

Lehigh University ♦ Gelmar Orestes Moraga ♦ Fresh Wheels ♦ July 2014, USA
♦ Bethlehem, PA, USA

According to the Department of Agriculture (USDA), there are four food deserts in the Lehigh Valley region in Pennsylvania. The USDA defines food deserts as “urban neighborhoods and rural towns without ready access to fresh, healthy, and affordable food.”¹ For the most part, residents of food deserts are composed of historically disadvantaged groups such as African Americans, Native Americans, and Hispanics.² Although small grocery stores operate in these areas, they do not provide an adequate selection of healthy foods at affordable prices. From 1989 to 2005, prices of vegetables increased 75% compared to unhealthy foods, which dropped 25% in prices.³ Many do not accept Women, Infant, and Children benefits (WIC) or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits (SNAP), further limiting the access to healthy foods. Additionally, residents in the areas designated as food deserts, often do not own cars. Since it is usually the case that large, well-stocked supermarkets are not located in the urban core areas, they must be accessed by public transportation and are often miles away. In some cases, even if residents wanted to take public transportation to a suburban supermarket, they can’t. For example, in the township of Bethlehem, PA, Wegman’s, a supermarket known in the region for its fresh, locally grown produce and healthy food selection, objected to the placement of a public transportation station near its establishment, further diminishing easy access to residents of food deserts. As a result, many residents with low-incomes subsist on unhealthy diets that put them at greater risk of diabetes, heart disease, or obesity. Studies have correlated healthier diets among people living more than a mile away from a supermarket.⁴

Establishing a supermarket in food deserts may not totally resolve that issue. As the USDA points out, produce must also be affordable. Supermarkets such as Wegman’s are not the most affordable compared to the grocery store Price Rite.

Fresh Wheels intends to provide a vast selection of affordable healthy foods to the residents of four food deserts in both Allentown and Bethlehem. A mobile fresh market would accomplish this task. A customized yellow school bus would be fitted to contain bins, a chest freezer, and an electric generator. In addition, Fresh Wheels will also be able to accept WIC/SNAP and credit/debit cards using a mobile app. Fresh Wheels would deliver fresh food at affordable prices through bulk purchases directly from farmers and local gardeners.

Overall, Fresh Wheels anticipates vending fresh produce and other healthy foods to residents of food deserts. In doing so, Fresh Wheels has the prospect of also reducing the health issues that result from unhealthy diets. For example, each year 2.4 million people die of heart disease related to diets high in unhealthy fats in the United States.⁵

Mission Statement

Fresh Wheels’ mission is to improve the community’s nourishment through the vending of affordable, healthy farm-to-table foods to address disparities in health and nutrition with a local focus. For example, families consume unhealthy fast foods as microwavable ramen soups, because it is cheaper than purchasing healthy foods such as vegetables to cook.

Organizational Purpose and Long-term Goals

The organizational purpose of Fresh Wheels is to supply affordable healthy foods to residents in areas designated as food deserts via a bus customized as a mobile supermarket that also operates on biofuels such as waste cooking oil.

Aiding in the elimination of food deserts throughout Allentown and Bethlehem is a long-term goal for Fresh Wheels.

¹ Research and data on the geographic issues related to food access are available here: <http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-access-research-atlas.aspx#.Uopo3NK-ofg>. Site last visited 11/18/13.

² Curry, Andrew. “Bringing Healthy Fare to Big-City ‘Food Deserts.’” *Diabetes Forecast*. December 2009.

³ Walsh, Bryan. “It’s Not Just Genetics.” *Time*. Time Inc., 12 June 2008

⁴ Curry, Andrew. “Bringing Healthy Fare to Big-City ‘Food Deserts.’” *Diabetes Forecast*. December 2009.

⁵ “Deaths and Mortality.” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2011

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Identify Need Filled by the Organization

By operating a mobile supermarket, Fresh Wheels will be able to provide residents of food deserts with affordable healthy foods where supermarkets such as Giant and Wegman's are distant or too expensive for residents.

Define Core Values

- Commitment in encouraging healthier diets through varied healthy foods
- Collaboration within the community to reduce shortages of affordable healthy foods

Operating Principles

- Reach a wide range of clients by utilizing a mobile supermarket
- Prompt controversy with civility among staff in business planning and direction
- Weekly staff/administrative meetings consisting of circles that address progress and problems within Fresh Wheels
- Staff and board of director members must reflect the demographics of where Fresh Wheels operates

Vision Statement

Fresh Wheels envisions providing affordable healthy foods not only in food deserts, but also low-income communities and neighborhoods.

Economic Assessment

Environment Scan-to identify opportunities, including innovative ways to make challenges opportunities

External Variables

- 1) Changing demographics: Given the shifting demographics of both Allentown and Bethlehem, staff, volunteers, and board of director members will reflect the demographics of Fresh Wheels' clients. As a result, Fresh Wheels will be able to properly adjust to changes.
- 2) Evolving community issues: Both Allentown and Bethlehem have four food deserts in total. This has resulted in people without transportation to supermarkets to practice unhealthy dieting practices. Furthermore, many people in these designated areas are low-income. This makes it difficult to buy healthy foods at an affordable level. Fresh Wheels intends to fill in that gap in providing affordable healthy foods to residents of these four designated food deserts.
- 3) Relevant cultural or social trends: Because of the diverse cultural differences between all four food deserts, Fresh Wheels will stock produce that is appealing to Hispanics, Blacks, Asians, and Whites. For example, stock black, red, and white beans.
- 4) Economic trends: Since many residents of the food deserts are people of low-income and qualify for government/state assistance, Fresh Wheels will be able to accept WIC/SNAP. In addition, Fresh Wheels intends to vend healthy foods at an affordable price.
- 5) State of org's partnerships, collaborations, alliances, and affiliations: Fresh Wheels intends to partner with Lehigh University, Moravian College, Muhlenberg College, Lehigh Carbon Community College, and Northampton Community College in recruiting volunteers. Furthermore, it hopes in collaborating with the United Way, local farmers, and gardeners. In addition, it plans to acquire membership in the PA Association of Nonprofit Organizations, which will monitor changes in Federal and State legislation that may create hurdles.
- 6) Political Landscape: Under the Obama Administration, healthy eating has been encouraged through programs such as Let's Move and the Healthy Food Financing Initiative. As a result, politicians are sensitive in facilitating the mission of Fresh Wheels.
- 7) Competition: Fresh Wheels does not intend to compete with small mini marts. Instead, Fresh Wheels intends to vend affordable, healthy foods. Since mini marts do not provide this, Fresh Wheels will not have much competition in regard to vending healthy foods.
- 8) New technologies, models, or methods: The encouragement of controversy with civility among a diverse selection of staff, board of directors, and volunteers will produce ideas and methods to maximum operations.