

Chapter 3

Research Methods

In this chapter, I explain the circumstances under which my opportunity to conduct this research arose, and also provide a contextual overview of the location of my study in Western North Carolina (WNC). I discuss the spatial logistics of the Asheville City Market and the process by which it came to first accept food stamps. I overview the recruitment methods for my study population, demographic (age, sex, and racial) differences between the two groups of food stamp shoppers I recruited, and how and where interviews were conducted. I discuss the means by which I conducted qualitative data analysis, and conclude with limitations of the study and provide evidence as to why this method of in-depth interviewing was best suited for the project at hand, as compared to other methods such as surveys or focus groups.

Study Location and Background

As stated in the literature review, the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), the administrative body for food stamps and other nutrition assistance programs, does not provide funding to farmers' markets for the wireless terminals needed for EBT transactions, which began to limit market access to the program during the mid to late 1990's. As a result of the switch to EBT and the technical and financial constraints to acquiring wireless terminals, currently fewer than 800 of the 5,000 farmers' markets nationwide are able to welcome food stamp users (USDA 2008).

Study
Rationale

The relative novelty of this program led me to question what sort of a response the new program would receive, and who would be the food stamp users most likely to

patronize the market. The attempt to link consumers to a new shopping venue, ostensibly where they might purchase healthier fresh foods, provoked many questions. What salient demographic characteristics (age, education, race, gender) or attitudinal differences (perceptions of organic and local food) would differentiate market shoppers from food stamp users who did not shop there, and how could these differences inform efforts—at both the national and local level—that promise to increase local and fresh food access to vulnerable populations? In seeking an answer, I developed a sampling frame that included all food stamp users within Buncombe County. To analyze differences between food stamp users I recruited from the farmers' market and those who I recruited through other means. Rather than compare EBT users to the entire farmers' market clientele, with income as an independent variable, I chose to focus on differences in the backgrounds of low-income persons, the target population of initiatives for fresh fruits and vegetables.

In Western North Carolina, a rural geographical region with 23 counties, three counties have farmers' markets with a wireless terminal that allows processing of EBT benefits. Buncombe County is the largest county in the region, with an estimated 220,000 residents (US Census Bureau 2008). The Asheville City Market is the first farmers' market in the county to begin accepting EBT as of June 2009, due to the efforts of the Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (ASAP), a Western North Carolina community nonprofit dedicated to rebuilding local food systems to strengthen the local economy and increase fresh food access to residents of the region.¹⁹ The 13 farmers' markets in Buncombe County operate autonomously with the exception of two markets

¹⁹ As with many areas of the country, the levels of production and consumption of local food in WNC are heavily disjointed. While the 23 counties in the region have over 12,000 family farms, the WNC economy sources only 1% of its food locally, and ranks 8th in the nation in terms of agricultural exports (Kirby, Jackson, and Perrett 2007).

that are funded primarily by ASAP; the Asheville City Market – South, located in the Biltmore Forest subdivision of South Asheville, and the Asheville City Market, located in downtown Asheville on Saturday mornings from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Although only in its second year, the Asheville City Market brought in upwards of \$20,000 in sales each week during the summer of 2009, making it one of the highest grossing markets in the county. In 2008, ASAP staff applied for and received funding from the LeafLight Institute, a North Carolina economic development nonprofit, for funds to purchase a wireless terminal and create marketing materials for potential shoppers.²⁰ ASAP had explored options for obtaining EBT at other area markets in earlier years, but was unable to do so until funding from LeafLight emerged for the \$800 terminal.²¹ Located in downtown Asheville and hosted on public land at Asheville City's Public Works Building parking lot, geographically the City Market is an unusually accessible market— nationwide, markets typically thrive in more affluent areas (Fisher 1999).²² Downtown Asheville is an eclectic, well-traveled location, notable as a tourist destination, a business center, and home to many of Asheville's public housing projects.

²⁰ Many things are needed to implement an EBT program at a market, involving continued investments of time, money, and manpower; Market managers must complete paperwork to process the sales and reimburse farmers; farmers must also be educated on how to accept the wooden tokens often used as EBT dollars. The Wholesome Wave foundation is funding EBT at farmers' markets across the country. Additional funding is also needed, however, for publicity and "bonus dollars" to double food stamp dollars spent at a market, which has happened in Washington, DC and Rhode Island farmers' markets. Many within the sustainable agriculture community argue that this method of increasing access through subsidized terminals and temporary sales promotions is not a viable long-term solution to increasing low-income shoppers' access, due to its reliance on outside funds from private funders.

²¹ Another factor that delayed obtaining the terminal at the start of the Asheville City Market in 2007 was that at that moment in time, wireless terminals for farmers markets could accept EBT transactions only. ASAP staff wanted to be able to accept credit and debit cards at the same terminal, so that the token system would not single out EBT shoppers to the farmers. This was an important consideration that the staff took into account when researching their options (Conversation with Emily Jackson, Program Director at ASAP, December 18, 2009).

²² For instance, the oldest farmers' market in Asheville, the North Asheville Tailgate Market, has been operating for 30 years and is located on the campus of a public university in a zip code where the average household income is \$76,000. The average household income in downtown Asheville, the vicinity of the City Market, is only \$37,000 (Asheville Business Research Center 2009).

Research Site

Downtown Asheville is also relatively accessible by bus, car, and sidewalk—the City Market is less than half a mile from an exit off of Interstate 240, a major highway that cuts across the western and eastern side of the city. Thus, I assumed that this market is accessible to those who have access to the Asheville City Transit system and those who drive, as the main thoroughfare across town is so close to Interstate 240. Figure 2 shows a basic map of Buncombe County in relation to the rest of North Carolina; Figure 3 shows Buncombe County’s major neighborhoods and highways.

Figure 2. Buncombe County Map

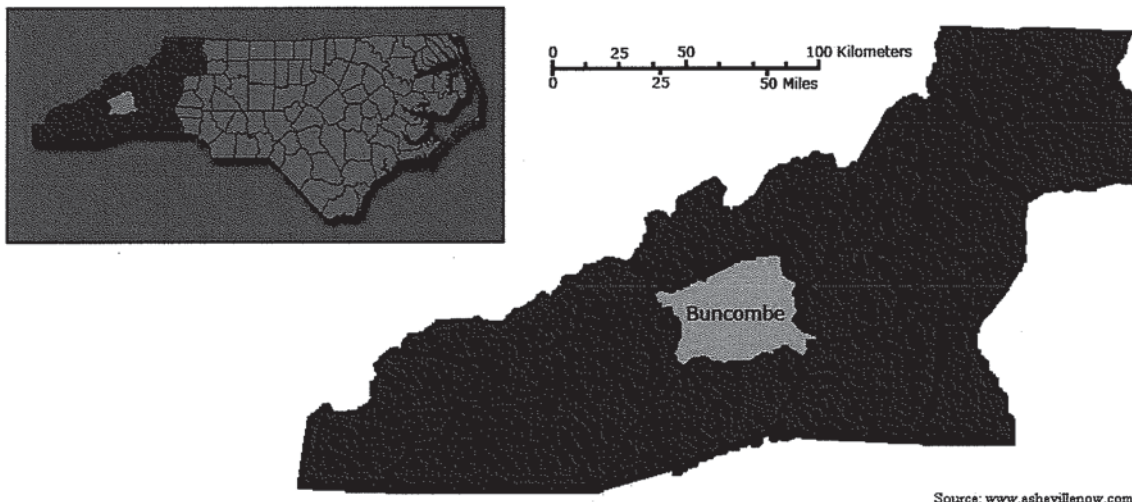
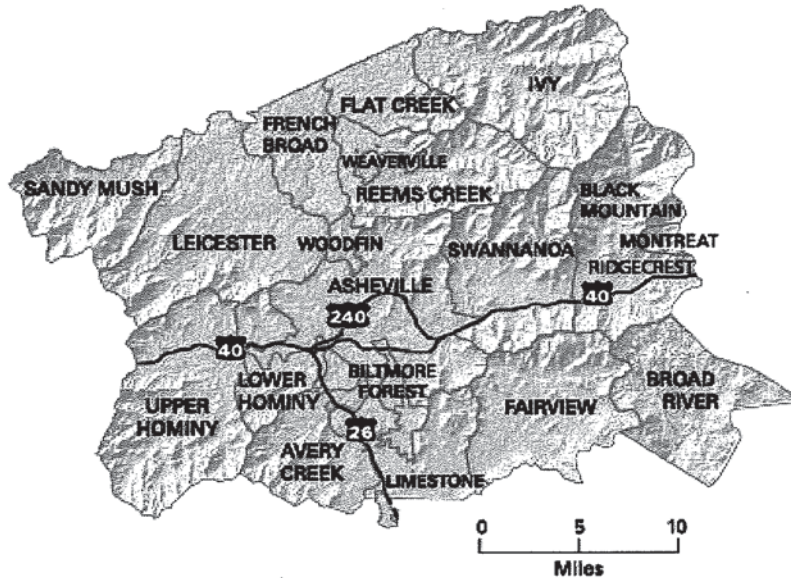


Figure 3. Buncombe County, including townships and major highways



Sample

I defined my possible sample to include all of Buncombe County (660 square miles and 200,000 residents) (U.S. Census 2008), rather than to merely the Asheville city limits (41 square miles) because I wanted to include participants from outside the central downtown area who may have shopped at places farther from home than their most convenient grocery store.²³ Asking for participants who live in Buncombe County also may have given me a higher response rate than my fliers than advertising for participants who live in “Asheville”, which is typically understood to mean only the downtown area. Other census-designated areas or towns in the county are adjacent to the city itself and referred to as distinct townships—Avery’s Creek, Bent Creek, Woodfin, and Weaverville, to name a few. People who did not live directly in downtown thus may

Pros & Cons of Sampling Frame

²³ Again, given that Buncombe County is rural, almost no grocery stores are within walking distance of neighborhoods. Only one of my respondents, George, said he could walk to the grocery store without having to take the bus.

have been less inclined to call me. Asking for participants from the County also eliminated confusion from potential participants; for instance, any food stamp user who saw a flier at the Buncombe County Health Department would be eligible to participate, because they by default live in the County, although not within city limits.²⁴ Furthermore, Buncombe County itself is of a size where I was feasibly able to canvass the area's main grocery stores and travel to respondents' homes.

Farmers' Market Shopper Recruitment

Recruitment

To obtain a sample of shoppers who used their food stamps at the City Market, I placed either a sign or a flier at the City Market's information tent during each day the market was open. The information tent is where one must go to swipe their EBT card for a specified dollar amount. Shoppers are then given tokens in \$1 increments to purchase food from the vendors at the market.²⁵ Information about my study was made available every market day from June 27 to August 29, 2009 (9 market days). The tent assistant(s) who staffed the information tent and operated the wireless terminal were aware of my study, and also mentioned it to shoppers in an effort to gain higher participation rates. The signs/fliers directed participants to either call or email me, or speak to me at the tent where I worked at the market in order to set up an interview. I was at this tent for at least three of the five market hours every Saturday morning, if not more. If a potential study participant approached me at the tent, we would either set a date for an interview or

²⁴ Widening my sample to the County resulted in the inclusion of five participants who reported a residence outside of the main six Asheville zip codes and who had very different experiences—for instance, one lived in a crowded trailer park, another lived in a more rural area that enabled her to grow her own food. Two of these six people shopped at the City Market, despite the availability of shopping venues closer to their home.

²⁵ The wireless terminal that accepts EBT cards also accepts debit and credit cards, and shoppers who pay with debit or credit cards are given tokens in \$5 increments.

exchange phone numbers, and I would contact them to arrange a time to meet, most often in a public location.

Conventional Food Stamp Shopper Recruitment

I used several routes to recruit food stamp participants who did not shop at farmers' markets. One method was to distribute fliers to local grocery store chains; see Table 3 for a list of these stores.²⁶ (A copy of the flier I used is located in Appendix A.) A second method was to post signs in Asheville's public housing projects, particularly in Norwood Apartments, a low-income project for the mentally disabled and elderly in the Eastern part of the city, Burnsville Complex, a housing project with a community garden in the Western part of the city, and Central Apartments, a smaller location in Downtown Asheville closest to the City Market.²⁷ I did not recruit in the Southern part of the county for two reasons: one, because it is a place with much higher economic capital, and two, because it was already served by an ASAP-sponsored market, the City Market South, which had relatively poor sales (\$1,000/week) compared to the Downtown City Market (\$20,000/week). This suggested to me that I would get a higher rate of participants if I focused my efforts at the downtown Market; furthermore, I was not able to attend the City Market South on a regular basis. Thirdly, I distributed fliers at the East End Family Resource Center, a community organization serving low-income mothers in West Asheville. Fourthly, although my requests to place signs at the Social Services Office were denied, I was able to post a flier in the Buncombe County Health Department, which allowed me to recruit two single mothers with young children.

²⁶ While I did not put signs in stores like Wal-Mart or Aldi, a high majority of my sample also said that they shopped there, which means I was not excluding these sorts of shoppers, although I may have excluded people who bought the majority of their groceries at these stores.

²⁷ Housing project and community organization names have been changed, but grocery store names have not been changed.

Finally, I used snowball sampling; at the conclusion of each interview, I told participants they were welcome to give my contact information to any friends they had who also received food stamps. Five participants were able to direct me to one other participant who I was able to interview. Additionally, one interviewee posted my request on an online message board called "Asheville Mamas", a natural-living website for mothers of young children living in the region. This resulted in three potential participants contacting me, two of whom I was able to interview.

Most non-farmers'-market shoppers elected to contact me by phone, although a few sent emails. If I was unable to answer my phone, my voice mail instructed them to leave a message and I would return their call. For respondents who did not initially answer my phone call, I would leave a voicemail and call again at least once or twice within the week to attempt to reach them.

Participant Response Rate

I had more success following through with initial contacts from the farmers' market than with food stamp users I recruited from supermarkets and other locations. I attribute this in some part to the regularity with which some shoppers went to the City Market. Several shoppers who expressed interest in the study but did not contact me immediately were nonetheless reminded of the study each Saturday, which likely increased their inclination to participate. Thus from my farmers' market sample, I was able to meet with and interview all who expressed interest in the study with the exception of one participant that did not return repeated phone calls, for a total of 16 participants. The number of EBT transactions at the ACM averaged five per market day from May to

Multiple Strategies

July 2009, and increased to 20 per market day in August.²⁸ If all of these transactions were from one-time shoppers, that would mean a total of 120 EBT shoppers over the course of the summer, or a 12% participation rate; the actual participation rate is likely higher because some of these are repeat customers from week to week.²⁹ By contrast, with non-farmers'-market shoppers, I was unable to establish contact with at least five participants after they called to express initial interest (this only includes participants who left voicemails—other potential participants may not have left voicemails indicating their interest). Although one or two participants missed an initial interview, we were able to reschedule. Only one participant did not follow through with our expected meeting time and did not return subsequent phone calls.

Additionally, several food stamp users who I did not recruit from the farmers' market who expressed interest and a history of buying local/organic food said that they would shop at farmers' markets, and their experiences were more similar to the City Market shoppers than the non-City Market food stamp users. Regarded in this light, the comparisons between the two mentalities of shopping are more pronounced.

Interview Procedure and Qualitative Analysis

Most interviews were easy to schedule during daytime hours, since most of the study respondents were not holding a regular job. I told interviewees I would speak to them in a public place, but if they were unable to do so, I offered to interview them at their home. Interviews were completed in grocery store cafes (16), respondent's homes (9), a public housing complex library (8), a community resource center (2), a McDonald's

²⁸ In August the ACM began a widely-publicized \$5 for \$5 promotion where food stamp users received a bonus \$5 token for spending \$5 or more at the market.

²⁹ Numbers obtained from personal correspondence with Mike McCreary, Asheville City Market Manager, on September 29, 2009 and October 13, 2009.

or other restaurant (3), outdoors at a public park or elsewhere (4), and the respondent's workplace (1). All participants gave consent to a recorded interview. One interview was conducted without the use of a tape recorder due to a battery malfunction. Interviews ranged from 30 minutes to almost 2 hours, but most averaged 70 minutes in length.

I introduced myself to interviewees, either on the phone or in person, as a college student conducting research on food shopping habits and purchasing decisions of food stamp users in the area. I explained that the study would take anywhere from 30 minutes to an hour and I would tape record the interviews but remove identifying information from the transcripts. If participants asked me about or referenced ASAP, I would generally defer questions about my role as an intern with the organization to the end of the interview so as to not posit myself as a researcher on their behalf. After reviewing the consent form and obtaining a signature from participants, as well as answering any questions they had, I asked my participants questions about four areas of food purchasing and consumption: (1) monthly purchasing habits –where and how often participants shopped and why, (2) which foods they purchased and how they budgeted their money, (3) participant perception of broader issues—local food, organic food, farmers' markets, and health, and (4) participant experience in the food stamp program and/or other public assistance programs such as Women, Infants and Children (WIC). The interview followed a semi-structured, in-depth format. A copy of my interview guide is in Appendix B.

I transcribed my interviews using a combination of voice recognition software, paid transcription, and personal transcription. After transcribing the interviews, I wrote up brief memos summarizing participants' food purchasing behaviors and shopping

Broad
of Overview
of Interview
guide

habits, speculating as to what themes were becoming constant across interviews. First names were deleted from the transcripts of the interview, in addition to place names of locations such as states the respondent had previously lived in. In subsequent chapters, I refer to participants by a pseudonym. (A list of these names is included in Appendix C.)

I coded my interviews using Atlas.ti, a qualitative data analysis software. I began with making a list of concepts and themes that had appeared throughout my interviews and in my memos, including such concepts as value, farming experience, social relationships with food, and definitions of organic/local food. After exporting this data, within these categories, I then read for similarities and differences in terms of how often concepts were addressed between each group, and also concepts that arose within groups, and observed which themes were more prevalent within one group as opposed to another, and which themes were equally common across both groups.

Participant Demographics

The sample for this study includes 43 food stamp households,³⁰ representing 16 households who shopped at the City Market at least once, and 27 households that had never shopped at the City Market.³¹ All of the participants interviewed were the primary food gatekeepers of their households; the ones who bought and prepared the majority of the food.³² Salient sample characteristics are listed for each subsample in Table 2.

³⁰ A food stamp household is defined as those members within a household who met eligibility requirements; however, a number of the people I interviewed had people living with them who were not part of the food stamp household either because they were children who came to stay on the weekend, for instance, or were not U.S. citizens. As I explain in the results chapters, this often made purchasing more difficult because a household was not receiving as much money in food stamps as it could have, were all household members included in the Food Stamp household.

³¹ Another way in which this sample could be organized is by participants' identification as purchasers of local/organic food, regardless of location—including those participants who I recruited from natural foods stores. In the results chapters, I expand upon and complicate this distinction.

³² Two exceptions include a household of three band members whom I interviewed collectively, and a male and female partner who came to an interview together. This makes for a total of 46 respondents, but

Divided by key groups

Table 2. Characteristics of Study Participants

Characteristic	Farmers' market shoppers N=16	Conventional shoppers N=27	Total N=43
Age of interviewee			
20-29	9	5	14
30-39	5	7	12
40-49	2	2	4
50-59	1	6	7
60+	2	7	9
Gender			
Male	2	5	7
Female	14	22	36
Race/Ethnicity			
Caucasian	15	18	33
African-American	0	7	7
Hispanic	0	1	1
Native American	0	1	1
Other	1	0	1
Household Composition			
1 Adult	8	16	24
2 Adults	2	1	3
1 Adult + children	2	6	8
2 adults + children	4	4	8
Food Stamp Benefits			
Less than \$100/month	1	9	10
\$100-199	3	3	6
\$200-299	6	6	12
\$300-399	2	3	5
\$400-499	0	3	3
\$500+	4	3	7
Income source			
None	4	3	7
Part-time job	7	5	12
Full-time job	0	1	1
Partner's job	2	3	5
SSI* or Social Security	1	15	16
Savings/ personal inheritance	2	0	2
Highest Level of Education			
Less than high school	0	7	7
High school diploma/GED	1	6	7
Attended college	9	7	16
Graduated from college	5	6	11
Advanced degree	1	1	2

*SSI= Supplemental Security Income

Basic demog. info.

Of the 27 households that did not shop at the farmers' market, 11 were multiple-person households and 16 were single-person households. This group was more racially

only 43 households. In the table, I list demographics for the primary food gatekeeper of these two households, so that all sections of the table add up to 43.

homogenous, including seven black respondents and one Latino and one Native American respondent. This group also included the five men of the sample who were primary food shoppers. Overall, the group was older and relied more heavily on social security or disability as a means of income. Additionally, this subsamples' overall level of education was more diverse, with roughly equal numbers of participants having attended high school, graduated high school, attended college and graduated college. However, professional degrees were rare among my sample as a whole. Only one participant in each group held an advanced degree—in both cases, a master's degree. Average amount of food stamp expenditures within each group were slightly higher than the national average—\$280 for the farmers' market shoppers and \$250 for the non-farmers'-market shoppers. The national average is \$200 in benefits.

Of the 16 households who shopped at the farmers' market, 8 interviewees were single women ranging from ages 21-62, most in their late 20s or early 30s; another 8 interviewees were part of multiple-person households, 6 of which had children. Most said, as had the other group, that their benefits were not enough to cover their monthly food expenditures. All interviewees were white with the exception of one mixed-race female. Their levels of education were overall much higher; only one of the respondents had not graduated from high school. Some had attended college, but did not graduate. This sample presents as generally younger; 9 of the 16 participants were under age 30.

Sample Representativeness

How well does my overall sample reflect the racial and demographic distribution of food stamp users in Buncombe County? The population selected from the farmers' market is a self-selecting group, so it is unreasonable to expect that it would mirror the

food stamp population in the county at large. However, my sample of non-farmers'-market shoppers reflects a diversity of racial, household size, and background among the population.³³ As of July 2009, there were 13,000 households receiving food stamps in the county for a total of 27,600 individuals benefiting from food stamps in these households. Racially, Buncombe County's food stamp population is 72% Caucasian, 17% African American, and 11% other races. While the farmers' market sample does not reflect this racial diversity, the non-farmers'-market sample does, with an overrepresentation of African American respondents. This overrepresentation allows me to more meaningfully explore any racial differences in food attitudes and selection among the food stamp population. In terms of household size, my sample also somewhat mirrors the larger food stamp population of the county. In July 2009, 54.5% of households with food stamps reported having no children (ages 0-17), 34.5% had 1-2 children, 9% had 3-4 children, and 1% had 5 or more children. Within each of my subsamples, roughly half (10/16 and 16/27) are households without children, which suggests that my data reflect a reasonable range of attitudes on food purchasing.

Food shopping options in Buncombe County

Within Buncombe County there exist dozens of places at which to buy groceries, but accessibility to these locations, particularly those with a wider range of local or organic options is highly dependent on transportation. Respondents listed a total of nine grocery chains, plus the Asheville City Market, as places that they shopped at during the course of a typical month. A list of these stores is reported in Table 3.

³³ All statistics cited in this section are from Duncan, D.F., Kum, H.C., Flair, K.A., Stewart, C.J., and Huang, S.P. (2009), Management Assistance for Child Welfare, Work First, and Food & Nutrition Services in North Carolina. Retrieved September 26, 2009, from University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Jordan Institute for Families website. URL: <http://ssw.unc.edu/ma/>

Study
Context

Table 3: List of Shopping Venues in Buncombe County

Name	Type of retail establishment
<i>Conventional grocery stores</i>	
Wal-Mart	National chain supercenter
Sam's Club	National chain warehouse-wholesale club
Ingles	Regional chain supermarket ³⁴
Food Lion	Regional chain supermarket
Bi-Lo	Regional chain supermarket
Aldi	National chain discount grocery
Go Grocery Outlet	National chain discount grocery
<i>"Green" grocery stores</i>	
Earth Fare	Regional chain supermarket
Greenlife	Independent supermarket
Amazing Savings	Independent discount grocery
French Broad Food Co-op	Independent small-scale grocery
Western North Carolina Farmers' Market	State-run agricultural wholesale market
Asheville City Market	Producer-only tailgate market

Ingles, the largest supermarket chain in the area, is a full-service standard grocery store with multiple locations in Buncombe County. Almost every participant reported shopping here at least once a month. Bi-Lo and Food Lion are also large supermarket chains that have been slowly closing over time so that only one store of each exists in

³⁴ Ingles Markets is a southeast regional chain with 200 stores in six states and twelve stores in Buncombe County, Earth Fare, also a regional chain comparable to Whole Foods; Greenlife is a smaller chain with only one other location in Tennessee. Ingles stores average 50,000 square feet, and Earth Fare and Greenlife 25,000 feet. By contrast, Wal-Mart Supercenters average 200,000 square feet.

Buncombe County—only two participants reported shopping there, and infrequently at that. Greenlife and Earth Fare are two full-service medium-sized natural foods stores located immediately off of highways in the western and northern parts of the county. The French Broad Food Co-Op is a small community-owned grocery carrying local and organic foods located in downtown Asheville, and is accessible by foot, bus, and car. All stores have fresh meat counters, delis, and sit-down cafes, with the exception of the Co-Op, which does not prepare food on-site.

Discount grocers in Asheville also vary in location and product selection. Amazing Savings is a locally-owned discount grocer that specializes in organic nonperishable foods and to a lesser extent discounted meats, fruits and vegetables; however, its warehouse is located in a part of town inaccessible by bus and is furthest from any residential neighborhoods. By contrast, conventional grocery “outlets” are more numerous and easier to access. Go Grocery has three locations, and Aldis has two locations in Buncombe County; all are located off of major highways. Three WalMart supercenters also exist in the county, the largest of which is accessible by bus and adjacent to an Aldi’s. Sam’s Club, a wholesale discount store, has one location in town off of a major highway and on a bus line, but membership is \$40 per year for individuals. Thus, while the options for discounted local and organic food in Asheville are available, these stores are not as numerous or as accessible as conventional grocery stores.

Finally, farmers’ markets in Buncombe County are numerous (thirteen to date), but they generally have limited hours and fewer locations.³⁵ One alternative—the WNC Farmers Market, is owned by the state of North Carolina and has been in Asheville for 30

³⁵ Farmers’ markets set up trucks and tents in parking lots and side lots around Buncombe County on Wednesdays, Saturdays, and Tuesdays in all areas of the county.

years and is open daily, with a large lot of land and several warehouses with vendors inside. However it is not a “true” farmers’ market with exclusively local produce; as an agricultural wholesale market, only 32 of its 100 vendors sell a product directly to consumers. Additionally, only one of its stands takes food stamps. Of all the tailgates in the city, only the City Market accepts food stamps. Thus the opportunities for farm-fresh produce directly from the farmer are limited, within Buncombe County, to the City Market.

Shopping habits of study participants

Overall the shopping locations chosen by participants appeared to align with nationwide data which suggest that 83% of food stamp benefits are redeemed within supermarkets, 6% at large grocery stores, 4% at small groceries, and 7% at convenient stores and specialty stores (USDA 2006). Not surprisingly, respondents overall listed the Ingles near their home as their most frequent shopping venue, citing convenience as the reason for shopping there. Respondents who went to Greenlife or Earth Fare said they did so to get specific items, the prepared foods in the deli (most often mentioned by single people as a way to save money) or certain food groups of groceries (bulk items or organic fruits and vegetables). Respondents who shopped at Wal-Mart did so to get canned foods or the majority of their groceries, and the same was reported with Aldi. Overall, respondents reported that shopping in multiple locations to search out deals was a cost-saving strategy. Those who lived in housing projects—a total of 11— who reported shopping at only one location cited limited transportation as a hindrance; limited by Asheville’s infrequent bus system, these respondents relied on the bus or a friend to take them to Ingles or Wal-Mart. The exception to this general pattern were those who

“Descriptive Results”

shopped at the City Market, at times driving very far from their homes to go there and avoiding the Ingles that was physically closer to their house or apartment.

Study Limitations and Benefits

By nature of my recruitment strategy of posting flyers at the information table at the City Market, this sample excludes those food stamp participants who visited the market but decided not to purchase anything. However, it does validate the fact that these shoppers are willing consumers and not just visitors to the farmers' market; if I had recruited visitors it would have been more difficult to recruit participants, given that there would be no salient characteristic on which to determine whether or not to approach potential respondents. This methodology also excludes low-income shoppers who are eligible for food stamps but are not enrolled in the program for whatever reason.

Additionally, my personal background may have affected the manner in which some participants related to me, detrimentally for some, yet positively for others. For instance, my sample population from the farmers' market contains a number of single, younger women, ranging from ages 22 to 28. These childless women were generally living on their own or with roommates, and (nearly all) had attended at least a year of college; most importantly, however, they all expressed an interest in buying organic food and eating whole foods rather than industrial processed foods, a philosophy in which I take personal interest (although my participants overwhelmingly reported eating a much better diet than my own). With these participants, I shared much in common, and likely felt more at ease interviewing them. At the end of our interviews, I would often share with these participants my thoughts on local and organic food and how closely their opinions mirrored my own. With others, such as older participants or participants in

housing projects, I differed from them greatly in that I was younger, Hispanic, college-educated, and for the male participants, female. However, like many of them, I was also a native resident of Asheville and I often referred to this during interviews.³⁶

Because I listed institutional support on my consent form, which discloses my affiliation with Harvard, I cannot definitively say how this may have influenced others' opinions of me, especially since I was conducting food stamp research with people who had little to no disposable income. In an effort to deflect attention from myself I would always mention that I was only able to attend Harvard because of financial aid, and that Harvard had given me the compensation money for participants and it was not coming out of my own pocket, as a few participants had assumed so and been reticent to take it. Given the universal friendliness with which I was received, I suspect that my unassuming demeanor and size, my racial ambiguity, as well as my casual dress, served to assuage any sort of negative mentality about Harvard that the participants might have assumed. Had I been a white male conducting research from Harvard, however, I suspect that my participants would have reacted quite differently.

Finally, this study should be characterized not as a "small-sample stud[y] but [a] multiple-case stud[y]" (Small 2009:101) which "cannot make accurate descriptive statements about the distribution of characteristics in the population as a whole." My study is not a definitive representation of farmers' market shoppers who are low-income, or of the population of food stamp users nationwide; the very fact that this study takes place within a rural Southern city with a visible (and growing) local food movement is indicative of that limitation.

³⁶ However, the universal response was that of surprise, followed with the phrase, "Wow....and what are you doing in Asheville?" to which I then replied that this was my home (not immediately apparent to most people since I have no southern accent) and where I had decided to conduct my research.

Nonetheless, my sample is similar to the region's food stamp population in terms of its proportionate representation of single families and children, and, for the non-farmers'-market shoppers, my sample has a similar racial demographic. Participants were recruited through a variety of means, to minimize biases that might have enclosed me within a particular social network of like-minded individuals. The informal means with which I interviewed participants revealed important information about budgeting, health perceptions, and food purchasing choices that each family or individual struggled to make on their limited income. Additionally, the wealth of qualitative data about food purchasing decisions, perceptions of health, and opinions on local and organic food that I uncovered was much broader in scope than what a quantitative, fixed answer survey may have elicited on the same topics.