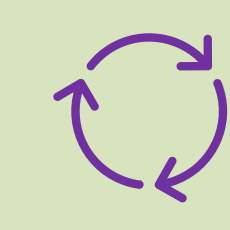


BACKGROUND



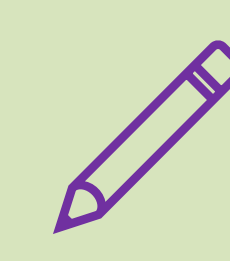
Gaps in the food system have resulted in food insecurity, malnutrition, environmental degradation, and more.



Alternative food networks, such as food hubs, farmers markets, and farmer co-ops are a body of practices, related to food provisioning, which were designed to fill the gaps.



Numerous barriers hinder fulfillment of intended goals for producers (farmers, crafters, bakers, etc.) and organizational parties (the companies or groups that run the networks).



Identifying and defining these barriers is a necessary step to optimize the system and enhance equity.

RESEARCH QUESTION

What factors contribute to the barriers to access faced by producers and organizations in local alternative food networks?

How can these barriers be addressed and rectified?

INTERNSHIP & METHODS

- Interned with **Whidbey Island Grown Cooperative**, specifically focusing on media and outreach.

- Assisted the Whidbey Island Grown Food Hub, visited the Bayview farmers market on Whidbey, performed informational interviews with co-op producers, and created posts for multiple social platforms (See fig 1).

- Conducted a literature review on barrier of Alternative Food Networks nationwide.

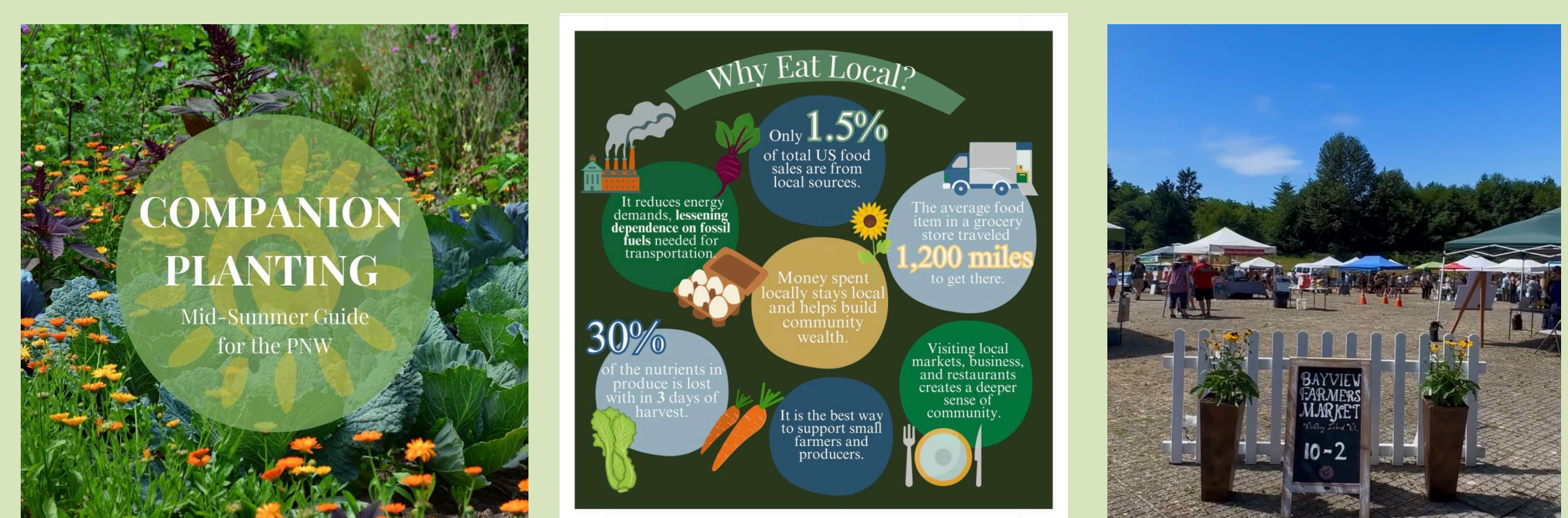


Figure 1. Shows three of the different types of educational social media posts I created for the Whidbey Island Grown Instagram.

RESEARCH RESULTS

- There are many dimensions to these barriers.
- The producers and organizations struggle with many of the same challenges, just in different ways (See fig 2).
- The following information has been gleaned from my informational interviews, observations, and literature review.

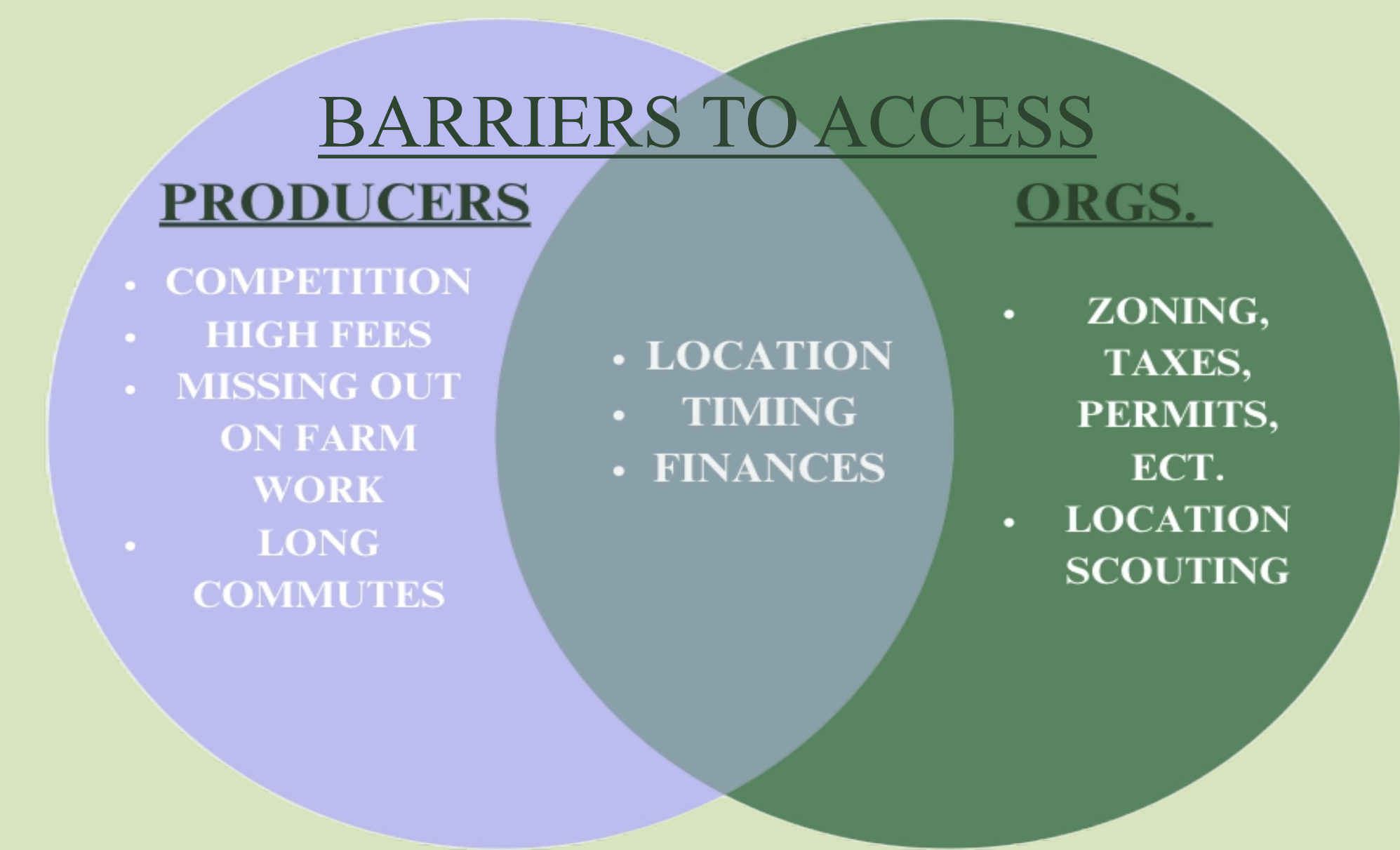


Figure 2. The specific barriers that producers and organization face as well when participating in alternative food networks.

Barriers for Producers

Finances - High vendor fees, competitive pricing, and financial feasibility for customers all add to financial instability for producers.

Location - One producer expressed that “Having to drive far distances makes the benefits of the farmers markets less enticing.”. Certain products require protection for the elements. Additionally, food hubs are often exclusive to producers in the immediate vicinity.

Timing - During informational interviews, the idea that spending time before, during, and after the farmers market means missing out on essential farm work was conveyed multiple times.

Barriers for Organizations

Rules + Regulations - Zoning, business licensing, permits, tax details, food handling, labor issues, etc. inhibit alternative food networks from forming and succeeding.

Finances - Profit is needed for alternative food networks to run. Therefore, organizations need to charge fees from the vendors. Controversy over fees was voiced in both the interviews and in the literature.

Location - Public access, consistent weekend availability, parking, public transport, weather, and more all need to be considered when choosing the locations needed for these event.

SOLUTIONS

1. Improve Communication -

Establishing community meetings and market surveys to enhance transparency has the potential to address all of the barriers.

2. Temporary Facilities -

Using temporary vending areas will enhance reach and allow for vast flexibility and addresses the barrier of timing and location (See fig 3).

3. Governmental Collaboration -

Local governing bodies can help navigate bureaucratic hurdles, saving time, reducing costs, and enabling these networks to flourish.



Figure 3. The stages that produce goes through in the Whidbey Island Grown Food HUB. The fourth image shows one of the multiple distribution sites that the Food Hub uses. A similar model, could be applied to other alternative food networks.

SIGNIFICANCE



The identified barriers underscore the need for structural reform to the policies, regulations, and the economic models of these networks



The identified solutions can increase equity in numerous ways:



Open communication empowers communities to voice their needs and concerns, fostering a system with more diverse perspectives.



Temporary facilities can address the lack of permanent structures in food deserts and therefore improve access to fresh, healthy food.



Forming strong relationships between the government and concerned organizations can expedite the implementation of food-related programs, ensuring a quicker response to issues of food insecurity.

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