

Testimony to the House Agriculture Committee
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Thank you Mr. Chairman and to the ranking member for having me here today. I came to the nonprofit world from journalism. I covered the military and the CIA for nearly 20 years. I covered the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and consequently I spent a lot of time visiting people who had been injured visited at Walter Reed As you know, the most visible injury of those wars is a lower limb amputation.

Fast forward to 2013 when I joined the nonprofit Arcadia Center for Sustainable Food & Agriculture here in DC. Arcadia is dedicated to among other things dismantling the barriers to a healthy diet.

The first time I went out on Mobile Markets in the low-food access neighborhoods we serve, I saw a remarkable number of people in wheelchairs and on crutches, with amputated limbs. I thought they were war veterans. I was wrong. They were victims of diabetes.

There have been about 1,500 amputations from 10 years of war, resulting from the work of a very diabolical and determined enemy. Do you know how many diabetic amputations there are in this country? In 2010 alone, about 73,000.

This isn't just a health system problem. This is a food system problem: what you have access to, what you can afford, and what you consume.

There are two food systems. There is the one most of us enjoy, where you can access just about anything you want, whenever you want. But if you have limited income and lack reliable transportation, you are primarily eating what's in your immediate neighborhood, which for most low-income people in Washington, D.C., means what's available from convenience stores and fast food.

If we are going to address the galloping rates of chronic disease which cost the United States somewhere north of \$300 billion a year, healthy foods need to be just as ubiquitous, inexpensive and appealing as the processed and convenience foods that so many of us – regardless of income – eat regularly. If you have ever tried to diet, you know how hard it is. If you can't afford healthy food or access it conveniently, it is almost impossible to make a sustained change in your diet.

And we all pay the price for the bad quality diets most Americans eat. Beyond the human cost, as a nation we all bear the burden in increased health care costs, insurance premiums, Medicaid, Medicare, and lost productivity.

Arcadia is trying to fix that, here in Washington.

Our nonprofit was established in 2010 by restaurateur Michael Babin.

We work in three interlocking mission areas:

Sustainable Agriculture:

We grow food on our vegetable farm in suburban Virginia on the grounds of the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Woodlawn-Pope-Leighey. We train military veterans to be farmers on that same land, which incidentally was once cultivated by George Washington himself after he resigned his military commission. So we are increasing the supply of wholesome food and farmers to grow it in our region.

Farm and Nutrition Education

Then we use the farm as a campus for school children to learn about agriculture, connect the food they eat to where it originates, and to get them excited about healthy food. It works: we see a 29 percent increase in the number of kids who like eating beets after they attend a field trip to our farm. So we are building demand for wholesome food even as we add to the supply.

But none of that does any good if you don't have a way of getting that food into the hands of the people who need it the most.

Food Access

That is where our market-based distribution model comes in. We have two Mobile Markets. The Mobile Markets are rolling farm stands that stock a complete healthy locally grown diet – from fruit and vegetables and herbs to milk, pastured and grass fed meat, eggs, and sustainably sourced fish. We take the farm stand to neighborhoods without a quality, affordable source of food. We pop out our awning, set up tables and tents and within about 30 minutes, have a fully functioning farmers market. We do this at 14 regular weekly stops in low-food access neighborhoods – places with high use of SNAP (the supplemental nutrition assistance program), low-car ownership and typically no store that can support a healthy diet within about a mile. We serve areas where people don't have much money, rely on public transportation, and have limited geographic access to wholesome food.

How the Mobile Markets Work

The Arcadia Mobile Markets prove that if you make high-quality food affordable and convenient, you can change the way people eat. Because our work centers on low-income communities, it is especially applicable to this discussion.

Healthy food needs to be just as ubiquitous, cheap and appealing as the processed and convenience foods that so many of us – regardless of income – eat regularly. If you have ever tried to diet, you know how hard it is. If you can't afford healthy food or access it conveniently, it is almost impossible to make a sustained change in your diet.

This is not an emergency food pantry, as necessary as those are. Our customers spend their own resources – be it their own money or a nutrition benefit – to select the most nutritious, fresh, local food. They buy it. They value it. They eat it.

We accept at least eight forms of tender – SNAP, WIC, Senior FMNP vouchers, Produce Plus vouchers, cash, debit, credit and our own coupons. Each of the forms of tender has their own rules. We also double WIC and Senior vouchers, but those are only for produce. PPP is good for \$10 in produce and is not doubled.

We make it affordable by matching SNAP purchases at the register for fruits, veggies, and proteins dollar for dollar. What that means for our customers is a 50 percent discount on the highest quality food possible. Our fruit and vegetable SNAP sales are matched through the Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive program the Congress funded in the last farm bill via our partner Wholesome Wave. It is a game changer, which our data demonstrates.

Our SNAP protein sales or clean, grass-fed, pastured meat, eggs, and milk – and our fruit and veggie match for WIC and Senior FMNP vouchers -- are matched by other donors, including the Bainum Family Foundation, William S. Abell Foundation, Power Supply, Inova, George Washington University's Inversity program, and Alston & Bird.

Leveraging Technology to Increase Food Access

As you can imagine, this makes for a complex, and sometime confusing point of sale. To make our transactions and our financial reporting easier, in the winter of 2014 we put up a request on Facebook for someone savvy with technology to help us create a point of sale system we could use on the Mobile Market to easily ring up our transactions.

Perigee Labs stepped up to partner with us, and they designed an elegant, iPad-based point of sale system – a glorified cash register – that we can use at our market stops to ring up sales that does all that math for us without a WiFi connection. Because we are a nonprofit and want to minimize costs, we built this for a second-generation iPad, available refurbished for around \$250.

The Arcadia Farmers Register speeds customer transactions, manages inventory, and expedites financial reporting. Because it associates every transaction with the form of tender used to purchase it, the location, time, and price, it also yields valuable data on the food purchasing patterns of our customers. Arcadia is now working with the city of Washington to use the data to inform and design food policies and interventions that encourage the purchase of nutrient dense foods.

The Arcadia Farmers Register is a scalable solution to creating a national database of healthy food purchasing behaviors available free of charge to government policy makers and public health researchers. It can also be used to ascertain prices at farmers markets nationwide, and to improve the farm business valuation system used to determine capital lent to small farmers.

It was used this year by 10 organizations and farms across the nation who are also working in healthy food access.

Real Food Farm in Maryland

Grow Ohio Valley in West Virginia

The Kellyn Foundation in Pennsylvania

Waterloo Greens to Go in Iowa

Healthy Here in New Mexico

Vegas Roots in Nevada

Seacoast Eat Local in New Hampshire

Good Food Bus in Maine

DC Urban Greens in Washington, D.C.

And

Mill City Grows in Massachusetts.

Data Gathering

But the more we used the Farmers Register, the more we began to see its transformational value: the data on the back end. Because of the Arcadia Farmers Register, we understand what our customers buy, what they want, how they use their federal nutrition benefits, and how they combine them with cash or other benefits to maximize the healthy food their families get.

We can analyze the impact interventions like cooking demonstrations and coupons have on promoting products and changing behaviors. We no longer go “on our gut” or anecdotally to determine what works in improving our customers’ diets. We can rely on cold, hard data.

The question is often asked: what are SNAP customers using the benefit to buy?

As a rule, people in my line of work have relied primarily on self-reporting surveys of SNAP customers to answer that question. While useful, the results can be a little unreliable. Ask me what I had for breakfast this morning and I am far more likely to admit to my oatmeal at 7 am than I am to the donut chaser at 10 am. The Arcadia Farmers Register tracks what customers who use SNAP purchase at every stop, every day, every week, every season.

Because they choose what they want and spend their own resources, we know they are eating the food. We can measure actual changes in purchasing patterns, track

improvements, and figure out what works to increase our customers' consumption of the most nutritious foods.

Results

First, the big picture:

- Our customers, the vast majority of whom are low income, have pumped more than \$468,000 in new farm sales into the rural economy in the Mid Atlantic – revenue farmers would not otherwise have without the Arcadia Mobile Markets as they do not have access to these customers.
- Since 2012, Mobile Market annual revenues have increased by more than 400 percent with no marketing budget while serving the poorest neighborhoods in Washington, D.C. This remarkable increase in revenue has occurred almost entirely through word of mouth. Our sales have increased because our customers love the food and the prices
- Although the Mobile Markets represent less than 2 percent of total farmers market revenues in Washington D.C., we redeem about 30 percent of all SNAP benefits used at farmers markets in the city. We have a disproportionate impact on the SNAP-using community. We attribute this to our locations – we are convenient to SNAP customers – to our prices, to the high quality and variety of offerings, and to our customer service.
- In 2012, our average SNAP customer took home about \$7.50 of food from the Mobile Market That has nearly tripled to about \$19 per SNAP transaction. That means our SNAP customers tried this food and doubled down using their EBT cards. They have increased their demand and consumption of nutritious food.

The impact of FINI: FINI encourages healthy purchases

- Our SNAP customers are the most likely among all low-income customers to reach into their pockets for cash to buy even more food. This is important because it means that these customers so value the food they get they are willing to spend their own money on it without getting the 50 percent discount. This is proof the FINI program works and meets a need.
- More proof the FINI program is creating converts. While SNAP customers only used cash in two percent of their transactions during the past two season, those two percent are strong users, with an average amount of additional cash spent at \$6.93 per transaction. Compare that to the next highest users, PPP customers, who are getting \$10 in free fruits and veggies. PPP customers who spend cash spend an average of \$2.22. Keep in mind that SNAP can be spent on any food at any store. In contrast, PPP is free and can only be used for produce at farmers markets in DC. This statistic, while complex, is important because it demonstrates that SNAP customers are willing to invest more of their own resources, which could be spent on any SNAP eligible item, on produce and then invest their own money.

- We did 3,769 SNAP transactions over the last two seasons. 75 percent of all SNAP transactions went for produce. That number is trending up, from 70 percent in 2015 to 81 percent in 2016.
- The increase in produce sales to SNAP customers is remarkable considering the similar increase in DC-funded Produce Plus benefits. That means overall demand for healthy produce is sharply increasing.

SNAP customers spent more than \$37,000 on produce during the past two seasons, half of the total attributable to FINI

- 1675+ pounds of apples
- 1475+ pounds of peaches
- 1098+ pounds of cantaloupe
- 812+ pounds of potatoes
- 796+ pounds of kale

The popularity of produce is trending up.

- The top four products sold to SNAP customers in 2016, based on transactions, are 'Produce' – they are in fact 6 of the top 10. Our SNAP customers have other choices – they can also buy meat, eggs, cheese and milk. But they increasingly choose fruits and vegetables, and more of them.
- That is a dramatic change from 2015, when produce cracked the top 4 only once: apples

In 2016 our top four SNAP purchases, all of which leveraged FINI funds:

- 972 pounds of apples, a 38 percent increase over 2015
- 860 pounds of peaches, a 40 percent increase over 2015
- 514 pounds of onions, an 83 percent increase over 2015
- 409 pounds of kale, a 6 percent increase over 2015

More than 70 percent of our transactions occur with verified low-income customers using some form of nutrition benefit. Here's what we know since we implemented the Farmers Register in 2015. It is just a taste of what our customers took home from us for the last two seasons.

- 7,865 customers bought 14,467 lbs of local peaches
- 7,810 customers bought 13,879 lbs of local apples
- 1,984 customers bought 7473 lbs of local watermelons
- 2,385 customers bought 9814 lbs of cantaloupe
- 3,706 customers bought 5195 lbs of kale
- 2,871 customers bought 4258 lbs of summer squash
- 2,277 customers bought 4019 lbs of sweet potatoes
- 2,160 customers bought 5,587 lbs of cabbage

Nutrition incentives change lives.

One of our customers, Yvonne Z. Smith, shared her story with me. Yvonne is 64, in her own home in Washington, D.C.'s Ward 8. She has crippling arthritis and is on disability – like many seniors in this country she is at particular risk of food insecurity. Until this year she was diabetic. Because her housing costs are more than 50 percent of her income, she qualifies for SNAP – a total of \$16 a month. It's not much, but it helps.

She uses SNAP at the Mobile Market, so her \$16 becomes \$32. She leverages PPP get even more produce and also uses cash.

She has cut all processed foods and simple sugars out of her diet. She cooks collards and kales in big batches in a crockpot twice a month, freezes them, and eats them three times a week. She has raw salads four times a week. The magnesium in the greens cuts down on the inflammation from arthritis. She eats brown rice and only rarely white potatoes.

Yvonne is now free from diabetes. The Mobile Market's rich, seasonal selection of affordable, sustainably grown vegetables is critical to her transformation and ongoing health.

"Organic is seen as something only for the rich. Having access to vegetables that you might not try is important," she told me. "Mushrooms, for example. I use them when I cook beef and that means I cut down on the amount of beef because of the texture, and (Arcadia has) them more reasonable than grocery stores."

"I am the person for whom just a little help is important," she told me. "It is the access to the vegetables within blocks of me that made all the difference, and the (incentives)."

About Arcadia:

The History of the Arcadia Center for Sustainable Food & Agriculture

Washington, D.C. restaurateur Michael Babin founded Arcadia to fix a problem he first came into contact with when trying to source local, responsibly well-grown fruits and vegetables for his restaurants. The supply was small and the price was high.

He asked himself: if this is so difficult for me, what does that mean for the rest of Washington? That question quickly led him to the public health crisis engendered by our food system: exceptionally effective at producing nutrition-free calories that are cheap at the point of sale but devastatingly expensive for public health. With few nutritious choices, constrained resources, and limited transportation, low-income communities suffer disproportionate rates of chronic disease that result from our industrial food system – diabetes, hypertension, heart disease and obesity. The health care cost to the United States annually is staggering – nearly half a trillion dollars.

Babin created Arcadia, a 501(c)3, in 2010 to innovate solutions to the gaps he saw in the local food system with the mission of improving public health through food.

He established Arcadia on the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Woodlawn-Pope-Leighey site in Alexandria, Va., just 14 miles from the nation's capital. Woodlawn is the first property the Trust ever purchased to save, and Arcadia has returned agriculture to this historic farm. This land was Dogue Run Farm, once part of George Washington's Mount Vernon. But its significance for the local food movement goes well beyond the first president.

In 1846, two decades before the Civil War and the Emancipation Proclamation, timber merchants bought the then-2,000 acre-property from Washington's family. These merchants were, not insignificantly, Quakers and abolitionists, and they had a plan for the property: Woodlawn would be a slavery-free farming community that would prove to the rest of the South that slavery was not necessary for a farm to thrive. They sold plots to free African-Americans, Irish and German immigrants, and other Quakers. They established the mansion as an integrated school for the town's children and created an integrated militia to protect the citizens. As a "free labor zone," for the first time in the Woodlawn's history, it was a profitable farming operation.

Arcadia, like the Quakers before us, is using food and agriculture to advance social justice.

Standing on the shoulders of those who came before, Arcadia is partnering with the National Trust for Historic Preservation to transform the 126-acre Woodlawn-Pope-Leighey estate into a true Center for Sustainable Food & Agriculture.

Just 25 minutes from Washington, D.C., Arcadia at Woodlawn will offer a landmark destination farmhouse restaurant, year-round farm stand, farm café, Virginia wine and cider tasting room, and craft food pavilion that will link the property's inspiring legacy of social and racial justice to food equity, public health, and the strengthening of the regional food system. Arcadia's programming and events will be expanded to include food policy conferences, lectures, culinary and gardening classes, edible landscaping, art and design events, and an expanded veteran farmer training program, enriched school programs, and experiential agriculture.

Arcadia at Woodlawn will once again reclaim the central role the property has historically occupied, serving as a beacon for food justice, environmental sustainability, and a healthy food system.

Arcadia has launched a \$20 million capital campaign to fund the rehabilitation of the historic farm buildings and finance new construction.