

A Food Hub for Monmouth: A Proposal

INTG 414 Citizenship: Land, Food, and Sustainable Agriculture

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According to a study conducted by the Galesburg Regional Economic Development Association along with J3 Concepts and Michigan State University, the city of Monmouth, Illinois contains an urban food desert in the rural breadbasket of America (50). What this means is that despite the fact that Monmouth is surrounded by farms for miles in any direction, many Monmouth residents struggle with food security and lack access to affordable, fresh, healthy, local foods. Farmers in this area, as in most of the Midwestern United States, tend to grow mostly corn and soybeans which are used as livestock feed or heavily processed by large corporations into less-healthy food products. One way to start changing this unfortunate predicament is to create a food hub in Monmouth. A food hub is a central location for local food producers to sell their fruit, vegetables, meat, dairy, and specialty items all throughout the week, allowing residents to access it when they are able. This would give farmers who choose to grow crops other than corn and soybeans a place to consistently sell their wares somewhere in addition to farmers' markets, which offer limited hours.

### **The Problem**

The total population of Warren County is 17,726. Monmouth is the most populous city with 9,565 people. Roseville is second with 1,125 people, and Alexis is third with 862 people. In Warren County, the unemployment rate is at 4.1%, meaning 726 people do not have a job. When people are unemployed, they are often forced to live off unemployment checks, meaning it is especially important for them to spend their money wisely, due to their fixed income. To spend money in the most efficient way, they are likely to buy the cheapest food that also provides the most calories, looking for the highest calories per dollar in order to get the energy they need to survive. An example of this would be buying a frozen pizza, which, depending on the brand, costs about three dollars and provides around 1,000 calories. That pizza could fill half of the

daily calories for a person. Although the calories are being consumed, this is not the most nutritious meal by far. Having a food hub in the county would provide the nutritious vegetables and fruits that would be a healthier and just as affordable alternative to something like a frozen pizza.

The average household income, meaning the average income of one or two people living together in a household, in Warren County was \$41,636 in 2010. 11.0% of families, and 13.4% of the total population of Warren County are below the poverty line. According to the U.S. Census, the average poverty threshold in the United States, is an annual income of \$15,391. The phrase “poverty line” refers to the estimated minimum level of income needed to secure the necessities of life (United States Department of Commerce). Even though these people are employed, they do not have very high paying jobs, and because of this, they are considered to be living in poverty. With the low household income, and low family incomes, the idea of obtaining the highest calories per dollar is essential to a person, or a family’s, survival. The lack of wealth means the households and families must spend their money wisely, and buying food that lacks nutrition, but has a lot of calories, is more often than not the economically-efficient choice. Having a food hub would allow people who are below the poverty line a chance to better their diets and buy food that is affordable as well as healthy.

Currently, Warren County has one farmers’ market that meets in Monmouth from 7 AM to 12 PM on Friday, from June through October. This does not provide much time for residents to purchase food, especially if they work during some or all of those hours. If residents cannot reach the farmers’ market during those hours, they have virtually no way to easily procure local produce. Residents are also left without any local access to farmers’ markets after October each year, until June of the next. Other stores in town carry only corporate agriculturally-farmed

produce that must be shipped from distant countries with different climates. Local produce is preferable to industrial produce for a number of reasons. Shipping food from all over the world uses fossil fuels and contributes to pollution and global warming. Additionally, when food must be shipped long distances, it must be picked before it is ripe, or it will become damaged or spoiled before it reaches its destination. Many fruits and vegetables do not reach their full potential for flavor, texture, or nutrient density when they are picked too early and ripened artificially. Also contributing to the beneficial qualities of locally grown produce is that much of it is naturally grown (NG), meaning that it is grown without the use of petroleum-based pesticides and fertilizers. Besides contributing to dependence on oil, these petroleum-based products can destroy aquatic ecosystems via the process of eutrophication. When fertilizers wash away in the rain, they tend to flow into rivers and then lakes or the ocean. The buildup of fertilizers leads to unsustainable algal blooms, which then die off. The decomposition of the dead algae then uses up most of the oxygen in the surrounding water, suffocating other living things in the area and leaving large “dead zones.” Beyond the environmental benefits of eating locally, if Monmouth residents were to purchase most of their produce locally, it would keep money in the Monmouth community, rather than handing it over to large corporations. This would mean more jobs in Monmouth and that Monmouth’s wealth would remain in the hands of the people who live there. Between the unemployment, lack of high-paying jobs, and generally low access to local fresh food, Warren County needs a food hub and is in an ideal location to create one.

The current system for buying and selling food does little to serve either the people who grow food or the people who buy it. Besides not being very environmentally-friendly and not being particularly healthy for those who eat it, industrial food is not the best option for people who produce food. Increasingly, farmers must have huge swathes of land, numbered in the

hundreds of acres, in order to be profitable. They are often trapped in a cycle of needing larger equipment to efficiently tend their crops, which costs millions of dollars, and needing to produce more food on more land to cover the price of the equipment. This has led to the end of family farms and towns based around farming, as fewer and fewer people farm more and more land. Those who have not been able to expand have been forced out of farming altogether, meaning they often leave their farming towns. This problem is evident in Monmouth, where the population has been decimated as family farms must be sold to the highest bidder and the families who used to work them must move somewhere else to make a living. The solution for all of these problems lies in a food hub.

### **The Solution**

A food hub is a system for aggregating and distributing local food from a centralized location. The National Food Hub Collaboration defines a food hub more specifically as, “a business or organization that actively manages the aggregation, distribution, and marketing of source-identified food products primarily from local and regional producers in order to satisfy wholesale, retail, and institutional demand” (Food Hubs). The overarching goal of a food hub is to put local buyers in contact with local food growers to provide a fresh and healthy alternative to the industrial food system that currently exists. Food hubs can take many forms. Some small food hubs are essentially just one person or family ordering food in bulk from multiple farmers and then breaking it up into individual orders for other individuals or families. Other forms more closely resemble a buying co-op, where a group of people pools money together to buy a large amount of food in bulk. Some food hubs more closely resemble farmers’ markets, including the model proposed in this paper, but with more hours and generally are at least partially indoors. Essentially, a food hub aims to combine the best and most necessary qualities of farmers’

markets, buying collectives, co-ops, and community-supported agriculture to create a system specifically fitted to the community in which it exists. Overall, the form a food hub takes must depend on the kind of community or group it aims to serve in order for it to be successful. A food hub comprised of several families ordering food together does not serve the overall community the same way that a farmers' market-style food hub may, although it requires much less effort to maintain its existence, and can cater specifically to the needs of those involved.

Evidently, the industrial system does not serve either its producers or consumers. This is especially apparent in the Monmouth area, where the town population has decreased greatly as families that used to farm no longer have a way to support themselves and must move away.

The lack of fresh, local, healthy food is a reason why Monmouth is considered to be a food desert. According to the American Nutrition Association, a food desert is defined as, "parts of the country vapid of fresh fruit, vegetables, and other healthful whole foods, usually found in impoverished areas. This is largely due to a lack of grocery stores, farmers' markets, and healthy food providers" (Gallagher 38:2). When a closer look is taken at the Monmouth community one can see just why it has been given this label. The only fresh choice that citizens have is at County Market. But how fresh is that food? Most of it has been shipped thousands of miles in semi-trucks or trains, with most of it grown on big monoculture farms. That is not the idea of fresh that most have in mind. Other than County Market, there are no other healthy or fresh options for citizens of Monmouth to choose from. This is especially true if we look at the south side of Monmouth. If someone living on the south side of Monmouth does not have a car, their food options come down to this: Dollar General, Family Dollar, Casey's General Store, or food from bars and restaurants. None of these choices are fresh and none of these choices are healthy. Monmouth needs an accessible and affordable place for its residents to buy fresh and healthy



physical location may be used for more than storing and selling the products received from the local growers; it has potential uses such as a community kitchen, that will be discussed later throughout the proposal.

The food hub would be available to Monmouth and the surrounding communities for a set number of hours a few days throughout the week. The hours will be directed toward times that are more convenient for customers to come in and pick out and purchase the food. In order to make the food hub as accessible as possible, it should have approximately four hours on two weekday mornings, approximately four hours on two weekday afternoons, and approximately four hours on two weekday evenings. The most needed hours could be assessed to determine when the food hub should be open on weekends. The figure below shows a potential list of hours of operation.

Day	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Hours	6-10 AM 6-10 PM	CLOSED for aggregation	10AM-2PM	2PM-6PM	8AM-12PM	4PM-10PM	7 AM-1PM

Figure 2: A chart of potential hours the food hub could be open.

Based on the proposed model, it is possible to trace a potential path a food item may take as it travels through the food hub. For example, a head of lettuce may be picked from Spurgeon's Veggies in Galesburg, Illinois. A panel truck or Monmouth College Garden pickup truck would arrive at Spurgeon's at a specific time to pick up that week's produce, including the head of lettuce. The truck would bring the vegetables to the Jamieson Center, a community center and food pantry located in Monmouth, where the food could be examined and sorted. While the Press location works as a centralized space for selling the food, its location in downtown Monmouth makes it less than ideal for unloading and sorting food. As such, the food can be sorted at the

Jamieson Center. If there is an abundance of food that cannot be sold before it expires, it can be donated to the Jamieson Center or to the proposed soup kitchen/food recovery program.

Otherwise, food that is to be sold will then be driven to the former Press location and stocked on shelves for Monmouth residents to buy. It may also be sold to restaurants interested in local produce, such as En Season, located in Galesburg (and slightly up-charged to offset the expense of offering produce to individuals at lower prices). Another potential buyer is the Monmouth College cafeteria.

### **Operational Model**

If the proposal were to be carried out, the operation as a whole would need to function as a non-profit organization. In short, a non-profit organization is not owned by a single entity, but by a board of directors (Galesburg Feasibility Study, 21). In an interview with Liz Hogan, the founder and operations manager of the Quad Cities Food Hub, it was suggested that the food hub be run as a non-profit organization, because of the fundraising and grant opportunities available to non-profits. According to the Galesburg Feasibility Study, some strengths of a non-profit organization include attracting more sponsors, being tax-exempt, being able to charge small fees for membership, and the grant opportunities (21). Some of these strengths will help with bringing in revenue for maintaining the food hub, keeping its prices low, and with bringing in revenue for the farmers that grow the food sold in the food hub. To help with some of the overhead costs, a simple storage and cooling fee could potentially be charged to farmers who sell their food using the food hub (Galesburg Feasibility Study, 23). These overhead costs would consist of the maintenance of the facility and bills needed to keep business buildings running. Charging these fees would cover those costs, leaving the fundraising grant dollars open for other aspects of the business. Another small fee that may be needed to help cover other costs could be delivery fees

from farms to the Jamieson Center. The delivery fees would then cover the labor and transportation cost; i.e. gas for the trucks and payment for the drivers (Galesburg Feasibility Study, 23). Since the overhead costs, like bills and transportation costs are being paid for, that leaves any grant money that is received available for use, while still granting the opportunity to fundraise for any other costs the food hub may incur.

The fundraising opportunities would then cover any other costs that were not covered by the fees that would be applied. Liz Hogan mentioned that a large part of the Quad Cities operation is getting out to the community and fundraising. Most of the time, the fees will not cover the full costs and fundraising must be available as an option. Keeping the grant money open to cover the bigger costs will help ensure that the business can continue running. The main reason why it would be necessary to keep the grant money open, is that coming across grant money can be very difficult. The grant competition is very tough and the application process is very time-consuming (Galesburg Feasibility Study, 21). The grant market being this competitive is a major weakness for a non-profit organization. Keeping those grant dollars available as a “safety net,” one might say, would allow the business some money to fall back on if something were to happen.

Another weakness within a non-profit organization is that there is no direct ownership with the board of directors (Galesburg Feasibility Study, 21). The lack of direct ownership means that different board members may come to want different things and have different goals for the food hub. Members may be determined to do things their own way and have trouble compromising with other members. The board may struggle to come to a consensus on different decisions for the food hub. The board of directors should be to comprised of members with

similar mindsets, goals, and a positive group dynamic to help guide the food hub in the right direction.

In order to avoid this issue, it is proposed that the board include community leaders, such as Paul Schuytema, and Jack Toal, in order ensure that the Monmouth community is represented in the decision-making process. Both Paul and Jack are well known with their involvement at the First Street Armory and the city of Monmouth. The rest of the board could consist of lawyers, for grant writing, and Monmouth College professors such as those involved with the Food Triad and even Professor Craig Watson. With a mixture of both community and College leaders, the board will represent both the city and Monmouth Collge. As was mentioned before, the board of directors would run the operations and ultimately make the decisions for the food hub, and it could be made up of entirely volunteers. Attached (Appendix, chart 1) at the end of the paper is a flowchart of how the business operations would be handled and to give a better picture of how the board would be set up.

Underneath the board of directors would be several mid-level managers. Some of the mid-level managers may include managers of aggregation, distribution, operations, marketing and advertising, food security, and College relations. These managers would be responsible for communicating to lower employees and volunteers how the board would want to run the business and the goals of the business. The manager of aggregation would be responsible for the storage and cooling of the product. Because aggregation is a key component in a food hub, the manager of aggregation would have a very important job. Some day-to-day tasks for that manager would include making sure the cooling systems are working properly, checking the food for spoilage, and keeping track of inventory. The manager of aggregation would also oversee the facility maintenance, including contacting the appropriate people to make repairs

when necessary. In labor costs, this manager would most likely be paid more than the other managers, with the exception of the Operations manager.

The manager of distribution would oversee everything that involves the pickup and delivery of the produce from the farmers. This person would have to coordinate the delivery schedules, and then schedule employees to pick up the food during those specific times. This position would be in the mid-level range for labor. This means that this manager could easily have another full-time job. This manager and the employees would have lower wages since they may or may not have to be working all the time, depending on delivery times. This manager would also have to keep records of the gas, the costs of the trucks, and the employees' wages, which would then in turn, be covered by the delivery fees.

The operations manager would be the main person responsible for running the day-to-day procedures of the food hub. They would look over when the store is open and look over any community volunteers willing to assist with the operations. The community volunteers would then lower the labor costs, helping with the revenue production. The operations manager would be the highest-paid manager, since they are the one in charge, right below the board of directors. Liz Hogan said that it is most important to pay the operations manager since they are the main contact between the board of directors and the rest of the employees.

The managers of marketing and advertising, food security and College relations would all work together in coordinating with the Food Triad, and then any possible College interns and student workers. It is proposed that some of the members of the board of directors be College professors, and these three managers would fit right into that concept. To help cut down on labor costs, most of the workers under these managers would either be students looking for internships or volunteer hours and possibly even work-study students. The interns and student workers

would work with the legal team to handle marketing tactics and grant writing. There are Monmouth College students who would like to learn how to write grants, which is a very marketable skill, and these students could work directly with a lawyer or professor who is part of the board.

Due to the fact that Monmouth has a variety of student organizations on campus, the food hub could easily work together with these organizations. The student volunteers could help move boxes or help with loading the trucks if there is going to be a delivery that day. Some of these organizations, such as Greek life, require a certain number of volunteer hours, this is a solution that helps both parties: the food hub gets volunteers, and the students have a way to fulfill their required hours if needed.

The food hub's operational model would resemble an aggregation center. The aggregation model would allow the food hub to run at an efficient rate and help serve the Monmouth farming community. According to the Galesburg Feasibility Study conducted by Michigan State University, an aggregation center is common food hub model that utilizes a brick-and-mortar facility to receive and store products from producers for resale (22). These facilities either act as brokers for products received, or purchase the products outright for resale (22). The farmer brings in their produce to the central location, where they will sell their produce to members of their general public. Farming is a business; farmers will not buy into an idea that would ultimately fail. This is why the farmer would hopefully be more inclined to continue working with the hub. Therefore, it is clear that the aggregation center model is the best system for organizing the food hub.

Basic services that an aggregation center can bring include: product storage and cooling, distribution, joint marketing, and crop planning (Galesburg Feasibility Study, 23). With the

number of services available, a Monmouth-area food hub becomes more attractive to potential farmers and investors. Product storage would help all of the farmers that either do not have the proper storage facilities or do not have enough room to store all of their produce. With the food hub storing the produce it will later sell, the farmer now can focus their attention on storing and selling their other produce.

A benefit of the storage concept of a food hub is the possibility of working with multiple farmers that grow the same kind of produce. If there are farmers that can grow the same product with the central location, this would maximize the volume of that type of produce available to the Monmouth community (Illinois Food Hub Guide, 14). In other words, the farmers that grow the same produce would be able to come together at the location, and offer the community the proper amount of that specific product without running out. That allows the community to come whenever they are available and then buy the necessary items to help provide for their family.

Along with the storage, the food hub would then provide the option to refrigerate the produce. Each product would require a specific temperature to help preserve it longer and have it available to buy. According to the Illinois Food Hub Guide, written in conjunction with the Illinois Departments of Commerce and Agriculture, and University of Illinois, when the produce is taken away from the field and then cooled, the risks of bacteria and mold forming decrease significantly (15). The cooling would allow the food hub to keep produce on the shelf longer, without losing its freshness and the quality of the produce to make it safe for consumers.

By providing the cooling and storage of the produce, the food hub would be able to offer a distribution aspect to the business. The food hub would be able to go to the area farmers, pick up the produce and then bring it all into a central location. The distribution aspect would cut down on the farmers bringing in their own produce, and then save them money and time in the

process. It is proposed that, in order to best provide a distribution aspect to the food hub, two different trucks be available to pick up and deliver produce to the central location. When talking to Jack Toal, he mentioned the use of a panel truck that is currently owned by the First Street Armory, as well as the truck used for Monmouth College's Educational Garden. With these two possibilities, the business would then have the access to two trucks in case there is a high level of productivity or one of the trucks is having mechanical issues. If only one truck were available, mechanical issues could cause the entire food hub to grind to a halt, costing the food hub and the farmers, as well as disappointing the consumers who may have come to rely on the food hub for their produce.

In a food hub, the facility is a key component in running the operation. The facility must be able to cool the produce, act as a central location, have the appropriate size, and have a loading dock to make the distribution process go smoothly (Galesburg Feasibility Study, 23). There are currently two possible locations for the food hub: the Jamieson Center and, as previously stated the location of the Press, a coffee shop that closed recently in downtown Monmouth. Both locations have cooling facilities to help, and they will work adequately for running the food hub. With talking with Farhida, a student at Monmouth College, and helping with her project of a community kitchen for the city of Monmouth, the only thing standing in the way of using the old Press building is a code inspection to make it safe for the actual preparation of cooked food. The size of the facility would also have to be large enough to house a large yield of produce in the case of an unexpectedly productive year for farmers (Galesburg Feasibility Study, 23). A business that does not have sufficient storage for their product would lose contributors, and it would reflect badly on operations. The central locations of the Press building and the Jamieson Center would benefit the food hub because part of the goal of the project is to

decrease the amount of land in Monmouth that can be considered a food desert. The Press building is right on Main St. and the Jamieson Center is in the middle of what is known as the lower income part of town. These centrally located buildings will give the consumers a better option to find the produce they need instead of traveling to another place to buy.

In the interview with Liz Hogan, she discussed how aggregation and distribution are the two most important things a food hub needs to focus on. This is especially true in Monmouth, because it is a small rural area, where most of the farmers grow the typical commodity crops of soybeans and corn. The farmers who grow a variety of produce need a location to bring the food where it can be sold. The produce aggregation concept means workers would pick up the produce and then the food hub location would be able to store the food all while cutting down the costs for all involved. With the proper aggregation and distribution aspects in place, the food hub would be in good hands and off to a good start.

Storage and distribution are two of the main services that a food hub can offer. As stated earlier, the hub can also offer marketing tactics and crop planning. The marketing tactics would help the farmer reach out to other farmers and the consumers when the food hub is not open for business. In the operational model, there could be one person specifically responsible for handling the marketing, producer relationships, and customer sales (Illinois FoodHub Guide, 17). This would allow the farmers and the food hub to get their names out to the community and help support local farmers and small businesses.

Marketing is another huge tool in reaching out to others, and an additional aspect that would help farmers involved in the food hub is crop planning. With crop planning, the food hub can offer insight to the farmer as to what specific produce to grow and then sell based on the demand of the community. Crop planning is key in having the farmer produce the most product

while generating the revenue for the farmer to continue the practice. In Monmouth, this part of the operation would help the farmers maximize their land compared to the larger farms that grow corn and soybeans. This would allow the small-scale farmers to stay competitive in their respective fields.

### **Steps for Implementation**

The first step is to gauge interest from potential consumers and producers. If there is no interest, or the food hub does not properly address the interests and desires of those who would be involved in it, then it will fail. Thus, it is essential to understand what Monmouth residents would like to see on the shelves of the food hub and what kinds of produce they are interested in, as well as what types of produce are available locally. Accomplishing this may be as simple as going to farmers' markets and speaking with the farmers and their customers. That way, it is possible to know first-hand what would make the food hub successful.

The next step after this is contacting a legal team. A legal team is necessary to establish the food hub's status as a non-profit, which will allow those working for it to get government and other grants. Luckily, Monmouth College has a legal team that may be able to take on some or all of these responsibilities at little or no cost to those hoping to implement the food hub.

Without grants and money from the government, our non-profit food hub will crumble. After hiring a lawyer to draw up the proposals and establish the food hub as a non-profit organization, next is applying for the grants and securing the funding. From there it becomes possible to plan a budget based on how much funding is received from grant proposals. Lastly, it is necessary to obtain a lease for an actual physical location in Monmouth. There are several options moving forward, but the decision will all come down to cost and opportunity to grow and upgrade. The

location needs to be affordable and accessible while having enough space for the current proposed uses as well as potential future projects.

### **Potential Participants**

One of the first things that needs to be established for the food hub to function is a number of local food growers interested in participating in the food hub. Without them, the food hub cannot exist. They are the backbone of the operation and buy-in from them is the only way this proposition will be able to work. In the figure below is a list of area farmers' markets within fifty miles of Galesburg. In regards to scale, it seems that fifty miles is an adequate area to look for local participants, as it is a reasonable driving distance that can be completed, round-trip, in about two hours. After talking with Liz Hogan, she explained that they began their research into potential contributors by traveling to the local farmers' markets in the Quad Cities and having each farmer they talked to take a survey on whether or not they would want to participate in the food hub. This approach can be used for the Monmouth area as well. As is apparent from the list of farmers' markets in the area, there exists an ample number of farmers to help produce for the food hub. Another tool that could be used to help find potential contributors is a website called LocalHarvest.org. Local Harvest allows anyone to enter a zip code and be presented with a map that shows local farms, farmers' markets, restaurants, and grocery stores. Each location that is represented on the map has additional information that can help in determining if the owners of the farm may be interested in participating in a food hub or other local food project, such as contact information.

Aledo Farmers' Market	Lewistown Farmers' Market
East Moline Farmers' Market/Skate City (Quad Cities)	Macomb Farmers' Market
East Peoria Farmers' Market	Metro Centre Farmers' Market (Peoria)
Galesburg Farmers' Market	Monmouth Farmers' Market
Geneseo Farmers' Market	Oneida Farmers' Market
Heights Farmers' Market (Peoria Heights)	Pekin Downtown Farmers' Market
Kewanee Farmers' Market	Peoria Riverfront Farmers' Market

Figure 3: List of Farmers' Markets within a fifty-mile radius

### **Feasibility**

According to the Galesburg Feasibility Study done by Michigan State University, there are several barriers to local food producers meeting demand which include: cost, learning new methods, time, labor, lack of supportive infrastructure, regulatory environment, and access to land (13).

From talking to Dusty Spurgeon of Spurgeon's Veggies in Galesburg, it became apparent that the Galesburg food hub was unsuccessful for a number of reasons. One such reason was that the food hub was spearheaded by an organization with strict regulations on the way its food was grown. Generally speaking, farmers do not tend to take well to this type of regulation, and as such, many chose to end their collaboration with the Galesburg food hub. This issue can be resolved by letting the farmers grow their produce as they wish and simply labeling it with the important differences from other produce. Additionally, farmers can be difficult to contact in the first place because most are older and tend to not be very active on the internet. This issue can be combated by approaching farmers at farmers' markets and such when it comes time to find participants. Also, it is important for food hub workers or volunteers to be able to pick up from the farmers, as the farmers may not have time to deliver the food to a central location such as the Press or the Jamieson Center.

Many farmers may be asked to produce more than they have in the past, which means they will be required to up-scale their current production methods. This will undoubtedly result in farmers investing in new equipment, land, and certain facilities that are required when moving up from a smaller scale operation. According to the Galesburg Feasibility study, other costs may include increased labor, processing materials and additional liability insurance (13).

Producing for the food hub may require new methods of handling and recording the food the farmer's produce, since certain standards have to be met in order to be able to sell to grocery stores in the future. This can include regulation for the cultivation, harvest and post-harvest handling of the food. With the increase of production comes an increase in the amount of time the farmer will have to put into their crop. This time will be spent learning the new methods described above as well as learning all the ends and outs it takes to produce on a larger scale. An increased production leads to an increase in the size of the operation, which leads to an increase for the demand for reliable and knowledgeable labor. This may also cost more since the farmers will be asked to do more difficult and higher-skilled jobs.

Existing operations may have custom built slaughterhouses and other infrastructure that would not be suitable for the increase in the demand they may be receiving as a result of their participation in the food hub. This is especially true when we look at the meat and poultry products. Gaining access to an inspected commercial kitchen for certain types of processing can also be challenging (Galesburg Feasibility Study, 13). Farmers may also be hindered by confusion about certain regulations that come with selling wholesale and with new regulations that may impact local food producers in the future. Additionally, small scale producers may have little or no access to land that will be needed to meet the new demand for either producing a specialty crop or additional land needed for livestock.

A majority of this project is dependent on securing funding to keep the food hub in operation as well as the employees paid. The funding that would be received for the food hub would come through government grants, with the potential of seeking out loans through Monmouth College. There are several hurdles to overcome before the hub can be considered a successful operation, with a number of challenges standing in the way of making this solution feasible and sustainable, the least of which involves the actual food production. Timothy Lindsey, who collaborated on the Illinois Food Hub Guide, states, “The aggregation services that food hubs can provide is a focus for agricultural development because local demand at the wholesale level cannot be met without the engagement of small to mid-sized growers” (Lindsey, 48). Potential producers face a multitude of challenges, namely: the quantity, consistency, and variety of produce being grown is not enough to motivate a buyer to purchase from a single farm. In addition, a majority of growers do not have the time, interest, or skill set to manage a wholesale operation as well as creating and maintaining a successful marketing strategy. These requirements are difficult for small to mid-sized farmers to meet, but if multiple producers team up to combine their harvests, some of these challenges become easier to take on. The biggest concern lies in the sustainability of the operation. Finding enough producers to sustain the volume necessary is a looming concern. If there are enough producers secured for a long-term operation, the next most important concern is acquiring the necessary grants to get the project off the ground.

Without grants, the food hub will cease to exist. Without enough producers or enough product, the food hub will cease to exist. There is a direct correlation between the two; money is a necessity to be able to sell the product, but it is also necessary to be able to maintain the sustainability of the product in order to have something to sell. There are a number of grants

available to the community, as well as the farmers that are producing the food. All of the grants listed below are given out through the government, specifically the United States Department of Agriculture. The first potential grant that is available is the Farmer's Market and Local Food Promotion Program. This divides up \$15 million in grants for direct-to-consumer outlets, as well as grants for local and regional food enterprises that are not direct farmer-to-consumer markets, including food hubs, food aggregators, food distributors, food wholesalers, and shared-use kitchens. The second grant is the Specialty Crop Block Grant. This grant was spurred on by the creation of the Specialty Crop Competitiveness Act of 2004, which authorized the USDA to provide grants to states to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops. These crops include fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, horticulture, and nursery crops (including floriculture). This grant is useful in helping the producers in the Monmouth area break away from the monoculture of a corn and soybean dominant agricultural model. A grant from the state can be beneficial to the surrounding community and could generate interest in farmers to convert some of their acreage from commodity crops to more specialized ones. The next potential grant is the Community Food Projects Competitive Grants Program. CFP grants are designed to increase food security in communities by bringing the whole food system together to assess strengths, establish linkages, and create systems that improve the self-reliance of community members over their food needs. This grant can help to strengthen the relationship between local producers and consumers, as well as determine the weaknesses in the establishment and evaluate possible solution for them. These projects are funded with anywhere from \$10,000-\$300,000 and are funded from 1 to 3 years. The Business and Industry Guaranteed Loan Program's purpose is to improve, develop, or finance business, industry, and employment; as well as improve the economic and environmental climate in rural communities. A borrower must be engaged in or

proposing to engage in a business that will provide employment and improve the economic or environmental climate. Loans can be used to finance new facilities and equipment necessary to process local products. This loan offers a maximum of \$10 million to any one borrower, with the project being located in an eligible rural area, which is defined as being outside of cities with a population of 50,000 or more and the surrounding built-up areas (Warren County has a population of a little over 17,000). For this grant program, Monmouth College would be the ideal borrower for the loan, which would increase the synergy between the college and community.

### **Benefits of A Food Hub**

The basis of the proposal for creating a food hub in Monmouth has several associated benefits for the local economy, for the community, for the producers, and for the consumers. “Food hubs have emerged as critical players in establishing and building strong local and regional food systems, and can provide efficient local and regional value chain linkages at a vastly reduced scale compared to leading industry players. They also create opportunities for small to mid-sized producers to reach wholesale markets (that critical 99% of all food sales)” (Lindsey, 10). The idea behind a food hub is to bring together local resources (such as niche farmers and producers) and consumers (the general public/local community). A niche farmer is defined as a farmer who produces specialty crops, namely outside of the mass-produced agricultural products. For the Monmouth community, which is surrounded by farms of mostly soybeans and corn, finding niche farmers can feel like trying to find a needle in a haystack. Several specialty farmers do exist in this monoculture dominant area, an example of which is Spurgeon’s Veggies in Galesburg, specializing in organic free-range chickens, eggs, and a variety of vegetables. While this food hub is not solely focused on the idea of wholesale, there

are a select few local farms that could contribute as wholesale; Spurgeon's does wholesale with in season, a restaurant in Galesburg that specializes in local, organic or naturally grown food. The proposed food hub will focus on creating and fostering relationships between the community of Monmouth and local food growers in the surrounding area.

A few of the most basic areas that will benefit from the food hub include low-income families in the area, local farmers such as the Spurgeon family, Monmouth College students, and the Monmouth community in general. For the low-income families in the area, the food hub will represent a way to help them get the affordable and nutritious food that many are lacking in their diet due to the prevalence of food deserts in the area. A food hub in Monmouth would lead to the shrinkage of food desolate areas. A central location in town for the hub will allow members of the community all over town to enjoy fresh local produce. The appeal of the food hub to the low-income families in town is that the food hub will offer the option of accepting food stamps such as Link and SNAP. This way, families do not have to worry about not being able to afford fresh food, and can instead focus on their health and well-being. One of the primary targets for the hub is single parents, who may also fall into the low-income category. Modified hours will allow parents access to the hub when they have time, mainly a few hours in the evening on weekdays, and longer hours on the weekends, or earlier hours in the morning on weekends. This will allow parents to swing by on their way home from work or after picking up kids from school or practice to purchase food. As far as marketing the food hub, the majority of the advertising will go through local churches, as well as the Jamieson Center. The decision to market through these platforms was because these organizations will be more aware of which families are struggling with income, but still deserve access to fresh food, and because of their charitable disposition. Another big pull for the community in general is that more and more people are seeking out fresh

and local food, so it makes sense for Monmouth to cater to this need. Timothy Lindsey states, “one out of six Americans will go out of their way to buy local products. Locally sourced fruits and vegetables was the product category with greatest consumer interest, with 31% purchasing this product category from local sources at least once per week” (Lindsey 10). That being said, there is a very strong market for local food, even in the small town of Monmouth, as evidenced by the number of community members at the city farmers’ market in the fall. The local fresh food also represents a nutritional godsend in this area of heavily processed foods. Two of the largest nutrition benefits from eating locally grown food includes the presence of more nutrients and vitamins in the food because the time from field to table is drastically reduced, as well as a safer food supply due to the decreased risks of contamination. This food that is locally grown is also beneficial to the environment, as it preserves fossil fuels because it does not need to be imported, exported, or shipped around the country. Eating locally produced foods also leads to economic benefits for the community as a whole, as well as producers. For example, the money that is spent with local farmers and growers all stays close to home and is reinvested with businesses and services in your community. By purchasing locally grown foods, consumers help maintain farmland and green and/or open space in their community. “Growers could benefit from the significantly higher market value of fresh market crops by converting acreage from commodity crops” (Lindsey, 11). What this means for the Monmouth community is utilizing existing farmland in order to move away from producing crops such as soybeans and corn, which require hundreds of acres to turn a profit, and instead working the land for a variety of produce (creating a polyculture). This stimulates the economy, as farmers are getting more money per acre farmed, which allows them to expand the variety of food they produce. The money is also being funneled back into the community from consumers, which is demonstrated in the cash

flow from producer to consumer and back to producer. Job creation is another positive aspect of creating a food hub, with multiple positions available ranging from seasonal production and up to management. Additionally, as food hubs encourage growers to convert acres from commodity to specialty crops, additional farm labor will be needed for manual harvesting. Another aspect of employment relies on the board of directors, comprised of community leaders and professors from the college, as well as those responsible for the aggregation and distribution of the produce. An additional potential option for employment lies with the students of Monmouth College. The food hub may operate as a source for volunteer hours for students, a potential possibility of work-study, or even internship opportunities for those majoring in business or marketing. The work options for these students, whether they be on a volunteer or paid basis, could include working as a cashier or shelf stocker, or potentially working in positions that might be more specific to their major, such as helping with the business side of the operation, the ecology and biology of helping producers to grow more sustainable crops, and assisting the marketing segment of the board of directors with advertising to the community as a whole. Another potential for the future of the food hub is to facilitate its use as a community kitchen as well as offering nutrition education to members of the community.

### **Potential Future Steps**

While the first and most important goal in this proposal is to get the food hub up and running, there is a plethora of potential future directions for a food hub in Monmouth. The expected timeline, from beginning the process of creating a food hub to opening the doors to the public is between six months and one year; which was a suggested timeframe from Liz Hogan. She speculated that, based on the size of the community, the availability of fresh produce, and the number of possible customers, six to twelve months was a reasonable expectation. If the food

hub is opened in a location with an industrial kitchen, it is important to ensure that the kitchen is up to code. Once the kitchen is updated and functional, it can be used for a number of educational and charitable programs. One such program would be hosting various types of cooking classes demonstrating how to prepare local produce that residents may not be familiar with. Ideas for such classes include cooking classes for college students who would like to learn how to cook more than just the typical college staples, classes for single parents and their children, classes for adults with developmental disabilities to learn to prepare food more independently, classes for adults on how to shop for healthy food, and classes for children to learn about cooking basics and the essentials of healthy eating. A functioning kitchen would allow the space to be used as a location for a soup kitchen or other food recovery center. Lastly, the space may also be used as a coffee shop or other social hub of downtown Monmouth to create a pleasant social space to draw in customers and build a sense of community between producers and consumers.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the proposed food hub in Monmouth would help the community substantially. Since Monmouth is considered to be a food desert, and there are numerous people who do not have the access to fresh produce, having a food hub would help solve that problem. Monmouth's farmers' market is almost unknown due to only being open once a week and during the morning on a Friday. During their hours of operation, the community is generally either getting ready for work or at work already and by the time they get off, the farmers' market is closed. With the farmers' market being closed at the hours when it is most convenient for the customer, the food hub would help close the gap. The proposed hours and structure would help meeting the community's needs when it comes to fresh produce for them and their family. The

proposed hours of operation would give the community ample time to go out, buy the produce and then return for work. The Monmouth food hub would be feasible for anyone that would pick this project up. With the number of grants that are available, this project would have the money to get started and succeed. The food hub would also offer employment opportunities for the community and the college as well. This food hub would allow the community members to have the fresh produce that is needed and then help promote healthy eating. This food hub will bring the community together along with local farmers.

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