




## A Community's Collective Courage: A Local Food Cooperative's Impact on Food Insecurity, Community and Economic Development, and Local Food Systems

Tabitha C. Barbour  
*Butler University*, [tabithabarbour1@gmail.com](mailto:tabithabarbour1@gmail.com)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/bjur>

 Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#), [Business Commons](#), [Education Commons](#), [Life Sciences Commons](#), [Medicine and Health Sciences Commons](#), [Physical Sciences and Mathematics Commons](#), and the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Barbour, Tabitha C. (2018) "A Community's Collective Courage: A Local Food Cooperative's Impact on Food Insecurity, Community and Economic Development, and Local Food Systems," *Butler Journal of Undergraduate Research*: Vol. 4 , Article 2.

Retrieved from: <https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/bjur/vol4/iss1/2>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Undergraduate Scholarship at Digital Commons @ Butler University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Butler Journal of Undergraduate Research by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Butler University. For more information, please contact [digitalscholarship@butler.edu](mailto:digitalscholarship@butler.edu).

---

# A Community's Collective Courage: A Local Food Cooperative's Impact on Food Insecurity, Community and Economic Development, and Local Food Systems

## Cover Page Footnote

Foremost, I would like acknowledge my family and ancestors; for without them, I would not be. Special thanks to the Kheprw Institute Staff, Community Control Food Initiative committee, and community members for their support, time, and knowledge sharing that helped make this research possible. I would also like to thank my thesis advisor, Dr. Terri Jett, for her patience, guidance on this thesis, supporting my academic and professional endeavors. Thank you to Dr. Robin Turner for acting as my second reader and giving valuable feedback during the development on this work. And lastly, special thanks to Dr. Jessica Gordon Nembhard, author of *Collective Courage*, for her scholarship and commitment to African-American cooperative history.

## **A COMMUNITY'S COLLECTIVE COURAGE: A LOCAL FOOD COOPERATIVE'S IMPACT ON FOOD INSECURITY, COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, AND LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS**

TABITHA C. BARBOUR, BUTLER UNIVERSITY  
MENTOR: TERRI JETT

### **Abstract**

I come from a long history of people who are connected to food and land as the descendants of slaves from Kentucky and Tennessee. My great-great grandparents purchased the land they sharecropped, exemplifying the importance of place, agriculture, and family history. As I grew up, I watched my grandparents on both my mother's and my father's side raise gardens of greens, tomatoes, peppers, okra, squash, string beans, and many other vegetables. I remember chasing chickens and ducks and watching the cattle chase after my grandfather's truck as we rode through the field. I did not fully realize my interest in food and the significance of my family's connection to agriculture until I went away to college.

During the summer of 2015, I participated in the Doris Duke Conservation Scholars Program at the University of Washington Seattle, where I became interested in urban gardening and local food systems. The following summer I connected with the Kheprw Institute (KI) through my participation in Butler Advance's Summer Fusion Program. I found KI and I had similar interests in food, community, and economic development. In May 2016, I began a case study of the KI Community Controlled Food Initiative (CCFI) using participatory observation. CCFI brings local, fresh produce to the Indianapolis community. KI's reach is felt throughout Indianapolis and beyond; however, this research will focus on food insecurity and impact in the 46208 zip code. This research uses Jessica Gordon Nembhard's *Collective Courage: A History of African American Cooperative Economic Thought and Practice* as a basis for understanding the cooperative model and history of community and economic development in African American communities. CCFI's work reflects the power of community through the implementation of grassroots organizing, collective economics, and supporting local food systems.

## Background

In 2003, Imhotep Adisa, Pambana Usihi, and Paulette Fair founded the Kheprw Institute. KI is a non-profit, 501(c)3 organization that has served the Indianapolis community for over 13 years. It executes its programming and activities through the mantra, “Community Empowerment Through Self-Mastery” (“Our Story”). KI has grown to serve community through intergenerational learning with a focus on youth development. KI serves the community through a variety of programming opportunities rooted in its four tenets: *Empowerment, Economy, Education, and Environment* (“Our Story”). It hosts community forums on many topics, including gentrification, community development, and education. Staff and youth leaders lead annual summer and after school programs for youth and offer mentorship opportunities throughout the academic year.

KI hosts three social enterprises: KI NuMedia, Express Yourself Rain Barrels, and Scaraby’s Consulting. A social enterprise is “an organization or initiative that marries the social mission of a non-profit or government program with the market driven approach of a business” (“Social Enterprise”). Staff and youth leaders mentor interns to develop entrepreneurial skills and lead the enterprise. KI’s social entrepreneurship philosophy focuses on social capital, a term used to describe a set of practices that values relationships and connections to leverage resources to benefit all parties involved in the relationship and the community at large. The organization’s social entrepreneurship model is grounded in little to no monetary capital to start with, and a heavy emphasis on social capital.

Cooperatives are like social enterprises in that they seek to address a societal need. They seek:

to satisfy an economic or social need, to provide a quality good or service (one that the market is not adequately providing) at an affordable price, or to create an economic structure to engage in needed production or facilitate more equal distribution to compensate for market failure. (Nembhard 2)

KI’s social enterprises use cooperative strategies. They use a flat leadership model, make decisions on behalf of business as a collective, and are mission-driven through the youth development and community empowerment. These practices were influential and fundamental to the creation of CCFI as an informal cooperative. CCFI addresses the issue of food insecurity in the 46208 zip code and Indianapolis at large. It is a combination of consumer and worker-owned cooperative which functions through the support of consumers buying monthly

shares. The CCFI committee runs the cooperative, functions through a flat leadership model, and gathers feedback from consumers to better run its programming. CCFI aligns with the basis of cooperative practice and the mission of KI to empower community through food access.

On July 23, 2015, four Double 8 Foods Grocery Stores closed unexpectedly (Vinson et al.). The locally owned and operated chain had been closing stores since the 1990s; however, these closures marked the end of almost 60 years of service (Chappel) and left neighborhood residents without a grocery store to purchase produce and other necessary food items. Residents in the 46208 zip code suffered from food insecurity even before the closing of Double 8 Foods. The store closing only increased residents' inaccessibility to food. Food insecurity is a measure of "a household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food" (Coleman-Jensen et al.). Many neighborhoods in the 46208 zip code match this criteria: They have low income status coupled with low access to food because of distance from food sources and limited or no options for transportation.

The closing of Double 8 Foods is a complex issue. It was a food source for neighborhood residents; however, it often did not meet customers' expectations in produce quality and overall shopping experience. In an interview, Tysha Ahmed, 41-year-old co-organizer of the CCFI Committee, shared that the issue with Double 8 is it "often did not offer quality produce." Fred Car shared with the Indianapolis Recorder that the closing of Double 8 "was a good thing. Sanitation was not a priority" (Vinson et al.). In informal conversations, neighborhood residents complained of the stores' smell, cleanliness of the store, and quality of produce. I had the opportunity to talk with the former Double 8 Foods store owner Isaiah Kuperstein in June 2016. He reported that the stores became too much of a burden financially for his family and were not earning the profits needed to keep them open. Kuperstein believes the grocery store industry was a factor in the store closing. He commented that Double 8 Foods was a small, locally-owned franchise store and could not compete with the larger chain grocery stores' appeal like Meijer, Walmart, Kroger, and so on. Double 8 Foods closed because the costs to keep the store open were greater than the profit. This shows neighborhood residents were not supporting the Double 8 stores enough for them to be sustainable. The local chain closed for a variety of reasons which left community members reaching for local control of their food.

KI responded to the closing of Double 8 Foods through hosting a youth-led community forum at CCFI to develop community based solutions. The committee began working through its mantra of "neighbors bring fresh affordable food to their

community” (“Community Controlled”). The committee is led by Miriam Zakem, KI Equity Fellow and Indiana University Graduate (2014), and Paulette Fair, Co-Founder of the KI Institute. Zakem and Fair work with the CCFI committee and launched their programs with zero capital and the support of the community and its resources. In October 2015, CCFI launched its programming, the monthly “Good Food Feast” and bi-weekly “Soup and Salad Luncheons.” These programs focus on health education through hosting guest speakers, cooking demonstrations, and gathering community members together around fresh, healthy food.

The CCFI committee researched many cooperative projects addressing food insecurity. The organization’s community-focused approach is based on the Fresh Stop Program in Louisville, Kentucky. Fresh Stop operates multiple food cooperative sites in Louisville, where community members can pool together their resources to provide fresh, affordable food (Moskowitz 23). CCFI built on this model through combining the food cooperative model with their food education programming. The food distribution and the Good Food Feast, which occurs on every second Saturday of the month, provide residents with their food shares and teach them how to prepare the produce they have purchased.

CCFI meets twice a week to prepare for its monthly distribution days. The supporters of the program provide funding for the cooperative through purchasing a share or seasonal share packages in the cooperative in exchange for a monthly opportunity to bring fresh produce into their community. The price of the food shares are \$12 with SNAP/EBT or \$25 for a variety of produce. Customers receive the same amount of produce and buy into the program not knowing what items they will receive. The two prices allow neighbors with more capital to subsidize the cost for others with less. Shares for the upcoming distribution must be purchased at least a week in advance of the distribution day; distribution occurs every second Saturday. Once the funds are collected, the CCFI team contacts local farmers to wholesale purchase produce. The farmers deliver the purchase to the KI Institute, and then a team of volunteers create equal shares from a variety of produce for customers. On June 11, 2016, CCFI launched their first food distribution day accompanied by the Good Food Feast. CCFI supported 36 families on their first distribution day and had in attendance around 35 people at the good food feast.

### **Literature Review**

Food insecurity is defined as “the uncertainty of having, or unable to acquire enough food to meet the needs of all their (household) members because they have insufficient money or other resources for food” (Coleman-Jensen et al.). Per the

USDA's Food Security Status of U.S. Households in 2015, researchers state 15.8 million households have experienced food insecurity at some point during the year (out of approximately 124 million households in the United States). In Indiana, more than one million people (out of 6.62 million total population) are food insecure (Feeding America Report 2014). Hoosiers suffer from food insecurity with rates as high as 19.2% of Marion County's population ("Map the Meal Gap"). With the state's high rates of food insecurity, state and local governments, non-profit and for-profit organizations, and citizens are engaged in finding solutions to address food insecurity. Although the definition of food insecurity is limited to those who have access to a place of residence, it helps locate areas experiencing high rates of poverty, low food access, and limited opportunity for economic mobility. These communities are typically, but not always, labeled as "food deserts," which describes areas that have low or limited access to fresh, healthy foods due to transportation or other economic barriers.

Food banks/pantries, farmer's markets, and new grocery stores are a few of the many ways in which people attempt to increase food access in their communities. In recent years, national, state, and local governments have supported initiatives surrounding food, including the USDA allocating funding in 2011 for Farmer's Market Promotion Program Grants. This program's purpose was to "help increase availability of local agricultural products in communities throughout the country" (Coleman-Jensen et al.). In Indiana, State Representatives Arnold L. Moed and Judy Shackelford introduced House Bill No. 1248 on February 13, 2015. This bill advocated for the Indiana's Department of Agriculture to "develop and promote programs in support of urban farming, food cooperatives, and farmer's markets" (1). Although the bill was not enacted into law, it showed lawmakers are engaged in the government's responsibility to address inequity in our society.

Many other cities are looking at policy to address food access from an intersectional approach. Food is a vastly complex issue that requires people to look at race, class, gender, geography, and other factors of power and privilege. Per a William and Mary Environmental Law and Policy Review, communities in the city of Detroit and Baltimore are using urban farming to address both food insecurity and the housing crisis (Buzby 479). Indianapolis faces a similar housing crisis with 31.8% of all its housing foreclosed and vacant, per a USA Today 2013 report (Sauter). Housing is an important issue for food insecurity because foreclosure and vacancy are signs of economic degradation. Vacant lots are potential sites to address food insecurity, because neighborhood residents could raise local gardens or farms. Keith Buzby proposed urban farming as a solution to address both the

housing crisis and food insecurity, writing, “Urban farms could be set up throughout the city, providing access to fresh fruits and vegetables that currently does not exist” (498). KI holds similar interests to Buzby’s research, where they partnered with the City of Indianapolis to secure vacant lots for urban farming. Kheprw launched the KI Collective Courage Urban Farm last year to put more urban agriculture education into practice. They named their urban agriculture project after Jessica Gordon Nembhard’s work to celebrate both KI’s and the author’s connection to cooperative development.

There has been a movement on the local level to move away from traditional corporate models and embrace methods that empower communities facing food insecurity issues. One of the ways people are embracing new solutions is through community organizing approaches inspired and operated by those who at the frontlines of these issues. Karyn Moskowitz, Executive Director of the Fresh Stop Program, wrote in “The Fresh Stop Project: An Oasis in a Food Desert of Louisville” that community organizing “generate[s] durable power for an organization representing the community, allowing it to influence key decision-makers on a range of issues over time” (24). The Fresh Stop Project is like Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs, but it is geared toward people with low income who live in food insecure communities (Moskowitz 24). There are multiple Fresh Stop locations around Louisville which are independently operated by community members who live near the stop. They operate on a weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly basis depending on how often the workers and consumers want produce delivered.

Fresh Stop offers two prices consumers pay in advance on a sliding scale, allowing community members to subsidize those with less economic resources and without telling consumers what they will receive in their share. These non-traditional models do more than just bring fresh produce to the community; they build leaders who “are passionate, encouraging children to eat fresh produce, reinventing soul food with healthier, fresh ingredients, learning how to negotiate with farmers and are spearheading policy campaigns” (Moskowitz 23). CCFI and Fresh Stop are two of the many examples of the growing movement for community-controlled agriculture and access to food. The programs engage neighborhood residents to reimagine their communities and to find power in themselves and their community in bringing fresh produce to where they live.

The cooperative model is one way people are investing and reimagining the landscape of their communities. It is a long tradition of people coming together to address a need in their community or society through a communal business



structure. In *Collective Courage: A History of African American Cooperative Economic Thought and Practice*, cooperatives are defined as companies and organizations owned by the people who use their service (Nembhard 2). This business model is noted for allowing people to work and manage a business together, develop consistent employment, and share profits (Nembhard 3). Cooperative business models are widely used around the globe. On October 10, 2014, the International Co-operative Alliance published a press release titled “Co-operative sector announces global turnover of 2.2 trillion USD for top 300 co-ops, and employment figures of at least 250 million worldwide” (ICA). Cooperatives are widely successful on the macro and micro level. The UN declared 2011 as the International Year of Cooperatives “to raise awareness of the invaluable contributions of cooperative enterprises to poverty reduction, employment generation and social integration” (Nembhard 3).

Cooperative movements serve as a space for advocacy and activism. *Collective Courage* displays the history of African-American cooperative strategy toward community and economic development and organizing for social and political mobility. Nembhard’s work details history from the late 1800s to the present and discusses the organizations led by W.E.B DuBois, Booker T. Washington, Ella Baker, George Schuyler and others. African-American cooperative history was based in intergenerational and women’s leadership. KI holds similar commitments as past leaders of promoting cross-cultural and intergenerational learning with an emphasis on youth development. George Schuyler and other cooperative leaders believed in order to build sustainable economic power for African-Americans young people needed to embrace cooperative economics (Nembhard 113). KI centers its initiatives on youth development to mentor the next generation of equity leaders.

### **Methodology**

This research is a case study of CCFI’s impact on addressing food insecurity, community and economic development, and local food systems in the face of climate change from June 2016 to April 2017. I define climate change as global, environmental phenomena representing a shift of weather patterns over an extended period due to excess amounts of CO<sub>2</sub> exhaust in the atmosphere due to overproduction (“What Are Climate”). The three focal points of this paper are deeply connected through the lens of food insecurity as a constructed circumstance that disproportionately effects people of color and people who are poor as a product

of environmental racism and degradation. I will discuss each of these pillars as connected ideas as I present my findings.

I completed this research through participatory observation and conducting open-ended interviews with CCFI committee members, KI Staff, and neighborhood residents. I used participatory observation as my method of field research because this method allowed to become a member of the cooperative and gain a greater familiarity with the strengths and challenges of the community. I chose the method of unstructured interviews and open-ended questions to create a conversational atmosphere and give room for follow-up questions to the interviewees' experiences (Malici and Smith 68). I began my research through regularly attending CCFI planning meetings during the months of June and July. I accompanied the co-chairs of the CCFI to farmer's markets throughout Indianapolis and Marion County to find farmers who would be willing to supply the program and attract additional customers. To secure farmers for the program, I collected contact information from local growers and collected data on crop specialty, pricing, and farm location. I promoted the food cooperative launch through social media and passed out flyers to neighborhood residents and throughout the city.

On June 8, 2016, I shadowed the CCFI team on a visit to Hoosier Harvest Market, a medium-sized food cooperative serving Hamilton, Hancock, Marion, Johnson, and Henry counties. They offer locations throughout the counties for customers to pick up their orders. In preparation for the first food distribution day, I assisted in: collecting customer orders; taking photographs; and posting to social media. On June 11, 2016, CCFI held their first food distribution and Good Food Feast at KI. The CCFI committee went out to collect the orders from farmers and volunteers created 32 equal shares for customers. On June 23, I attended the Indiana Healthy Food Access Policy Forum, where I had the opportunity to hear from mainstream, traditional approaches to food access. This included heavy reliance on governments and institutions to provide grant funding and programs. This gave me a comparison point to CCFI's cooperative model, which empowers communities to make decisions, utilize collective and individual knowledge, and build economic opportunity for local farmers and others in the community.

In July 2016, I attended CCFI committee meetings with Indiana University Health (IU Health) Outreach and Indy Food Taskforce. I worked with Scaraby's Consulting to submit an IU Health's Healthy Food Access Grant and received a \$10,000 grant to help fund CCFI. I also met with the long-time owner of Double 8 Foods, Isaiah Kuperstein, for an informal conversation on the history of Double 8 and Indianapolis and the grocery store industry. This conversation corroborated

evidence from my interviews with neighborhood residents and helped to reveal a fuller image of the complexities of the community's relationship with Double 8 and the grocery store model.

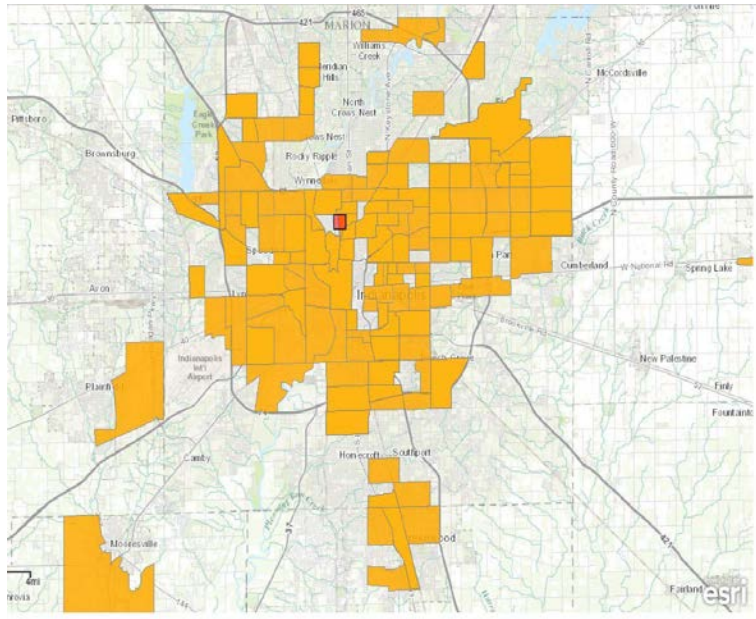
In August and September of 2016, I continued to attend CCFI meetings and distribution days and collected research on urban gardens and food systems. On October 20, 2016, I attended the Cooperatives and People of Color Conference at the Indianapolis Farmers Bureau, where Nembhard served as featured speaker on her ongoing efforts to collect African-American cooperative history. I attended a reception in her honor following the conference at KI and had an informal conversation with her about her work and my research. In January 2017, KI, in partnership with Spirit and Place Festival, launched their Equity in Action discussion series on every third Sunday of the month at KI. On March 26, 2017, Equity in Action hosted the discussion "Community Grown Food Solutions," which featured a panel of local and national speakers and provided an opportunity for community members to network and collaborate on projects within Indianapolis. In the same month, I applied for Institutional Review Board Approval for this research and received full approval on April 8, 2017.

Following IRB approval, I interviewed members of the CCFI team and neighborhood residents to understand the personal impacts of food insecurity and uphold the grassroots effort of the food movement. I completed a total of six interviews and used the information to describe the experiences of community empowerment and food insecurity. Therefore, I present these findings to the best of my ability to depict a most accurate understanding of CCFI's efforts to address food insecurity, community and economic development, and CCFI's impact on local food systems in the face of climate change.

### **Addressing Food Insecurity**

The food equity issues in the 46208 zip code are reflective of the issues Indianapolis at large faces (see Figure 1). "Equity" is the term used to describe the just and equal access to resources and opportunity. This issue exists inside racial and socioeconomic influence, where the 46208 zip code has a high percentage of African-American and Latino population with high rates of poverty. The community CCFI serves is facing low food security, where there is a presence of reduced quality and variety of food and limited reports of hunger (Coleman-Jensen et al.). CCFI team leader Miriam Zakem shared with me another term circulating in food circles: "food swamp," which she defined "as saturation of unhealthy food in community...It's the convenience stores, gas stations, and fast food that you see

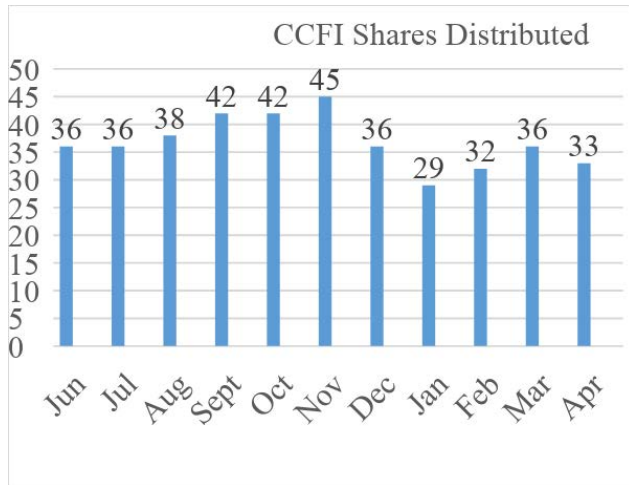
in our community.” The community CCFI serves has access to food in their community through food pantries, fast food restaurants, gas stations, and so on, but there is little to no fresh, healthy food available to neighborhood residents unless one travels to a grocery store outside of the community.



**Figure 1.** USDA Food Access Research Atlas. Portion of map with low income and low access of at ½ and 10 miles layer of Indianapolis from “Food Access Research Atlas”; *USDA*; [www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-access-research-atlas](http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-access-research-atlas). Accessed 23 Mar 17.

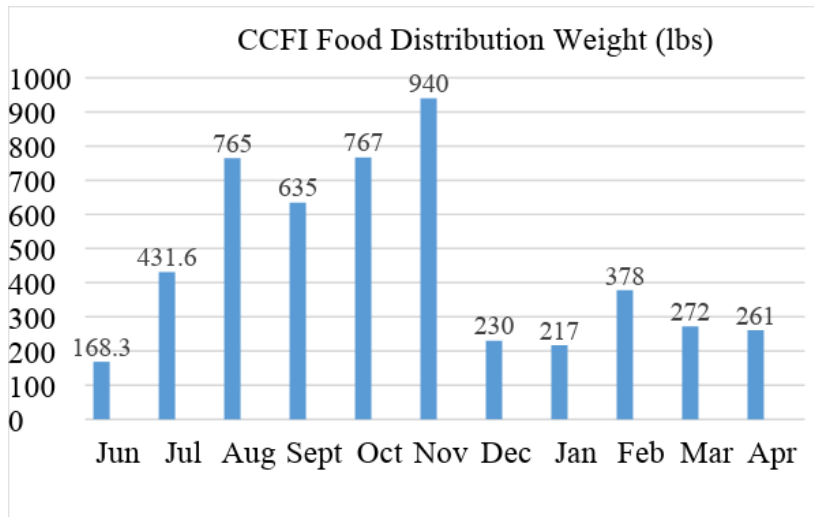
CCFI has made significant gains in addressing food insecurity. It successfully launched the food distribution, made connections with local farmers, and empowered neighborhood residents to bring fresh food to their community. As of April 2017, the CCFI program has supported approximately 40 families monthly with fresh, local fruits, vegetables, and dairy products from organic farmers (see Figure 2). It has handled over 3,000 lbs. of food, placing this food into the hands of neighborhood residents from June 2016 to March 2017 (see Figure 3). This is

substantial impact in communities which otherwise would not have had access to fresh produce.



**Figure 2.** CCFI Shares Distributed.

This chart shows the number of shares purchased by consumers and distributed by CCFI during their monthly food distribution.



**Figure 3.** CCFI Food Distribution Weight (lbs).

This chart shows the pounds of food CCFI distributed in the community by pounds from June to February.

One reason CCFI was able to achieve such great success in its first year is continued community conversations. Community conversation is an important way CCFI addresses food insecurity. KI and the CCFI committee create spaces to engage community in collective learning and strategy building. KI Staff and community members created CCFI as a result of a community forum after the closing of Double 8 Foods. Nembhard argues education and knowledge sharing is an important cooperative practices when she writes, “Education continues to be an essential element to the development and success of the cooperatives that form” (85). Education is a core tenant of KI. KI staff and the CCFI committee uses a “Knowledge by Inquiry” and a “Grassroots/From the Bottom Up” approach as a means to value individual and collective knowledge in community. KI upholds community as the primary knowledge source. It seeks information and resources within its community first, using conversation, and often good food, to build relationships with individuals and groups and gather knowledge. This holds the people who are facing the food insecurity at the center of problem identification and solution creation to ensure their needs are served. KI and CCFI use these approaches to generate solutions and build community during the Good Food Feast, Soup and Salad Luncheons, the Food Assembly, and the “From the Ground Up” community discussion series in partnership with Spirit and Place Festival. Conversation is a significant strategy to addressing food insecurity, because it centers communities facing the problems as the essential knowledge source and problem solver.

KI Staff and CCFI committee members analyze economic models in order to address food security. In an interview, Imhotep Adisa, Executive Director of KI, critiqued issues surrounding food access, saying, “I don’t adhere to the term food desert...We live in an economic desert” (“Food Desert”). Per U.S. Census data, approximately 21.3% of people live in poverty in Indianapolis with a per capita income of \$24, 280 in the past 12 months. Poverty is the result of low economic opportunity and the label of food desert or food insecurity fails to capture the entire picture of the inequity of race, class, gender legal status, and so on working in society. The image of poverty is visible through the limited economic opportunity in the community, vacant and abandoned properties, homelessness, and limited to no access to fresh, healthy food in the 46208 zip code.

When asked to reflect on the current food economy of her community, Miriam Zakem replied,

The traditional model puts profit and dollars as the goal...and our agricultural system is very tied up in global corporate capitalism...If you drive around, people who have money have grocery stores and good food, people who don't have dollars don't have grocery stores and good food.

Despite the loss of the grocery store in the community, the economic inequities are deeper than lack of grocery stores. They are reflective of a capitalist society focused on the exploitation of people and planet. A year after the closing of Double 8 Foods, Marsh, a national grocery store chain, closed their locations everywhere. This signifies the failing of the grocery store model as a sustainable business and means to address food insecurity.

If one talks to the CCFI team, you will hear them say, "We don't need another grocery store" (Zakem). After experiencing both the local and national chain closing, it is evident persons everywhere are vulnerable to food insecurity, because the current system is reliant on grocery stores under an economic model that places profit over people in a fluctuating economic climate. Thus CCFI's goal is to address food insecurity by providing fresh produce, education, and activism, and building economic models that empower community.

### **Community and Economic Development**

When asked to define community, Zakem said, "Community is people who come together and care about one another. My role in the community is to learn from others and contribute whatever I have to offer." Community is vital to the success of CCFI and is managed by a committee of neighbors who want to bring fresh produce to their community. When reflecting on how she became a part of the CCFI team, Zakem said, "I did not plan on starting a project...I had just moved here." Zakem, originally from Cincinnati, moved to Indianapolis a few years after graduating from IU. She found herself working and learning as a white woman in a predominantly African American community. She quickly became involved in the continued conversation around food, then the facilitator of CCFI team meetings and a project leader. She emphasizes CCFI is truly a team effort; she relies on the mentorship of others on the team and KI staff to manage the project. She works closely with Tysha Ahmed, 41, and Paulette Fair, 73, on the daily operations of the CCFI project.

Ahmed reflected on what community means to her, asking, "How can I be happy if others in my community are not?" She sees her role in the community

centered on food issues and helping others. Fair uses the term “neighborliness” to describe the significance of her role in the community. This means having “the concern for our common environment, issues, and resources.”

The women on this committee represent three generations of ideas and experiences. CCFI reflects the community development principles of KI, one of those being intergenerational learning where people both young and young at heart work together. Mentorship works as a space where older members of the community share with younger members while also remaining open to all that young people have to offer to the community as future leaders.

One of the strategies CCFI uses to influence community and economic development is social capital. The cooperative is able to run its food initiatives through the resources and connections members of the committee have built with other people. In one example of this, every Good Food Feast features a cooking demonstration and guest speaker. These persons donate their time to the program because of the relationship they have with members of the cooperative. Another example is CCFI’s employment of youth interns to assist with marketing, social media, and videography during the programs. CCFI has access to youth with these skills because of the cooperative’s relationship with KI.

Social capital as discussed earlier in this research was instrumental in the formation of CCFI. Members of the committee like to emphasize the fact that CCFI started with zero initial monetary capital and relied instead on support of neighbors pulling resources together to launch the program. CCFI is unique in that it did not start with a donation or grant like many other community-based food cooperatives. They problematize this model, because most cooperatives which begin this way struggle with sustainability and end after a few years of operation. The CCFI team believes for marginalized populations, community driven approaches lead to long term sustainability and community empowerment.

When asked about the future of CCFI, Zakem talked about seeing the project become a formal cooperative and providing economic opportunity for community members to run the program. All members of the CCFI committee are volunteers. They invest their time to organize the program and connect residents with farm fresh food. With increased capacity and residents buying more shares, there is a potential for the program to offer paid positions. CCFI’s goal is to double capacity and have the support of approximately 70 shareholders each month. This will allow the program to hire a part-time program coordinator to lead this initiative.



## Local Food Systems and Climate Change

CCFI's impact on climate change focuses on influencing local food systems. A local food system is "a collaborative network that integrates sustainable food production, processing, distribution, consumption, and waste management in order to enhance the environmental, economic, and social health" ("Local Food Systems"). This level of impact is important to CCFI, because they know their community has the knowledge and resources to control their food system. The cooperative also seeks to influence the environmental, economic, and overall health and wellbeing of members in their community. CCFI invests in local food systems through supporting local agriculture and building a community of local farmers, helping community members connect to farmers and food.

Supporting local agriculture is an important part of CCFI. There are many local farmers who support the program, including Johnnie Raber Farms, Street Beats, Lawrence Community Gardens, and others. CCFI has also established a relationship with Purdue Extension Farm Incubator, which provides land and materials for people who want to learn how to be urban farmers. Zakem helps coordinate the Farm Incubator and assisted in building the relationship between KI and Purdue Extension. Farmers in the incubator have provided produce for the cooperative and benefited from having a customer base from their own community of neighbors. This has empowered the farmers to learn how to grow crops and has spurred entrepreneurship.

For instance, Sybil Satterfield, one of the Purdue Incubator Farmers, supplied produce to CCFI in her first year of operating Street Beats Urban Farm. Street Beats is located in the Riverside Community in Indianapolis, where Satterfield grows a variety of produce, including greens, squash, tomatoes, Swiss Chards, and, of course, her specialty crop beats, on a plot next to her home. Satterfield hopes to expand Street Beats through purchasing more land, saying "There are several lots in the area to grow food on...I hope to have 1 acre of land to grow." When I asked her what motivates her to grow food, she answered, "I got to have some skin in the game, whether it's a foot, a hand, or an ear. This helps me feel engaged in the community, because I am a part of what's going on." Satterfield's commitment to community wellness goes beyond food, as she plans to expand her farm and sell both food and wellness products from her own home store. Thus, the partnership with Purdue Extension Farm Incubator has allowed community members like Satterfield to gain access to urban farming skills. These skills in turn help support the larger work of the KI through entrepreneurship with an environmental focus.

Moreover, the traditional model's emphasis on a global corporate capitalism has had multiple effects on the environment. The transportation of food is a large environmental issue, where it is "estimated that the average American meal travels 1500 miles from farm to plate" ("How Far"). The amount of travel uses thousands of gallons of fossil fuels to power trucks, planes, boats, and so forth, which bring the food to dinner tables across the United States and the world. The use of fossil fuels is harmful to the environment, as they pollute the air, soil, and water sources. Large scale farming also produces a large amount of pollutants due to the use of large equipment and pesticides, whereas small scale farmers tend to use less heavy equipment and pesticides. CCFI sources organic produce from local and urban farmers, which drastically reduces the amount of fossil fuels used and miles traveled from farm to plate – a reduction of up to 25 times.

Eating seasonally is another important aspect of local food systems. Seasonal eating is good for the environment because it reduces the year-round demand for imports of certain products that can be grown locally for only a few months. The grocery store industry helped commercialized the common perception of produce as available all year long, because it is available in their local grocery store. This perception is harmful to the environment, because consumers do not know about the heavy impact the agriculture industry has on the environment and the amount of labor it takes to raise produce and livestock. The transition from an agricultural to an industrialized economy shifted the relationship people had with their food from one in which people actively participated in the production of their food to one in which it seems normal to have what seems like instantaneous access to food through grocery stores, fast food restaurants, and so on. Working with local farmers allows consumers to build relationships with their local farmer and to understand what produce is grown in their local ecosystem as well as the labor put into growing food.

Local food systems help to build communities that are more independent of the traditional economic model. Community control of food allows neighborhood residents to have choice of what food enters their community and at what cost. CCFI members have relationships with farmers and know their produce is treated with little to no pesticides. Customers have given the feedback that they can even taste the difference in the food they buy in the grocery store versus the CCFI shares. When I asked Aghilah Nadaraj if CCFI has affected her views on supporting local agriculture, she said, "Yes, it has! The environmental movements I have been in have told me to support local agriculture, but CCFI gives me a practical opportunity." Nadaraj sees the potential for CCFI to be replicated in multiple parts

of the city and says “it could create a demand for more local agriculture.” Recently, KI launched the Kheprw Agricultural Science Project, via which they are preparing vacant lots, allotted to them for free by the city of Indianapolis, for urban farming (Fair). These lots are available for neighborhood residents to grow food for the community. Fair has been working with Ahmed to prepare these lots. She spoke about the lot located on 26th and Harding, saying, “We loved the book so much we named our farm after it. We call it *Collective Courage* Community Farm.” CCFI’s team is invested in the service of local farmers, providing fresh food to the community, and providing opportunities for residents to learn how to grow their own food.

### Conclusion

CCFI has been serving the 46208 zip code and greater Indianapolis community for over a year and shows no signs of stopping. The important aspects of CCFI’s work are addressing food insecurity, enhancing community and economic development, and investing in local food systems. The cooperative model allows the program to build community and create economic opportunity. Ahmed reflects on the importance of collective economics, saying, “Collectivism has already been done. Co-ops is [sic] something that’s not new, but has been something that always been done. I think it’s good that we are getting back to that.” CCFI aligns with the history of cooperation that Nembhard outlines in her book, where people come together to address a need in their community. KI uses *Collective Courage* as one of many texts to inform their understanding of cooperative development, organizing strategy, and advocacy for community development. Nembhard’s work is instrumental to this research, because she provides an historical perspective on the role of African American participation and activism through the cooperative model. This helps bridge the old and the new of cooperative work and allows the leaders of CCFI to stand on the shoulders of cooperative leaders before them.

The future of CCFI is shaped around creating opportunity and sustainability. The CCFI team set a goal to increase capacity to 70 shares each month to fund a part-time coordinator for the program. The team also wants to support others who wish to replicate their cooperative model and programming. CCFI received the Bicentennial Green Legacy Hall of Fame Award from Earth Charter Indiana at the organization’s 2016 Sustainable Awards. CCFI also developed a broad network of food access organizations, including partnerships with the Indy Food Council, Purdue Extension Farm Incubator, Office of Sustainability, Jump in for Healthy Kids, IU Health, Food Assembly, Community

Innovate, and the City of Indianapolis Department of Public Safety through a relationship with the Indianapolis Food Czar, Shelly Shuttles.

I have been truly impacted by the mission of the Kheprw Institute and CCFI. They have an organic way of building community and made me feel welcomed. This work helped me feel more connected to my ancestry as a descendent of sharecroppers and slaves on tobacco plantations. I rest this research on my ancestor's labor and legacy in alignment to Kheprw's and Nembhard's commitment to African American cooperative history. CCFI created a space to connect me with the Indianapolis community and inspired me to visualize a sustainable, equitable, and better world.

### **About the Author**

Tabitha Barbour is a graduate of Butler University'17, where she earned a degree in English Literature, double minor in Political Science and Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies. Originally from Clarksville, Tennessee, she now resides in Indianapolis, where she works for the Kheprw Institute coordinating their Girls eSTEAM program.

### Works Cited

- Ahmed, Tysha. Personal Interview. 10 Apr. 2017.
- Briggs, James. "Indy council approves transit tax." *IndyStar*, 28 Feb. 2017, [www.indystar.com/story/news/local/marion-county/2017/02/27/indy-council-approves-transit-tax/98490222/](http://www.indystar.com/story/news/local/marion-county/2017/02/27/indy-council-approves-transit-tax/98490222/).
- Buzby, Keith. "Farming the Slums: Using Eminent Domain and Urban Agriculture to Rebuild Baltimore's Blighted Neighborhoods." *William and Mary Environmental Law and Policy Review*, vol. 38, no. 1, 2017, p. 479-505.
- Chappel, Ebony. "Community organizes, reacts to Double 8 closing." *Indianapolis Recorder*, 15 Sept 2016, [www.indianapolisrecorder.com/article\\_d09da98b-701c-5811-ac06-43210cdb4b13.html](http://www.indianapolisrecorder.com/article_d09da98b-701c-5811-ac06-43210cdb4b13.html).
- Coleman-Jensen, Alisha, Matthew P. Rabbitt, Christian A. Gregory and Anita Singh. "Household Food Security in the United States in 2016." USDA, 2017, [www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/84973/err-237.pdf](http://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/84973/err-237.pdf).
- "Community Controlled Food Initiative." *Kheprw*, [www.kheprw.org/ccfi](http://www.kheprw.org/ccfi). Accessed 16 May 2016.
- "Cooperatives and Employment: a Global Report." *International Co-Operative Alliance*, 17 Nov. 2014, <https://ica.coop/en/media/library/research-and-reviews/cooperatives-and-employment-global-report#overlay-context=en/media/library/research-and-reviews/co-operatives-and-employment-global-report>.
- Fair, Paulette. Personal Interview. 11 Apr. 2017.
- "Food Desert of Economic Desert." *YouTube*, uploaded by KI NuMedia, 15 Feb. 2016, [www.youtube.com/watch?list=PLNU\\_w8WIPLvbt991d8sr91DDVjw4IUc12&v=VecdsnZJSXc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?list=PLNU_w8WIPLvbt991d8sr91DDVjw4IUc12&v=VecdsnZJSXc).
- "How Far Does Your Food Travel to Get to Your Plate?" *CUESA*, 3 Mar. 2017, [www.cuesa.org/learn/how-far-does-your-food-travel-get-your-plate](http://www.cuesa.org/learn/how-far-does-your-food-travel-get-your-plate).

- International Co-operative Alliance*. 10 Oct. 14, <https://ica.coop>. Accessed 13 Oct. 2017.
- “IU Health Healthy Food Access Grant.” *Indiana University Health*, 20 Jan. 2017, <https://iuhealth.org/about-iu-health/in-the-community/iu-health-healthy-food-access-grant/>.
- “Local Food Systems.” *Community-Wealth.Org*, 29 Dec. 2017, <https://community-wealth.org/strategies/panel/urban-ag/index.html>.
- Moed, Arnold L., and Judy Shackelford. “House Bill No. 1248.” *Indiana State Legislature*. 2 Feb. 2016. <http://iga.in.gov/staticdocuments/6/5/c/8/65c84164/HB1248.02.CO.MH.pdf>.
- Nadaraj, Aghilah. Personal Interview. 10 Apr. 2017.
- Nembhard, Jessica Gordon. *Collective Courage: A History of African American Cooperative Economic Thought and Practice*. Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014.
- Malici, Akam, and Elizabeth Smith. *Political Science Research in Practice*. Routledge, 2012.
- “Map the Meal Gap.” *Feeding America*, 21 June 2016, <http://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2014/overall/indiana>.
- Moskowitz, Karyn. “The Fresh Stop Project: An Oasis in a Food Desert of Louisville.” *Sustain*, Fall/Winter 2013, <http://stsroundtable.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/NR-Sustain-Article-2013.pdf>.
- “Our Story.” *Kheprw*, 20 Jul. 2016, <https://kheprw.org/our-story/>.
- “QuickFacts Indianapolis city (balance), Indiana.” United States Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/IPE120215/1836003,18>. Accessed 15 Dec 2016.
- Satterfield, Sybil. Personal Interview. 9 Apr. 2017.

Sauter, Mike. "Cities with the most abandoned homes." *USA Today*, 25 May 2016, [www.usatoday.com/story/money/business/2013/06/22/cities-with-most-abandoned-homes/2447613](http://www.usatoday.com/story/money/business/2013/06/22/cities-with-most-abandoned-homes/2447613).

"What Are Climate and Climate Change?" *NASA*, 26 Oct. 2011, [www.nasa.gov/audience/forstudents/5-8/features/nasa-knows/what-is-climate-change-58.html](http://www.nasa.gov/audience/forstudents/5-8/features/nasa-knows/what-is-climate-change-58.html).

"What's Happening in 2017?" *Spirit & Place Festival*, 16 Mar. 2017, [www.spiritandplace.org/Festival.aspx?access=Year](http://www.spiritandplace.org/Festival.aspx?access=Year).

"Social Enterprise." *Social Enterprise Alliance*, 21 Oct. 2016, <https://socialenterprise.us/about/social-enterprise>.

Vinson, Arriel, Mikala Lomax, and David Jones. "Breaking: Double 8 Foods closes its doors." *Indianapolis Recorder*, 15 Sept. 2016, [www.indianapolisrecorder.com/news/article\\_a5f3f00a-3153-11e5-9a4f-e3eda38265a2.html](http://www.indianapolisrecorder.com/news/article_a5f3f00a-3153-11e5-9a4f-e3eda38265a2.html).

Zakem, Miriam. Personal Interview. 9 Apr. 2017.