







have fewer food retailers than urban areas and 20 percent of rural counties are considered food deserts (Treuhaft and Karpyn, 2010).

Despite these findings, solutions to food deserts are mostly concentrated in urban areas with urban gardening projects becoming widely popular. The American Community Gardening Association has seen a significant rise in the building of community gardens, with thousands of them cited across the country. More than 30 percent of these gardens were started after 1991,

fresh produce and raise livestock. As of 2007, there were eight farmers markets and 641 farms in Saratoga County; the majority of them are small farms between 10 and 50 acres (2007 Census of Agriculture). The land has a long history of farming and supplies many residents with fresh produce and meat. However, a large amount of food produced in the area is not being distributed locally, especially not to the lower income populations. Even of this small percentage, the local food is sold for significantly more money than convenience store food, preventing easy access to lower income individuals.

There are a number of programs that exist in Saratoga County that address either economic insecurity or access to healthy food. In this research we explore the relationship between lower income communities and access to local, healthy food options through the perspective of non-profit organizations that are addressing these issues. Through this research we will illuminate what is being done to improve local food access in lower income communities, where more connections can be made between groups and how the infrastructure can be enhanced to better connect the rural poor communities with local, healthy food sources.

We began our research by examining the current state of both marginalized communities and local food on a national scale and locally in Saratoga County. We found that there is a significant amount of research about the connections between lower income people and access to healthy food, as well as the benefits of this food on quality of life. We used this research to understand the national trends regarding local food and marginalized communities. In order to

bring these issues to a local level, we started by speaking with members of Saratoga County that are currently involved in either issues regarding local food and/or lower income populations.

Through our interactions with these stakeholders, we had a better understanding of the economic diversity of the county and what programs are in place to address the issues of rural poverty and food access.

After learning that Saratoga County has the highest number of mobile home communities in the state, we decided to use them as case studies of low income communities in the area. We began our process to find a gatekeeper from a mobile home, someone that was willing to help us

organizations focused on these issues. This provided both a lens for us to learn about rural and urban poor in Saratoga, as well as the current state of community action to alleviate poor nutrition in these demographics.

Interviewing organizations that are working on these issues in the area shed light on where there is a lot of effort being placed as well as, perhaps more importantly, where they can be improved. This became clearer when interviewing organizations like the Farmer's Markets, who do a lot for local food in the area but little regarding lower income communities. Using a snowball method of each organization suggesting another organization to interview, we collected data from people with varying kinds of involvement with the project. Pairing the personal interviews with statistics about poverty, food issues and nutrition nationally and locally, our next step was to analyze the relationships between the organizations. This highlighted where we believe there should be more focus in order to make local, healthy food accessible and appealing to lower income communities.

In our research we found a growing trend in food deserts across the country, especially in rural communities. Rural food deserts are considered places where all residents live 10 miles or more from the nearest large food source (Morton and Blanchard 2007). Olsen et al. (1996) states that there are three factors that contribute to food insecurity: a limited number of supermarkets, limited availability of food items and a higher relative cost of food. The phenomenon of food deserts has been recognized across the country as contributing to obesity and other health conditions. Because residents in food deserts do not live in close proximity to a fresh food source,

they are more likely to shop at convenience stores and food suppliers that sell solely canned and processed food. These types of food are generally less healthy and lead to a variety of long term health issues. There is a substantial amount of literature that highlights the dilemma of food deserts in the United States, focusing on why they occur and how they can be remedied. Because Saratoga County is predominantly rural, we examined how these national trends were being played out in this region.

While most research focused on urban food deserts, there is also growing interest in rural food deserts and why they exist. Studies show that low income communities, communities of color and sparsely populated rural areas are the least likely to have sufficient opportunities to buy healthy, affordable food (Treuhaft and Karpyn 2010). Rural areas actually have fewer food retailers of any type compared to urban areas and 20 percent of rural counties in the US are considered food deserts. Nationwide, supermarkets are 7.4 times more available in urban versus rural areas. Rural regions bring a specific set of problems to the issue of food insecurity as opposed to urban area. Lack of transportation in rural areas becomes a huge issue and while there is usually higher vehicle ownership, those who don't own vehicles are particularly isolated (Treuhaft and Karpyn 2010). This is true in Saratoga County as well, while there are programs in place that give incentives for low income families to shop at farmers markets, they often don't have the means to get there (Kennedy 2011, DeMatteo 2011). Instead residents are forced to rely on low cost, high fat, high sugar prepared food from small food stores, convenience stores and gas stations.



In addition to transportation, there are other issues that need to be considered when specifically dealing with the rural poor. Olsen et al. (1996) and Sherman (2006) argue that the rural poor are less likely to participate in food assistance programs and because they are not available or culturally acceptable and are more likely to participate in culturally specific survival strategies such as subsistence activities. Things like hunting, fishing and gardening are a highly valued alternative form of survival for members of mobile home communities.

Because urban poverty is often more visible and the public has been more widely



in the area. In order to understand these connections, we interviewed representatives from three different sectors of non-profits, the first dealing with food access. These organizations are Sustainable Saratoga, Capital District Community Gardens and various departments at Cornell Cooperative Extension. The second grouping of organizations handle poverty issues, including the Franklin Community Center

There are many other organizations in the area that are trying to bridge the gap between healthy food and economic equality. Cornell Cooperative Extension, for example, has numerous programs in place to address issues of food insecurity, local food promotion and rural and urban poverty.

garden” if

immigrant workers and they are working on building one at Wesley senior housing. As the organization states: “community gardens have long been a dream of many Saratogains. It is the hope of Sustainable Saratoga that this garden marks the first in a new network of community gardens across the city” (Sustainable Saratoga, 2011).

The gardens have been very successful in giving community members the space to grow their own food. They got seeds, supplies and compost donated from local businesses to start the garden and partnered with other organization such as Cornell Cooperative Extension, the Backstretch Employee Service Team (BEST), and the Racetrack Chaplaincy. Casey Holzworth of Sustainable Saratoga stated that residents were usually very receptive to the idea of the garden and fresh, local food. They often were eager to learn but did not know where to start and the garden gave them an outlet for that. He found that the city is receptive to gardens on city land, however the biggest road block is usually the legal issues surrounding liability insurance (Holzworth, 2011). These gardens provide inspiration to future projy o6r(rde) 0Tf [ (ga)0.2 (e) m /F2.0 1 y9.0

and Schenectady; roughly 3,000 gardeners manage these gardens throughout the region. The gardeners come from a diverse demographics and are mostly low income, underprivileged, unemployed, are far from grocery stores and/or do not have cars. The gardens have been very successful in building community and bringing neighborhoods together. CDCG also have a Veggie Mobile that brings local produce to communities across the area including day-cares, YMCA's, community centers and other neighborhoods without grocery stores. This program has been very successful and they have a very committed customer based that comes out to buy vegetables every week.

Capital District Community Gardens also run a Squash Hunger program that takes food donations in bulk from local farmers and distributes it to food pantries. Lastly, they have created the Taste Good program that goes to elementary schools to introduce new vegetables to students and educate them on how them to use them. "The series encourages children to try new fruits and vegetables through a program of fun educational activities, games, songs, and samples," working with young people to create better food habits (Capital District Community Gardens, 2011). Capital District Community Gardens has now received a grant to help start a community garden with CAPTAIN Youth and Family Center in a mobile home community in Clifton Park. Sharon DiLorenzo stated that they have had a lot of requests for community gardens in Clifton Park and in rural areas in Saratoga County. CAPTAIN has established connections and outreach programs in the community and Capital District Community Gardens will provide the resources and training to start the garden.

CAPTAIN Youth and Family Services works in Clifton Park to address "the changing needs of youth





very tight sense of community and other places where neighbors keep to themselves. He said that some residents grow their own fruits and vegetables in their backyard. Cross allows residents to maintain gardens as long as they don't get too unsightly or disrupt the neighbors. However, he would not be receptive to the idea of having a community garden because there is not much public land to use for a garden and it is most economically beneficial for him to use empty house plots for houses and not gardens. Although he was very receptive to new ideas and his

economically self-sufficient” in the Saratoga region (Economic Opportunity Council, 2011). One of their major initiatives is running a soup kitchen that provides a free hot meal to people every day. They have a garden that was created with the help of Cornell Cooperative Extension, and is managed by a generous community member. The vegetables grown are served to the average of 70 people that come to the soup kitchen every day. This garden has proved to be successful in its two years, and the community members that utilize the resource have been very excited about access to fresh produce

have experienced varying levels of success, there are still major structural barriers in the way that decrease availability of local food. Due to national trends in our food system, local farmers are forced to charge high prices for their food. This makes fresh, local food increasingly more expensive than food available at a supermarket. As a result of this discrepancy, the most affordable food is unhealthy, processed food coming from industrial agriculture farms and factories. As McCarthy (2011) stated “the way you’re going to make your budget stretch is by buying Ramen and TV Dinners.”

While we originally thought the only obstacle preventing lower income people from eating local and fresh food is cost, our research shows that there are other major factors involved in how these food choices are made. There is a lack of infrastructure, on both a logistical and cultural level, to really bridge the gap between low income communities and access to local food. Some of these factors include social, physical and financial barriers to accessing local food. These barriers are present for both individuals and organization and are structurally embedded in our society. However, there are some organizations that have been able to overcome these obstacles through a comprehensive approach to food that addresses all of these issues in conjunction with one another. We found that these programs are the ones that are able to make the most holistic and lasting change.

While affordability is the underlying barrier, there are other infrastructural issues that need to be addressed to improve access. A major structural obstacle that inhibits lower income people from having access to local food is that there is little public transportation to get people to food banks, Farmer’s Markets or fresh food outlets. This is especially important in Saratoga

County since a high percentage of the population live in rural areas where transportation is necessary. High gas prices today in addition to a lack of public transportation in the area make it especially difficult for residents to travel far to get fresh, local food. As seen in Appedix 1, there are eight Farmers Markets in the county though they are all dispersed throughout the region. Residents living in more rural areas far from a major highway have difficulty getting to the markets especially when the markets are only held once or twice a week. As DeMatteo (2011) explained, a family can have \$10.00 in WIC food stamps designate

have a presence at both the Saratoga Springs and Ballston Spa Farmer's Market, where they do demonstrations on healthy eating and hand out nutrition information to consumers.

O'Hearn (2011) and DeMatteo (2011) have gone into senior centers

Saratoga County is known as being an affluent community; there is often a lack of knowledge about the lower income populations in the county. For example, Kennedy (2011) pointed out that Clifton Park doesn't offer public housing assistance because it is perceived that there is no need. This became increasingly clear after meeting with Suzanne Voigt (2011) from the Saratoga Springs Farmer's market. She was unaware that Saratoga County has the highest number of mobile home communities in New York

Recognizing that there is potential to better connect lower income people with this abundance of local food, the Farmer's Market Federation of New York, a statewide program that supports and monitors markets in New York, put pressure on the Saratoga Springs market to allow programs to accept more food stamps, lower the prices of goods and generally make the market more accessible to a diversity of people. However, Voigt (2011) was told by the Friends of the Market, a group of local

Another infrastructural barrier that comes with trying to improve access to local, healthy food is stability of funding sources for non-profit organizations. Most of the organizations that are involved in this relationship are funded by state or national grants, which are apt to run out at any point. Many of the organizations are supported by the generosity of local volunteers and donations, again providing an inconsistent flow of resources. This makes it difficult for organizations to commit to something as large scale as a community garden, even if it is something they are interested in building. Williams (2011) from Franklin Community Center expressed her desire for a garden on site to supplement their food pantry but she felt there is not enough staff capacity to maintain a garden, they simply “don’t have the manpower.”

Although the various infrastructural issues put hurdle in between low income people and access to local, healthy food, there are a number of programs that are working in the county. We believe that these programs can be used as a model or expanded on to address the gap in food access. A trend we found throughout our research is that the programs that have been most successful are those that look at the issue of access to local food comprehensively. Instead of just trying to feed individuals they are able to see the larger social context and the many factors that contribute to food insecurity. As a result a sense of community is built around food creating lasting change. This in turn engages individuals in their food choices and creates a sense of personal responsibility to eat healthy. The most successful programs address the root of the problem in a comprehensive way by incorporating all of the social, infrastructural and cost barriers into the solution.



For example, the Veggie Mobile created and managed by Capital District Community Gardens is a viable option to address lack of transportation to fresh food. The Veggie Mobile is a powerful way to bridge the gap between low income communities and local, healthy food since it solves the issues of lack of transportation in addition to building a sense of community among neighbors. The truck essentially brings the farmers market to the people, creating the infrastructure for lower income populations to have access to local, fresh produce on a regular basis. The Veggie Mobile also creates an atmosphere of community, as DeLorenzo expressed, people come out to buy their produce and socialize with their neighbors. She explained that people come out to buy the food and stay for the whole hour, despite the brevity of the actual purchase. Clients have maintained long term friendships and a sense of connectivity with others that utilize the service (DeLorenzo, 2011). Food is bonding, it spurs conversation and connection, and in that way the Veggie Mobile has the power to bring communities together while bridging the gap between lower income people and healthy food.

When we visited

well as nutritional information about the produce (Fashoro, 2011). The atmosphere was positive and welcoming, with music playing and people outside socializing. One woman we spoke with called the Veggie Mobile “a godsend” and “a blessing,” as she would otherwise have to travel longer distances to



stop in to tend to the plants after the races or while they're on breaks. They also helped establish

of the more run-down and lower income mobile home communities in the area. Kennedy pointed out that out of the 1000 people that reside at Turf, 60 percent of the children are

interest in more community gardens, there is an issue of liability within gardening. If a problem



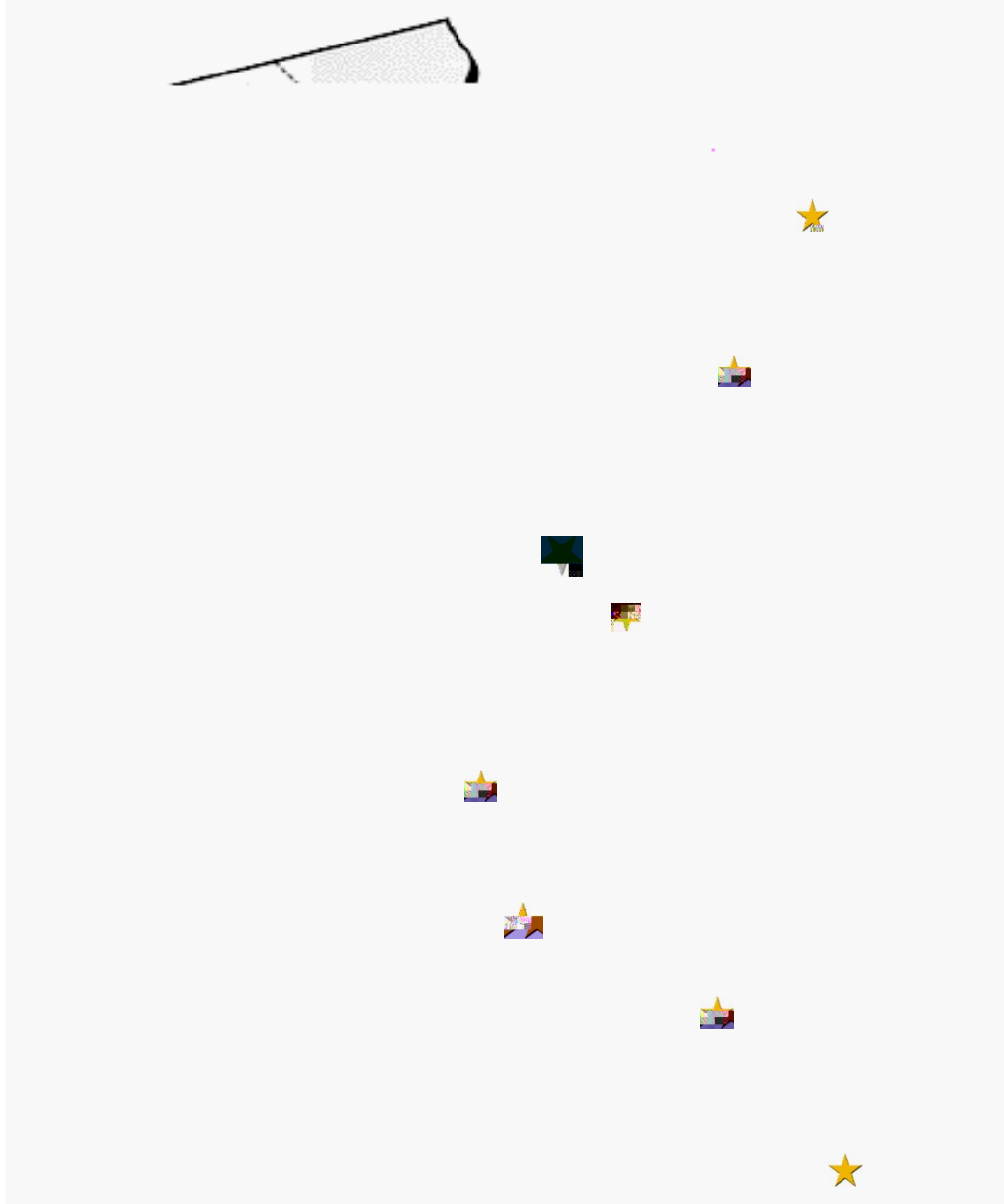
alleviating poverty. Increased connection among groups could help to handle the problem of food access holistically, creating more longstanding and successful change.

The most successfully implemented programs all focus on creating a sense of community around food. Whether this is through building and maintaining a community garden or lingering around the Veggie Truck with neighbors, this atmosphere not only makes healthy food accessible, but promotes a healthy lifestyle. The successful programs emphasize food independence and ownership over ones' diet, signifying the national trend that eating is more than just alleviating hunger. Food has the potential to generate social connections, support local economies, improve healthy lifestyles and create a deeper connection to the land. Ultimately, food has the power to significantly improve quality of life, often in communities that need it most.

Given the national trends in food deserts, these problems are relevant to organizations across the country. While each region has a different culture with a unique set of issues, there are many similarities that can be seen throughout. Issues of transportation, limited resources, and lack of nutritional education are all concerns for low income people throughout the country. Therefore, Saratoga County can be viewed as a microcosm of larger trends on a national scale. This research could be applied to a variety of contexts with cultural differences being taken into consideration. Regardless of the region, an emphasis on addressing systematic barriers and building community around food is crucial to making any project successful and sustainable.



*Appendix 1: Map of Farmers Markets in Saratoga County*

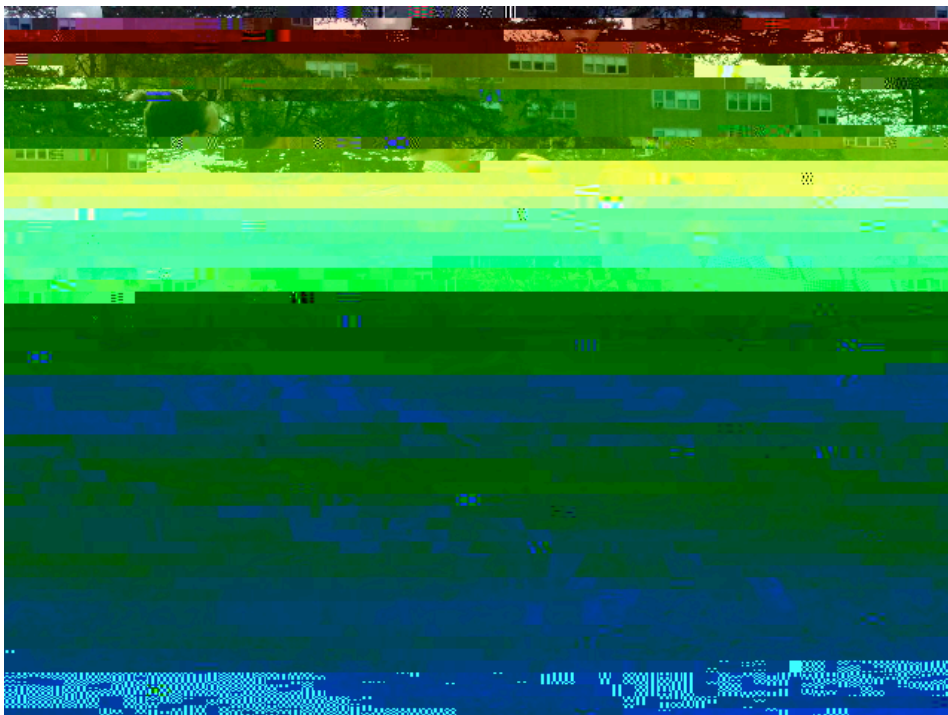


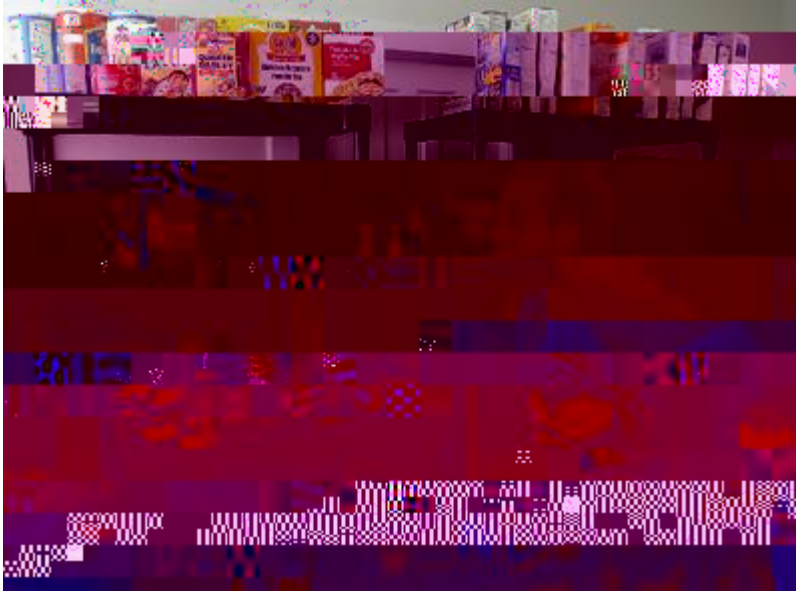
★ Farmers Markets

*Appendix 2: Pictures of projects in Saratoga County*

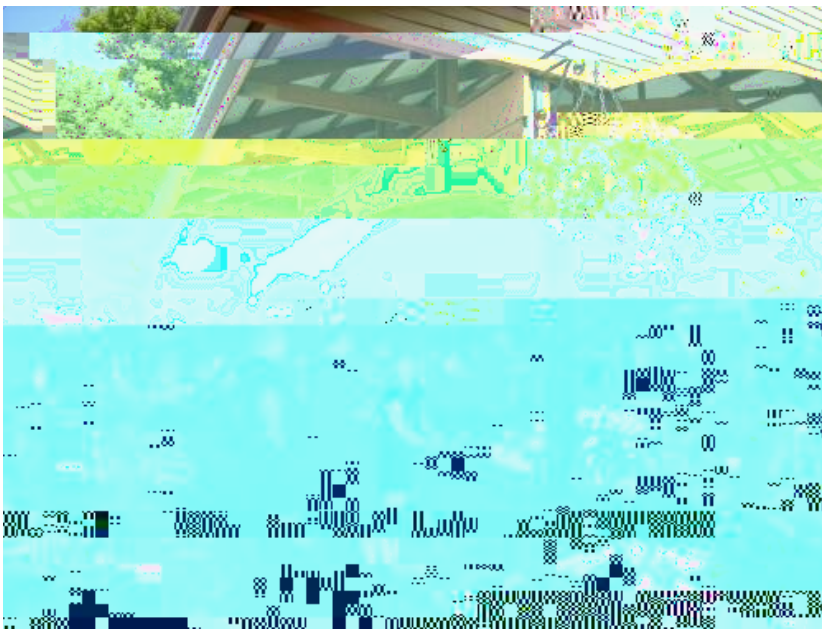


*Residents building community garden at Stonequist Apartments, Saratoga Springs, NY*





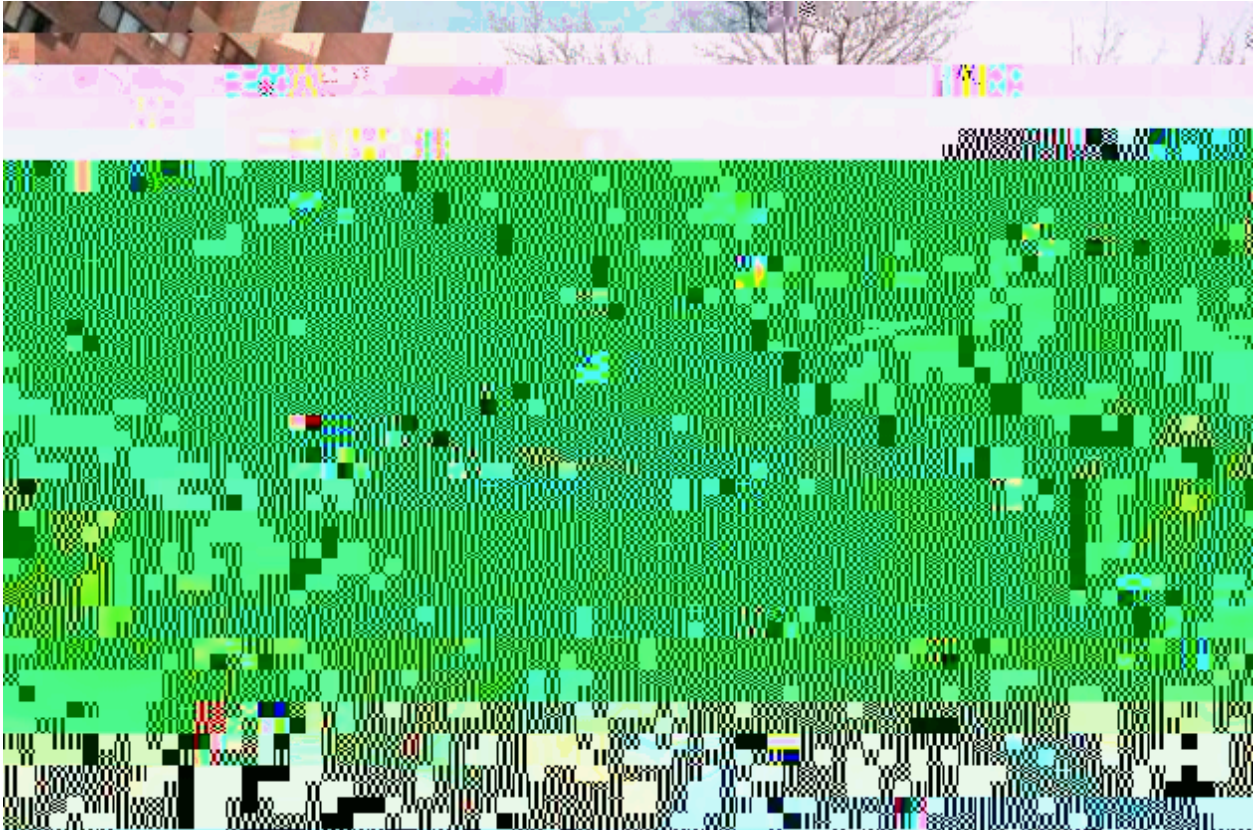
*Franklin Community Center food pantry full of canned and prepared foods*



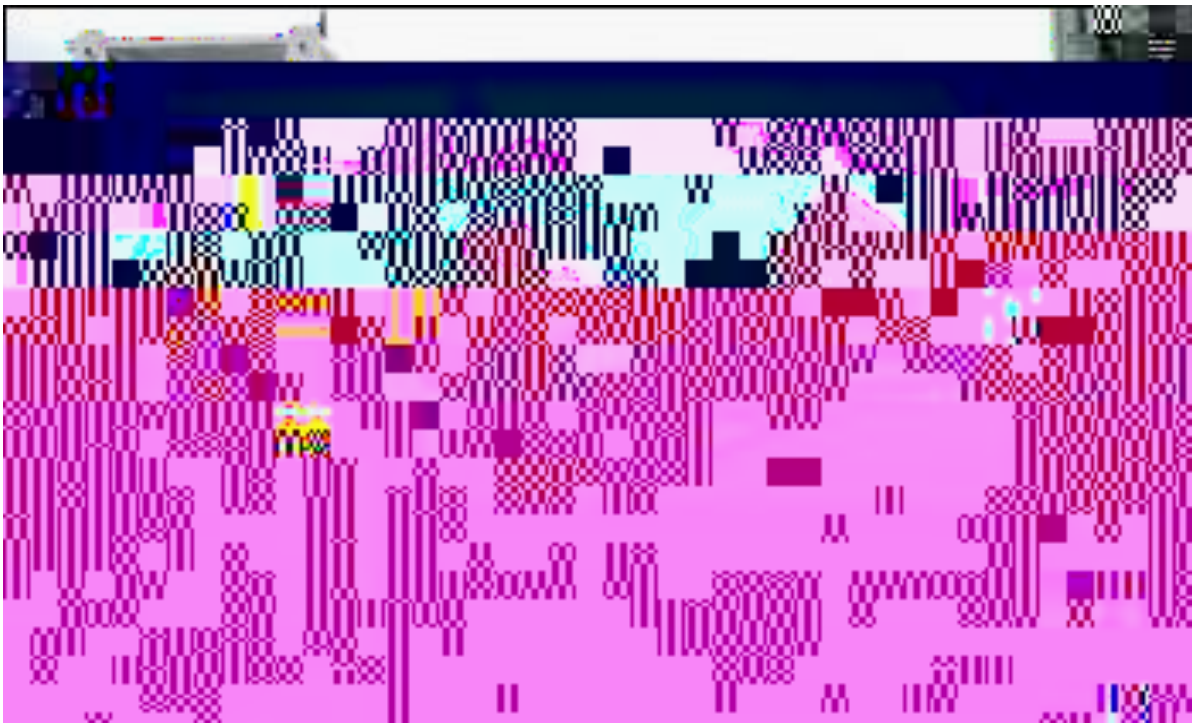
*Saratoga Springs Farmers Market*

*Backstretch racetrack worker tending to his plot at the garden*





*Veggie Mobile selling local produce to residents in the capital district*



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