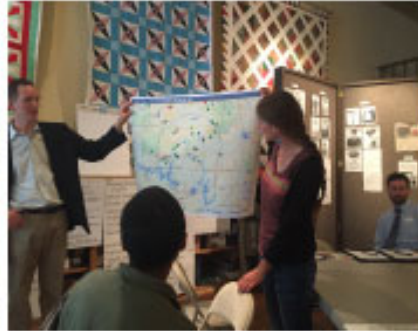




# LOCAL FOODS, LOCAL PLACES

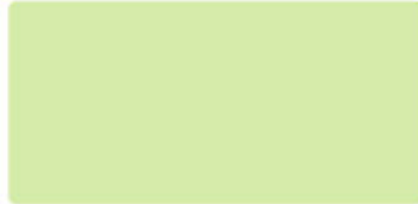
## Technical Assistance Program



Strengthening the  
Local Foods System  
and Downtown  
Revitalization:

Actions and Strategies  
for Gainesville, Missouri

August 12, 2016



## Community Story

Gainesville, MO is a small, rural city of 773 people located in the Ozarks near the southern border with Arkansas. Gainesville became the county seat for Ozark County, named for the country's oldest mountainous region, in 1860. The landscape of Ozark County features rugged beauty in the form of streams, rolling hills, and lakes ripe with fishing opportunities. After the Civil War veterans returned to homestead government land, and small-scale farms producing cotton, grain, and livestock populated the county while Gainesville grew as a banking, trading, and judicial center. The county grew prosperous from dairy farming into the 1950s, when local residents report that new regulations shuttered many farms, weakening the local farm economy.



Figure 1 – The “Yellow House” in which the Farm, Fork, and Fiddle is located. Image Credit: Renaissance Planning

The city is based around a small town square that has some housing and businesses within walking distance. Most of the residents are spread out along several miles of highway, making it difficult to get around by any means other than automobile. Most residents of Gainesville have to do much of their shopping outside of the county or online. Many residents also commute outside of the county for work.

Gainesville residents have exhibited enthusiasm for strengthening their downtown and supporting local agricultural production. In a survey conducted by the Ozark County Health Department, more than thirty households expressed a desire for a community garden that supports the senior center and food pantry with produce, an interest in learning about gardening and food preparation, and a willingness to donate to the garden's creation. The annual Ozark County Homegrown and Homemade Festival highlights local agriculture, tourism, crafts, and businesses, and it offers gardening and beekeeping workshops for children conducted by the Ozark County Homegrown Food Project (OCHFP).

A group of local individuals who wanted to organize around local food to improve the local economy started the OCHFP in March of 2014. They hope to energize the community around creating a town center that is self-sufficient and reduces the need for residents to leave to meet their needs or find entertainment. The OCHFP is completely volunteer-based and their mission is “Making local, wholesome food accessible to everyone in Ozark County.” There are several programs that OCHFP are in the process of implementing, which include edible landscaping; a farmers market; a community garden; and the group's flagship endeavor, the Farm, Fork, and Fiddle (FFF).

The FFF is a store and café that offers a community gathering space and a market that sells products grown or made by local farmers and artisans. The tagline is “For the Community, By the Community,” and seeks to be a place to bring together all different kinds of people and provides the community a feeling of ownership. In January of 2016, OCHFP began renting an old house one block off of the town square to open a shop selling local produce and locally made arts and crafts. Called “the yellow house,” the shop also has a kitchen that serves lunch Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Eventually they would like to hold workshops on painting, music lessons, cooking, and other activities. The OCHFP would also like to start a community garden on site at the yellow house. This would enable people to spend time

outdoors, and its location offers the opportunity for collaboration with teachers, students, and families in workshops and workdays.

The expansion of Farm, Fork, and Fiddle and its food-focused programming will give residents a sense of ownership in their community by supporting an organization that features local producers in a market, offers educational workshops, improves health by expanding access to fresh produce, and offers a gathering space and events venue for community members.

The FFF is completely run by volunteers, who also donated their labor to renovate the yellow house. An open house in March 2016 attracted 200 to 300 visitors.

Despite this recent progress, Gainesville still faces a number of challenges that can be addressed by further strengthening residents' connection with local agricultural production. The city offers few options for entertainment, recreation, or employment, leading many residents to leave its borders for work and play. Accordingly, local businesses have found it difficult to thrive in Gainesville. Residents experience high poverty rates, limited access to fresh, healthy food, and resulting negative health outcomes. The median household income in Gainesville is \$22,500, well below the median income of \$47,380 for Missouri as a whole. More than 84 percent of adults consume less than the recommended five servings of fruits and vegetables per day, and almost half of students in kindergarten through sixth grade are overweight or obese. Overall, Gainesville exhibits an obesity rate of 31 percent and a diabetes rate of almost 13 percent.



Figure 2 – Tour of OCHFP member Amelia LaMair's farm. Image Credit: Renaissance Planning

The Ozark County Health Department is another key group working in partnership with the OCHFP to improve health in the city and county. The department is working with Maternal Child Health Services to address obesity in children and launching an educational campaign to gauge interest in a community garden. The health department also worked with the nonprofit One Garden to make fresh food more accessible by connecting growers with agencies serving low-income families, providing 2,500 pounds of produce through its "Plant It Forward" program.

In addition to the OCHFP and Ozark County Health Department, a number of organizations across the city and county are involved in strengthening the community's food system, including the Ozark County Senior Center, the Ozark County Food Pantry, county schools, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the University of Missouri Cooperative Extension, Ozarks Neighborly Exchange, the East Wind community, the Ozark County Chamber of Commerce, the Ozarks Heritage Gardening Club, local businesses, and the Ozark County Times.

While the OCHFP has made a lot of headway towards their vision, they need help communicating their vision with the community. Many residents know that the group runs the FFF, but do not fully understand the vision behind their efforts – to make Gainesville a vibrant, self-sufficient, and enjoyable community. Communicating their vision and attracting new customers is also key to the financial sustainability of the FFF. OCHFP needed assistance in developing a plan to attract new customers, communicate their vision, and organize and prioritize their goals.

In 2015, OCHFP requested assistance through the Local Foods, Local Places (LFLP) program to develop an action plan for continuing growth of the OCHFP, and tapping into the interest in local foods and products to improve public health and bring new energy to downtown Gainesville. The community’s goals are well aligned with the goals of the LFLP program, which 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.

The LFLP program is supported by 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). Gainesville was one of 27 communities across the United States that the federal partners selected to participate in the program in 2016.

The community formed a LFLP Steering Committee in preparation for this technical assistance project, which is comprised of members of the OCHFP who also represent other groups in

Gainesville (see Figure 3). In their request for LFLP technical assistance, OCHFP requested assistance in defining their vision and setting realistic goals and developing a clear plan to move that vision forward.

The remainder of this report and appendices document the engagement process, the workshop activities, and most importantly, the action plan and next steps for achieving the OCHFP’s goals. The LFLP Steering Committee helped plan the workshop and guide the community’s initial steps to implement the resulting action plan documented in this report and Appendix A. The goals identified during the workshop and which the action plan is organized around are:

1. The Farm, Fork, and Fiddle (FFF) is fully operational and sustainable into the future.
2. New partners are supporting the Farm, Fork, & Fiddle

## LOCAL FOODS, LOCAL PLACES STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

**Amelia LaMair**, OCHFP board member, farmer

**Jessi Dreckman**, OCHFP President, Ozark County Times reporter

**Carole Long**, OCHFP Board member and Kitchen Coordinator

**Pearl Schneider**, OCHFP Board member, Ozarks Neighborly Exchange

**Dennise Lawson**, OCHFP Secretary

**Jeffrey Goss**, OCHFP member, farmer

**Susan Shipley**, OCHFP member, R.N. at Ozark County Health Department

*Figure 2 - The LFLP Steering Committee in Gainesville*

3. The Farm, Fork, & Fiddle has broad membership and community-wide support
4. Farm, Fork, and Fiddle leads to community improvements that support health, local foods, and economic vitality

## Engagement

The technical assistance engagement process for LFLP has three phases, illustrated in Figure 4 below. The assessment phase consists of three preparation conference calls with the LFLP 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 workshop in the community. The next steps phase includes three follow up conference calls as well as process reporting and documentation.

The community workshop occurred on May 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>, 2016, and included a tour of Gainesville's downtown and parts of nearby Ozark County and an evening community meeting at The Ozark County Historium—a non-profit dedicated to preserving and celebrating Gainesville's history—in downtown Gainesville (Day 1); and a pair of action-planning work sessions, also at The Ozark County Historium (Day 2). The community meeting and all-day working session were well attended by key stakeholder groups, residents, and local leaders. The workshop sign-in sheets are provided in Appendix D.

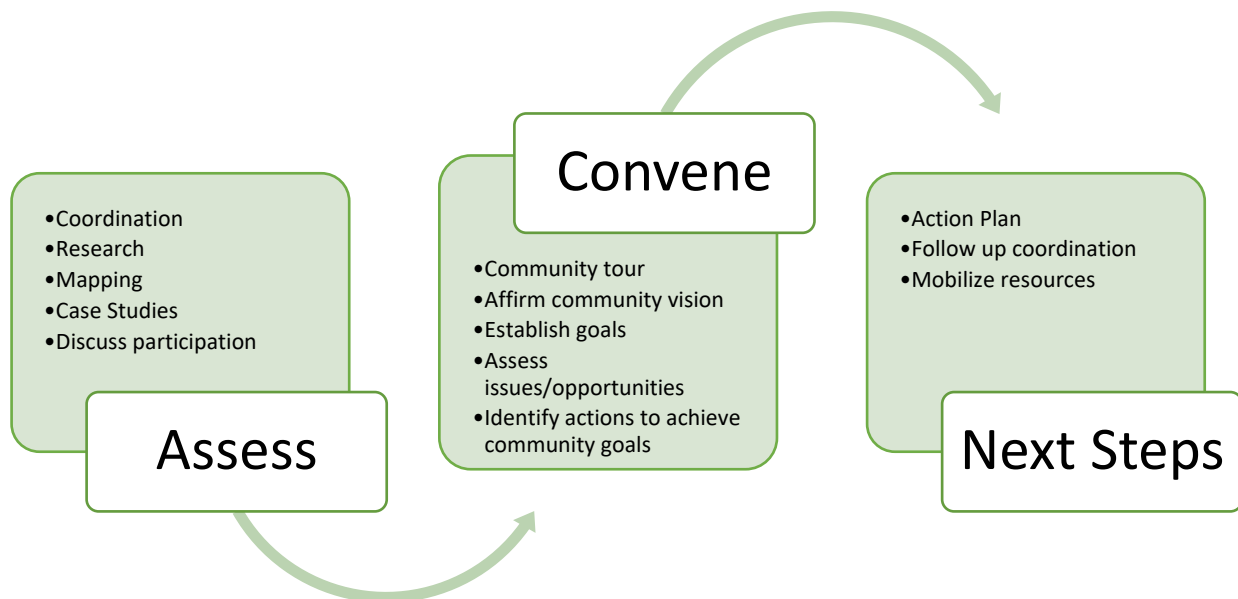


Figure 3 - Local Foods, Local Places Technical Assistance Process Diagram

## Community Tour

The LFLP Steering Committee led the workshop facilitators and federal agency partners on a tour of key places and projects in the Gainesville area that started in downtown with a tour of the Farm, Fork, and Fiddle. The group then drove to Dawt Mill for lunch. Dawt Mill is a refurbished mill that features cabins, a lodge, and a restaurant that incorporates food grown on site. Following lunch, the group drove to Hodgson's Mill, Amelia Lamair's (OCHFP member) farm (see Figure 2), the nearby city park that was at one point considered for the community garden, the elementary school garden, and the Ozark County Times. The tour provided an overview of challenges and opportunities facing the community, and

allowed for informal discussions about the local food system and place-making efforts. A number of the locations visited are shown in pictures here and in Appendix H.

## Vision and Values

More than 35 local residents and representatives of regional, state, and federal agencies attended the first night of the workshop. Amelia Lamair, board member of the OCHFP, welcomed attendees to the event and spoke about the organization's ongoing efforts. The consultant team outlined the goals of the workshop process and introduced the topics and program overview with a short presentation. To break the ice, facilitators led attendees through a quick exercise called "This I Believe" in which participants stand up and say something they believe about their community. Those ideas are summarized in Figure 5

Following this activity, the facilitators asked meeting attendees to consider how the success of the Farm, Fork, and Fiddle can positively transform the community. Participants wrote their answers down on note cards and then followed up by naming the challenges to reaching that vision of positive change. These responses are summarized in Figure 5.

The first day concluded with a review of the community goals on which the workshop focused, and a discussion about the direction for action planning to follow the next day. These goals were further refined, evolving into the action plan implementation tables that are summarized below (full version in Appendix A).

The second day of the workshop included two guest speakers. The first was Rachel Luster to speak about her efforts to start the nearby Oregon County Co-op. She spoke on how her idea got started, how their co-op is set up, and gave advice on how to grow membership and involve the community. The highlights of her presentation include:

- The organization of the co-op allows all active members to have equal voting power.
- 100 percent of the profits go back to the community in the form of monthly community events, meals, and festivals.

## ENGAGEMENT RESULTS:

### I Believe Gainesville:

- Is self-sufficient
- Has helpful, passionate people
- Is a model for other cities
- Has untapped resources
- Has many different groups and types of people but all are working together to make the FFF work
- Can work cooperatively toward success
- Is walkable
- Draws quality, like-minded people
- Is accepting and progressive
- Has a strong community-oriented spirit

### How the FFF can transform Gainesville:

- Increased jobs
- Becoming a center for health
- Youth are staying
- No one is hungry
- Unifies community
- More people moving here

### Challenges to achieving that vision:

- Clear communication
- People's time
- Cost of materials and programs
- Financial sustainability
- Getting enough volunteers who show up
- Growing enough food
- Federal regulations on farming
- Getting youth interested

Figure 5 - Workshop Participants' summarized their vision for the FFF and local food system and the challenges they face.

## Local Foods, Local Places Technical Assistance Workshop

- It is an incorporated non-profit that has a Board of Directors and a Youth Council.
- The best way to get the work out in their experience is through paper mail outs
- They recently adopted a Code of Conduct

The second guest speaker was Jenny Rasico from nearby Flippin, Arkansas, whose community participated in the LFLP program in 2015. She provided insights into their endeavors starting a farmers market and involving the community in their local food endeavors. Some elements of their downtown and local food initiatives that were started following the LFLP workshop last year include:

- Farmers market is now Fridays from 3 PM until dark. They have incorporated music and are building a market pavilion.
- They started a school garden and planted apple trees that provide apples for the cafeteria.
- They received a sidewalk grant to connect the garden, the school, and the town square.
- They built a skate park with financial assistance from a grant.

Following these presentations, workshop participants mapped the local food system of Gainesville and the downtown assets and opportunities. The purpose of these exercises was to highlight the potential for growing the local food economy, and possible connections between the OCHFP's initiatives and community assets. For example, the assets and opportunities mapping highlighted the need for a better sidewalk connecting the downtown square to the Farm, Fork, and Fiddle. The results of these two activities are documented in Appendix B.

## Action Plan

The culminating product of the workshop is a strategic action plan to guide implementation. The plan is organized around four goals and includes actions the participants brainstormed at the meeting and during follow up calls. The goals and actions that are part of this plan are summarized below and are contained in their full detail in Appendix A. The action plan matrix in Appendix A helps to further clarify, prioritize, and define roles and responsibilities for moving forward on these actions.

### GOAL 1: The Farm, Fork, and Fiddle (FFF) is fully operational and sustainable into the future

The FFF is the OCHFP's flagship endeavor. The workshop included discussions on how to proceed into the future with the FFF. The yellow house the FFF is currently located in has doubled in rent. The house needs significant renovations to improve the heating and cooling, plumbing, and organization of the space. The yellow house, however, is a significant landmark in downtown known by most Ozark County residents, which lends itself to greater support from the community in improving the space. The exterior of the yellow house could benefit from new siding to refresh the color and a larger sign so that the FFF catches the eye of passersby and intrigues them to come inside. In addition to physical repairs to bring the house up to date, there are organizational considerations to the structure of the FFF and how decisions are made and work is divvied up.

- **Action 1.1:** Consider the long-term location for the FFF. The co-op can either stay in the house and renovate, or it must soon find a new location.
- **Action 1.2:** Determine how to structure the co-op so that everyone feels they have a say in the future of the FFF.
- **Action 1.3:** Improve storage space issues in the kitchen to free up space for the storage of more fresh produce.

- **Action 1.4:** Apply a fresh coat of paint to the FFF and make a sign that is more visible to passersby.

GOAL 2: New partners are supporting the Farm, Fork, & Fiddle

One aspect of the success of the FFF is to have enough vendors and a diversity of products to attract new customers and keep existing customers coming back. One area in particular the OCHFP has struggled with is to have a meat vendor, which would draw in a number of new customers. There are certain regulations with the state health department and the USDA that require meat sold to be certified by the USDA. The OCHFP would also benefit from expanded storage space for produce they receive from local vendors. An additional action step identified at the workshop is to create a list of potential vendors to contact and invite to sell at the FFF. Expanding the vendor base can increase the customers shopping at the FFF.

- **Action 2.1:** Identify a meat vendor to sell at the FFF.
- **Action 2.2:** Improve infrastructure for receiving and storing produce, eggs, etc.
- **Action 2.3:** List out potential vendors to contact and make a publicly available directory.

GOAL 3: The Farm, Fork, & Fiddle has broad membership and community-wide support

The other crucial component to the success of the FFF is a broad customer base and support from the community. This goal entails action steps centered on better communication with the community and customer base and expanding the customer base through targeted outreach and holding more community-wide events.

- **Action 3.1:** Engage as many community groups as possible. Create a list of potential groups to engage and recruit.
- **Action 3.2:** Develop a support directory of other groups.
- **Action 3.3:** Create a schedule of monthly events.
- **Action 3.4:** Develop a communication network to ensure a reliable source of produce at FFF. Develop an efficient and easy way to let customers know what is available each day for purchase at the FFF.
- **Action 3.5:** Investigate the potential to set up SNAP/WIC capabilities at the FFF.
- **Action 3.6:** Educate shoppers on what produce is being sold and how to prepare it (recipes, samples).

GOAL 4: Farm, Fork, and Fiddle leads to community improvements that support health, local foods, and economic vitality

Finally, the FFF is an opportunity to tie in broader community development goals, such as revitalizing downtown. The actions below will not only help to increase knowledge and support of the FFF, but lead to benefits for downtown Gainesville, such as more successful businesses and people electing to shop in town rather than driving to other communities or ordering items online for home delivery.

- **Action 4.1:** Launch a Friday or Saturday night market with music at the FFF.
- **Action 4.2:** Install sidewalk from the town square to the FFF.
- **Action 4.3:** Confirm the location to build the community garden. Build the community garden. Hold classes and workshops in the garden to teach people how to grow food.



## Implementation and Next Steps

Three post-workshop conference calls were held during June and July 2016, following the workshop. The calls were held with the LFLP Steering Committee and a few additional stakeholders whose interest was cultivated during the workshop. They worked to refine the action plan and add clarifying language.

### Delta Regional Authority Implementation Assistance

The DRA is making available to each of the LFLP communities in its service area some implementation funding assistance of up to \$25,000 per community. The funding is to be targeted towards specific actions identified in the workshop and post-workshop action planning effort.

## Appendices

- Appendix A – Action Plan Implementation Tables
- Appendix B – Local and Regional Maps
- Appendix C – Workshop Participants
- Appendix D – Community Data Profile
- Appendix E – Funding Resources
- Appendix F – References
- Appendix G – Presentation Slides
- Appendix H – Workshop Photo Album