-profit organizations (e.g., local Lions Club, churches, etc.) somewhat limited in their support and outreach.
 - Lower income community often not engaged in city planning, economic development or community development initiatives.
 - Lack of connections between young people and elderly and between longtime residents and newcomers.
 - Lack of connection between local watermen, local farmers, and local community organizers.
 - Lack of clarity and consensus on economic development focus and priorities.
- Lack of knowledge about the Accohannock Indian Tribe's cultural history and lack of a cultural center or other interpretive programs and facilities.
- Difficulty balancing public investments between increasing tourism (economic development) and meeting community needs (community development).
- A Large percentage of community living in poverty and subsidized housing.
- Existing seafood industry built entirely around a processing, export economy, which is difficult to transition into a business that can viably serve local consumers and demand.

Community Opportunities:

- Capitalize on the community's "welcoming and friendly" atmosphere; strong sense of community identity tied to Bay and economic base in the seafood industry.
- Expand local culinary experiences as part of larger "authentic" tourism experiences.

- Wine and seafood trails, local breweries, foraging classes
- Utilize existing international tourism attractions (e.g., Accohannock Indian Tribe’s Pow Wows and other gatherings).
- Increase the promotion and presence of the performing arts community (e.g., musicians).
- Engage resources of local universities (e.g., Salisbury University – business school; University of Maryland Eastern Shore agriculture program).
- Diversify crop production and enhance marketing of local products to residents.
 - Good climate for growing a wide variety of produce
 - Better utilize marshlands for growing – asparagus, pomegranate – both premium crops
- Promote healthier lifestyles.
 - Increase education and infrastructure for to encourage more active living and better health choices
- Continue to invest in local trail system to increase recreation and alternative transportation opportunities as well as promote tourism.

The public meeting on the first day of the workshop also included a Food System Mapping exercise where participants broke into groups to identify the components of the greater Crisfield area local food system, including the following categories:

- **Producers** (farmers, ranchers, watermen, incubator farm programs, etc.)
- **Distributors** (aggregators and transporters)
- **Processors** (community kitchens, food hubs, commercial manufacturing facilities)
- **Wholesale Outlets for Consumers** (restaurants, grocery stores, hospitals, schools, corporate contracts, etc.)
- **Retail Outlets for Consumers** (farmers markets, CSAs, online distribution)
- **Nutrient Cycling** (compost facilities, recycling programs, etc.)

Appendix F includes a complete list of the workshop participants’ input on these local food system categories.

Technical Workshop

The second day of the site visit began with a session to help participants begin to identify the specific actions they could take to achieve their goals. The project team presented several case studies highlighting how other communities have used their local food system to foster downtown redevelopment, improve access to healthy foods for lower income populations, and spur additional economic revitalization. Refer to Appendix H for the presentation slides from the workshop. Based on the input from the public meeting and discussions during the technical workshop, the project team summarized the participant feedback into four refined goals. Following lunch, workshop participants identified actions to achieve each goal. The following reflects the priority goals and actions that came out of the community engagement process. Appendix A includes an expanded description of the actions. Each action includes a description of why the action is important, potential measures of success, identification of individuals or organizations to help lead and support each action, an estimate of costs

or other resources, an estimated timeframe for completing the action, and a list of potential funding resources.

Action Plan

GOAL 1: Grow local businesses and create new job opportunities related to local foods, eco-tourism, and experience-based tourism.

Given the rich history of the community's ties to the seafood-based economy that is also inextricably linked to the natural resources of the area, this goal reinforces the commitment to a locally-based economic and community development strategy. There is already existing momentum moving in this direction, and therefore the needs revolve around strengthening those efforts and building a broader coalition around those efforts to leverage limited resources.

- Action 1.1 – Enhance the Crisfield brand.
- Action 1.2 - Advance eco-tourism and experience-based tourism opportunities and business growth (existing businesses and potential for new businesses).
- Action 1.3 - Identify and document local culinary dishes and unique food offerings (e.g. local seafood, local produce, Smith Island cakes, etc.) and explore opportunities to improve healthy options for local cuisine.
- Action 1.4 - Establish a local cooperative in downtown Crisfield that serves as a retail space offering local value-added foods and products and where residents and tourists can find out where to buy other 'fresh' foods and local products.

Goal 2: Improve access to and consumption of local foods.

A primary concern of residents is the lack of fresh produce and local seafood offerings that can foster local economic development and reinforce local identity. Therefore, this goal focuses on specific efforts to reinforce education, production, sales, and consumption of local foods.

- Action 2.1 - Establish an incubator/community kitchen to foster local food innovators.
- Action 2.2 - Create an online information resource to identify local farmers, local watermen, and local products currently available and use this information to publish a local food guide.
- Action 2.3 - Strengthen existing farmer's market through improved marketing, diversified offerings, and other programmatic changes (demonstrations, coordination with other events, etc.) to attract more customers and more vendors.
- Action 2.4 - Improve accessibility of farmer's market (and fresh produce) to all members of the community with a particular emphasis on those without a car or other forms of transportation.

Goal 3: Improve public health outcomes for residents through improved access and consumption of healthy foods and more opportunities for active living (walking, biking and other physical activities).

The community has several public health challenges driven by many factors including poverty, limited access to healthy food options, and low-activity lifestyles. This goal supports multiple actions to address public health concerns by promoting opportunities to increase physical activity as well as grow and consume healthier foods.

- Action 3.1 - Continue to support and increase participation in the community garden at City Hall.
- Action 3.2 - Identify interested community members and establish additional locations for new community gardens and other local food production in the city.
- Action 3.3 - Establish a regular program of outdoor, recreational events that bring people together and provides opportunities to be active and promote Local Foods, Local Places initiatives.
- Action 3.4 - Implement “Trail Mix,” a multi-recreational trail program and link this system to local points of interest, downtown destinations, and other local food venues.

Goal 4: Organize and build local people capacity to advance local foods and local place-based initiatives.

There are several existing individuals and organizations working independently towards community and economic development within the greater Crisfield areas. This goal seeks to support efforts that would bring together these various entities in a collaborative fashion to enable more leveraging of limited resources and consensus building on broader goals.

- Action 4.1 - Create a Greater Crisfield Local Foods, Local Places task force reflecting diverse stakeholders with interest in the broad set of goals/initiatives contained herein.
- Action 4.2 - Develop a communications strategy to promote and highlight progress on the Greater Crisfield Local Foods, Local Places initiative, and other key events.
- Action 4.3 - Engage and leverage nearby university students in Local Foods, Local Places initiatives.

Appendices

- Appendix A – Action Plan Implementation Details
- Appendix B – Participants
- Appendix C – Local Mapping
- Appendix D – Funding Resources
- Appendix E – References
- Appendix F – Local Food System Elements
- Appendix G – Actions Brainstorming
- Appendix H – Workshop Presentations