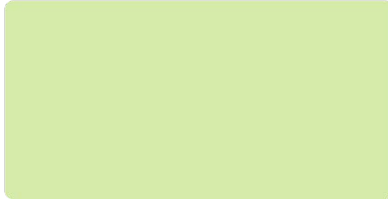
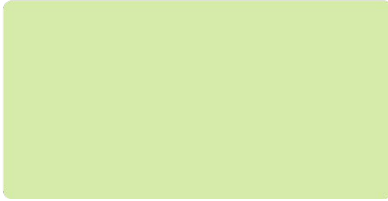
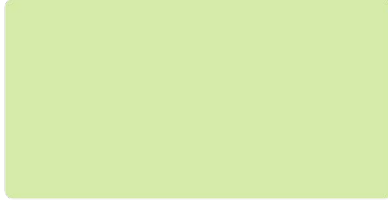
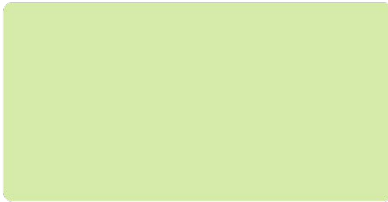
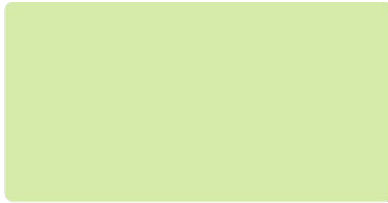




LOCAL FOODS, LOCAL PLACES

Technical Assistance Program



Strengthening the
Local Foods System
and Downtown
Revitalization:
Actions and Strategies
for Lake Village, Arkansas
December 2016



Community Story

Lake Village, Arkansas, is located in the Lower Delta region approximately 125 miles southeast of Little Rock. The city is on the Greater River Road National Scenic Byway and lies beside the picturesque shoreline of Lake Chicot, North America’s largest, natural oxbow lake formed from the Mississippi River. Lake Village is home to just over 2,500 people as the seat of Chicot County. The city houses nine sites on the National Register of Historic Places as well as the state’s only tourist information center heated and cooled entirely with solar energy. The economy of Lake Village centers largely on agriculture and aquaculture with cotton, soybeans, wheat, and catfish the primary products.



Figure 1 – City Hall building in downtown Lake Village. Image Credit: Renaissance Planning

In recent years Lake Village has made remarkable progress in promoting public health and economic development by providing new park space and infrastructure for public access to the outdoors. Henry Augustus Johnson Park is a half-mile linear park in the city’s north side that connects several community health assets focused on senior care, outdoor recreation, exercise, childhood education, and gardening. Residents have exhibited strong demand for a community garden space along the park, leading to the construction of more beds. The Rodney Angel Memorial Sports Complex is another important park space, attracting teams from several states to its baseball tournaments. Lake Village is also looking to gain economic benefits from tourism centered around outdoor recreation. The city is looking to build a spur connecting it to the Delta Heritage Trail, which is a planned 84-mile pedestrian and bicycle trail on a former railroad right of way between Lexa and Arkansas City.

While the city’s efforts to build these park assets is having a positive effect, Lake Village still faces significant economic and health challenges. Development along a bypass highway has drawn business and vitality out of downtown. Meanwhile, one of Lake Village’s two grocery stores closed, reducing the variety of fresh produce available to residents. Nearly 20 percent of households in Lake Village lack access to a vehicle, making it difficult for people to obtain fresh produce, and leading to diets insufficient in nutritious food. The low rate of physical activity among residents is also an issue, which is reflected in an obesity rate of 41.6 percent and a diabetes rate of 18.8 percent, compared to 34.7 percent and 11.5 percent statewide.



Figure 2 – Community garden within the city’s linear park. Image Credit: Renaissance Planning

In response to these challenges, several stakeholders formed an alliance to launch a cultural change in support of physical fitness and proper nutrition. The Healing Hearts community wellness initiative brings together 25 partners to address

opportunities for and barriers to healthy lifestyles. Workplaces across the city have added wellness programming, and the city has integrated the health of employees into its planning efforts by strategically placing three city parks along primary business districts. In addition, Lake Village has become a Let’s Move! City and hosts community play days. The Community Outreach Center along the linear park offers free fitness classes, health screenings, gym space, and a weight management program under collaboration among the city, the Chicot Memorial Medical Center, and University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) in Lake Village. And a 15-bed community garden in the city’s linear park supports educational programming for children as well as a Master Gardener Program. The city plans to expand it to add more capacity for residents wishing to grow produce.

While these efforts are making a positive change in the health of the city’s people and economy, city leaders feel even more benefits could be captured by better connecting all the programs that are underway in the community. Under the leadership of the city of Lake Village, stakeholders came together in late August 2016 to participate in the Local Foods, Local Places (LFLP) technical assistance program to achieve their vision of permanently reversing negative health trends and supporting economic development downtown.

In 2015, the city requested assistance through the Local Foods, Local Places program to develop an action plan for achieving its vision. The program is supported by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), 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). This report and its appendices document the engagement process, the workshop activities, and most importantly, the action plan and implementation strategies. Lake Village put together an LFLP Steering Committee (Figure 3) consisting of community leaders to help plan the workshop and guide the community’s initial steps to implement the resulting action plan. Implementing the actions described later in this plan can bring several benefits to the community including:

- A revitalized downtown that is the economic anchor of the community.
- More economic opportunities for local farmers and businesses.
- Better access to healthy local food, especially among disadvantaged groups.

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

LOCAL FOODS, LOCAL PLACES STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

JoAnne Bush, Mayor of Lake Village

Dr. Jennifer Conner, University of Arkansas Ext.

John Conner, Southeast Arkansas Community Foundation

Leigh Anthony, UAMS Lake Village

Dolores Dixon, Farmers Market Manager

Sam E. Angel, City Councilman Lake Village and Economic Development Commission

Amanda Box, Lake Village Chamber of Commerce

Figure 3 - The LFLP Steering Committee in Lake Village

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 August 30th and 31st, 2016, and included a tour of Lake Village’s key community assets. An evening community meeting was held at the Lake Village Expo Center on the first day. Day two included a pair of action planning work sessions at the Guachoya Cultural Arts Center. The community meeting and all-day working sessions were well attended by key stakeholder groups, residents, and local leaders. The workshop sign-in sheets are provided in **Appendix D**.

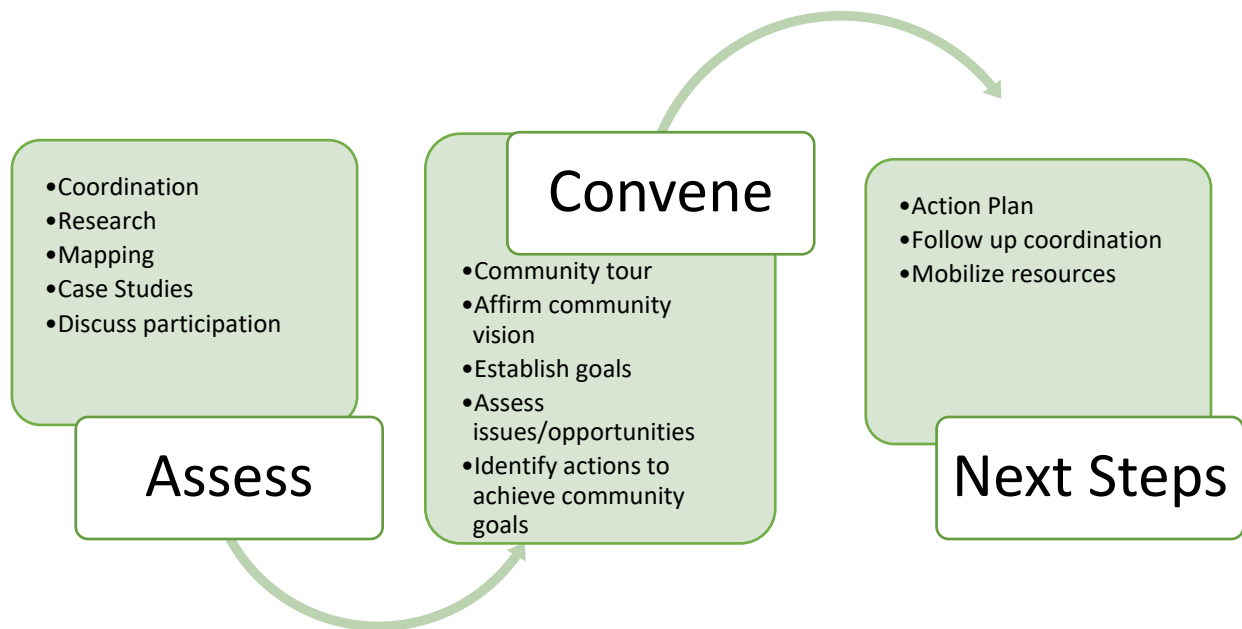


Figure 4 - Technical Assistance Process Diagram

Community Tour

The LFLP Steering Committee led the workshop facilitators and federal agency partners on a tour of key places and projects in the Lake Village area. The tour showcased the city’s community gardens, linear park, CMMC UAMS East Community Outreach Center, and farmers market. The tour provided an overview of challenges and opportunities the community is facing, and allowed for informal discussions about the local food system and ways to tie local food efforts with community wellness initiatives and downtown revitalization. Several of the locations visited are shown in pictures in **Appendix G**.

Vision and Values

More than 30 residents and representatives of regional, state, and federal agencies attended the community meeting. Joanne Bush, the Lake Village mayor, welcomed attendees to the event and spoke about the city’s continued efforts to improve health and wellness. The consultant team outlined the goals of the workshop process and introduced the topics and program overview with a short presentation. To engage the workshop participants, 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 they would define future success in the year 2036 as it relates to health and wellness in the community. Participants were optimistic about the future of Lake Village and described scenarios such as:

- Having the lowest rates of diabetes, heart disease, and obesity in the Delta Region;
- Having an award-winning restaurant in town;
- Celebrating Lake Village’s first all senior marathon;
- Hosting a successful fishing tournament and;
- Having 20 farms growing vegetables in Chicot County.

Following this exercise, participants wrote down their thoughts on challenges to healthier eating (Figure 5) and the greatest opportunities for Lake Village to improve health and downtown.

The community meeting concluded with a review of the community goals on which the workshop focused, and a general overview of the next day’s activities. These goals were further refined to create the action plan implementation tables summarized below and shown in **Appendix A**.

The second day of the workshop included a presentation of case studies and several mapping exercises. The first mapping exercise identified where people go for food and physical activity and ideal pedestrian

ENGAGEMENT RESULTS:

This I believe about Lake Village:

- It’s a great place to raise a family
- Amazing moonrises over the lake
- Potential for tourism and retirement
- Relaxing
- Friendly, loving people
- Coming together and unified
- Great leadership with vision

This I believe about how Lake Village will become a model for healthy community:

- Job opportunities for all
- More walkable
- Community is aware of its assets
- More local farmers and food sources
- More activities for youth
- People taking advantage of outdoor recreation

Challenges to healthier eating:

- Lack of knowledge about preparing healthy foods
- Unhealthy options are easier to prepare
- Lack of transportation to healthy food outlets
- Restaurants that serve healthy foods
- Cost of healthy foods
- Preparing food menus and budgets at home
- Understanding how food affects health
- Habits passed down from generation to generation

Figure 5 - Workshop Participants’ summarized their vision for Lake Village and local food system and the challenges they face.

and bicycling paths throughout the city. The second mapping exercise aimed to identify the producers, markets, and supporters of the Lake Village local food system. 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 of the community's goals. The plan is organized around four goals and includes actions that 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 full detail within **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: A thriving farmers market with more vendors and customers.

Lake Village's current farmers market operates on Highway 65/82, just outside of downtown. There is a new and large sheltered space with tables for vendors, some benches, and an indoor store area where various local products and refrigerated goods are sold. The existing farmers market does not have a set day or time and is open whenever a vendor arrives and sets up. This can be good for vendors since it offers flexibility but also challenging because patrons do not have a market schedule to rely on. There are currently about three active vendors. The market was previously located downtown on the corner of Commerce Street and Main Street. Market vendors did not feel like they had enough visibility at the location and so the market was moved out along the highway.

- **Action 1.1** – Contact nearby farmers markets to learn how they have grown vendors and marketed to customers (Best Practice Research).
- **Action 1.2** – Create a list of potential market vendors, contact them, and recruit them to participate at the Lake Village Market on specific days and times.
- **Action 1.3** – Contact 2-3 food truck vendors and recruit them to set up at regular days and times at the Lake Village Market and downtown.
- **Action 1.4** – Identify and secure weather-durable materials needed for a permanent greenhouse at the city's existing community garden.

Goal 2: A revitalized downtown with new life in underutilized areas.

Downtown Lake Village is uniquely situated with its main street terminating along a beautiful lakefront. The lakefront has an amphitheater, trails, and fishing/swimming docks available to the public. While the lakefront is active, the rest of downtown is struggling to maintain businesses and attract people, like many other small towns around the country. Many buildings are vacant or underused. However, Lake Village benefits from having blocks of whole, intact buildings ready to be reinvigorated as well as empty lots that could be used to support entrepreneurship.

- **Action 2.1** – Assess potential locations, preferable in the downtown area, to set up an entrepreneurship incubator space, similar to the Market Village concept.¹

¹ Market Village is a space for pop up retail businesses in downtown Tionesta, PA. This example was presented as a case study during the second day of the workshop. More information about Market Village is available here: <http://marketvillage.forestcounty.com/>.

Local Foods, Local Places Action Plan – Lake Village, Arkansas

- **Action 2.2** – Identify management for the Market Village concept, hold a solicitation or meeting to determine public interest, and seek sponsors and donations if warranted by interest.
- **Action 2.3** – Identify ownership of vacant downtown buildings and meet with owner(s) to share the community’s vision and gauge their interests in redeveloping properties.
- **Action 2.4** – Organize a downtown arts committee to explore murals, beautification projects, and using vacant space for artists or galleries.
- **Action 2.5** – Establish a satellite downtown farmers market periodically and/or consider a mobile market for downtown.

Goal 3: A connected community with safe walking and biking routes between Lake Village’s food and wellness assets.

Being able to access goods and services has been a long-standing problem for residents who do not have transportation readily available. Nearly 20 percent of residents within Lake Village do not have access to a vehicle. This combined with the lowest median income in the state and high rates of several diseases such as diabetes and obesity elevates the importance of providing non-motorized transportation options for people to access the community food and wellness assets.

- **Action 3.1** – Work with Arkansas State Highways and Transportation Department to design an improved pedestrian and bicycle crossing at the intersection of US 65 and Lakeside Street.
- **Action 3.2** – Install sidewalk along west side of US 65 from Lakeside Street south to the Lake Village Market; Connect with paths back to the sports complex.
- **Action 3.3** – Install appropriate pedestrian-scale lighting along key pedestrian and bicycle routes to illuminate them at night.
- **Action 3.4** – Install bike racks at major destinations (downtown, farmers market, sports complex, lake, etc.) and consider providing community shared bikes at some locations.
- **Action 3.5** – Conduct a bike/pedestrian safety class at the local schools.

Goal 4: More awareness of the assets Lake Village has to offer.

The city of Lake Village is doing a lot to improve the lives of its residents through health, wellness, and recreational activities. Workshop participants identified communication and awareness as a challenge towards getting more people to take advantage of these initiatives. Lake Village is considering several tools to improve awareness, including branding, a central community news source, and a system of wayfinding signs.

- **Action 4.1** – Develop a unified logo and slogan for Lake Village to use on signs, websites, publications, and tourism sites.
- **Action 4.2** – Identify a central source for posting events and community information – may be online, signage, or smart phone application.
- **Action 4.3** – Design and identify locations for wayfinding signs from highway to downtown, lake, and other attractions.
- **Action 4.4** – Seek a commitment to bring the Delta Heritage Trail into Lake Chicot State Park; plan for a long-term connection to downtown Lake Village.

Implementation

Three post-workshop conference calls were held during September, October and December 2016, following the workshop. The calls involved the LFLP Steering Committee and staff from state and federal agencies that attended the workshop. The purpose of these calls was to refine the initial action plan items and identify priorities.

Delta Regional Authority Implementation Assistance

The Delta Regional Authority (DRA) is a sponsor of the LFLP program. The agency is making available to each of the LFLP communities in its service area 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. Lake Village is planning to apply for these funds to implement the following actions:

- **Action 1.3: Contact 2-3 food truck vendors and recruit them to set up at regular days and times at the Lake Village Market and downtown.**
 - As part of Action 1.3, Lake Village would like to use part of the DRA funding to create an awning on the back of the existing farmers market building. An awning would create a flexible space that could be used for food education demonstrations, food truck vendors, and/or overflow space for traditional market vendors.
- **Action 1.4: Identify and secure weather-durable materials needed for a permanent greenhouse at the city's existing community garden.**
 - As part of the DRA funding, Lake Village would like to enlarge the existing greenhouse and create a more weather-durable structure. The existing greenhouse is quite small and is tough for more than one person to work inside at a time. The DRA funding will allow for an expansion of the space. Additionally, Lake Village is hoping to leverage funds through additional cross agency collaboration and working with the CDC to get funds for five additional raised beds in the community garden surrounding the greenhouse.

Additionally, as part of Goal 3 for creating a more connected community to the health and wellness assets, Lake Village would like to use part of the DRA funds to install a BMX pump track near the Neighborhood Outreach Center. A pump track is a combination of berms, small jumps, and cross-overs that are laid out in such a way that riders can “pump” around and gain momentum without the need to pedal their bicycle as much. The track is intended as a space for the community youth to gather as the Neighborhood Outreach Center is more adult-oriented.

Appendices

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