

Hope in the Hills

How local communities can feed hungry children in the rural Ozarks of Arkansas

Sean Alexander, Hendrix College



ARKANSAS POLICY PROGRAM AN UNDERGRADUATE THINK TANK

This project was carried out on behalf of the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance under the direction of Dr. Jay Barth, Bill and Connie Bowen Odyssey Professor.

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Executive Summary

The Ozarks is home to an estimated 33,510 children who are food insecure, a population larger than that of every other region in the state. The purpose of this research is to identify the causes of and propose solutions to childhood hunger in the Arkansas Ozarks, primarily by providing a strategy that works to stabilize Ozark communities' participation in food security programs.¹ In doing so, this paper provides a survey of Ozark history, an analysis of present-day demographics, and a strategy for developing a set of food security policies that are consistent with local cultural expectations. Moreover, the conclusions found here endeavors to support the work of the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance (AHRA), which aims to create sustainable hunger relief programs and community driven partnerships in rural Arkansas.

Most fundamentally, this research advocates the establishment of programs led by so-called “local champions”: community leaders who work to build awareness of childhood hunger and to implement consistently available nutrition supports for children and families. This conclusion is founded on two conclusions from supporting analysis:

- First, based upon a historical and sociological examination into the region, research suggests that the Ozarks are a self-reliant and change-adverse area of Arkansas. Solutions perceived to be top-down or antithetical to Ozark lifestyle are less likely to be adopted.
- Second, while the Ozarks are change-adverse, the greater Ozark community also has a well-defined sense of place, which suggest that programs perceived to be home-grown and home-owned stand to provide the stable food security services that Ozark children desperately need.

¹ Such programs include food pantries, summer meal feeding sites, and SNAP.

Introduction

In light of these findings, this report offers a set of policies that work to both train local champions and provide such leaders with a framework for creating effective solutions to childhood food insecurity in the Ozarks. While the whole strategy can be found in the policy solutions section (pg. 14), the summarized version is as follows:

- First, through partnerships with other nonprofits, AHRA should create a local networking program that builds up social capital in the Ozarks. This effort would empower the Ozarks to create a more effective food security safety net for Ozark children (pg. 14).
- The AHRA should host an annual training opportunity through which Ozark food security leaders - or “local champions” - would be trained on the history and culture of the Ozarks and Ozark-specific strategies for reducing the food access gaps for children (pg. 16).
- Third, by utilizing community input and trained leadership, AHRA should create childhood food security solutions that are Ozark specific; a list provided on (pg. 17) highlights a few examples of such solutions.

Only through community buy-in is a sustainable path forward available to the people of the Ozarks. Ending childhood food insecurity in the Ozarks is not merely a question of pairing the right solutions to the right amount of funding; it is also a question of understanding the culture of the place. By utilizing trained leaders and a unified community, the Ozarks would take the first step toward creating a food secure future for all children in the region.

On the whole, the Ozarks is one of the most prosperous regions of the state. In part, this is due to the companies that have chosen the region as their home: the retail giant Walmart, and Tyson Foods, one of the largest food producers in the world, both have their headquarters in Northwest Arkansas. However, amid the prosperity, there is an unseen problem in the modern-day Ozarks. Even though the region is rich for some, it has the second highest obesity rate (34.6 percent) in Arkansas, and is home to one of the hungriest rural populations in America.

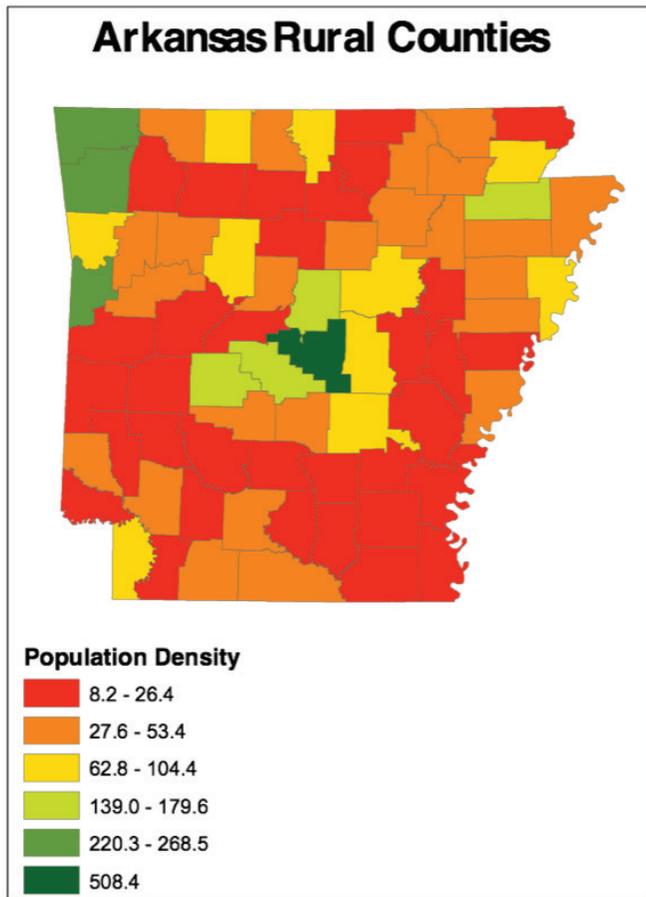
Arkansas is a mostly rural state. Indeed, four of the state’s six regions are considered as such: The Ozarks, the Arkansas Delta, the Southern Timberlands, and the Arkansas River Valley(See map 1).² Though it does not always seem so, this diversity is both a blessing and a curse: just as it forms the foundation for our state identity, our population’s sparsity also makes it difficult to notice the problems small towns face (See map 1).

One of these hidden challenges is the issue of childhood hunger. The rapid erosion of the rural economies has had a profound effect on the rates of childhood food insecurity, upon which this project focuses. Today, 88,980 Ozark residents are considered food-insecure. Over one third of them are children (approximately 33,510). This makes the Ozarks the second most food-insecure region in Arkansas.

Intertwined with the struggle for a food secure tomorrow, the Ozarks are plagued with unique challenges related to their distinctive history, sociology, economy, geography, and their uniquely held cultural norms. These attributes stem primarily from the region’s historical development, which transpired without significant outside influence. What is more, in the Ozarks, these norms pose significant challenges

² According to the U.S. Census Bureau, rurality is a measure of population density. The more sparsely populated, the more rural the county is considered to be.

Map 1



to the fight against childhood food insecurity: an outsider who knows nothing of the Ozarker way of life stands little chance of garnering the amount of public trust requisite for sustainable enrollment. Therefore, the focus of this report is to understand Ozark food insecurity and empower local communities with policy solutions that expand access to healthy, affordable food for children in the region.

The report is broken into six parts. The first three sections provide the background and context necessary to understand the development of Ozark childhood food insecurity and the barriers policy leaders face. The final three sections of this report articulate a framework and strategy for building social capital³ and local leadership,⁴ as well as a series of policies that help eradicate childhood hunger in the Ozarks. Several maps

and tables have been provided as a means to visualize the scope of food insecurity, all of which use the most recent census data available at the county-level.

History of the Ozarks

Early exploration of the Arkansas Ozarks divided the region into four sub-regions, each with a distinctive geology: The Salem or Central Plateau, The White River Hills, The Springfield Plain, and The Boston Mountains. While each of these sub-regions is distinctive, the four were aggregated into one region by early French settlers, who called it “aux arc.” (Blevins, 2002)⁵ The transformed name, Ozark, was first used by early American explorers following the Louisiana Purchase, and became commonplace by the early 20th century.

While the stereotype of Ozark geology conjures images of a barren, rocky, and infertile land, that description is only characteristic of the Salem Plateau, which occupies the most northeastern section of the Ozarks (Blevins 2002, 11). Brooks Blevins writes that the myth of the Arkansas Ozarks’ infertility was created by early historical accounts. As those accounts circulated, he contends, people began to dub the region as unfit for life. Thus, early impressions of the Ozarks deterred settlers from moving to the Salem Plateau and White River Hills for several decades. This developmental bias against the Salem Plateau and White River Hills is apparent in contemporary demographic study; they are the two most sparsely populated Ozark sub-regions.

By contrast, early settlers found the Springfield Plain to be an incredibly fertile region. Indeed, the same early historians who wrote of the bareness of the Salem Plateau described the Springfield Plain’s geography as the “most extensive, rich, and beautiful of any which I have seen west of the Mississippi River.” (Blevins 2002, 13). Blevins argues that it was due to this hospitable ecology that the Springfield Plain became the most

³ A measure of community interconnectedness, as later sections will describe in detail.

⁴ A metric that captures the efficacy of local leaders, as later sections will describe in detail.

⁵ Various explanations exist for how ‘aux arcs’ morphed into Ozarks, but all relate to the region’s proximity to the Arkansas River.

Map 2: The Ozarks



heavily populated region in the state at the time of entry into the Union. Today, the Springfield Plain is home to some of the most populous Arkansas counties and the world's largest retailer, Walmart.

While the settling of the Ozarks was determined by geography, the specific places where settlers chose to make their home was also determined by an affinity toward 'familiar surroundings.' Blevins writes:

An in-depth look at the origins of settlers by county reveals that Arkansas Ozark counties drew their settlers from eastern locations sharing common physiological characteristics. Migrants from Tennessee tended to settle in Ozark areas similar in elevation and terrain to those of their previous homes. Remote and rugged Newton County, the most mountainous of Arkansas's Ozark counties attracted many immigrants from the higher elevations of the Appalachian region. (Blevins 2002, 20).

This appetite for familiarity might be linked to the culture of the present day Ozarks which manifests as a skepticism to outsider influence. If most families share a common set of experiences - both personal and historically. It is rational to see how those with lives antithetical to that shared experience might be skeptically viewed.

Surface level investigations of the modern Ozarks would lead one to conclude that the population has always been racially homogenous. While it is true that very few counties had large enough farms to support a sizable African American slave population, on the Springfield Plain, slaves were present (Morgan and Kunkle 1970; Blevins 2002). In 1840, more than half of the total slave population in the Ozarks resided in Washington County, where they grew typical plantation cash crops, cotton, and tobacco. Still, the overwhelming number of white settlers in the region cannot be underestimated (Blevins 2000; Blevins 2002). By 1850, following the region's largest population boom, nine out of ten people in the Ozarks were white (Blevins 2002).

While those who settled in the Ozarks brought with them their distinctive lifestyle, the region's insulated developmental history contributed to the bolstering of their distinctive culture. Early cultural accounts of the Ozarks, wrote of a land without manners, morals, and customs. One period historian writes that they were, "not essentially different from that which exists among the savages" (Pitcaithley 1978, 207). While this is not altogether that different from other, more general, accounts of Arkansans, who were described as "lawless and luckless," the comparative remoteness of the Ozarks created a distinct cultural bubble (Blair and Barth 2005, 20). Even following the influx of new



settlers due to cheap land opportunities beginning in the early 1820s, the overall culture of the Ozarks remained extremely self-sufficient and skeptical of outsiders.

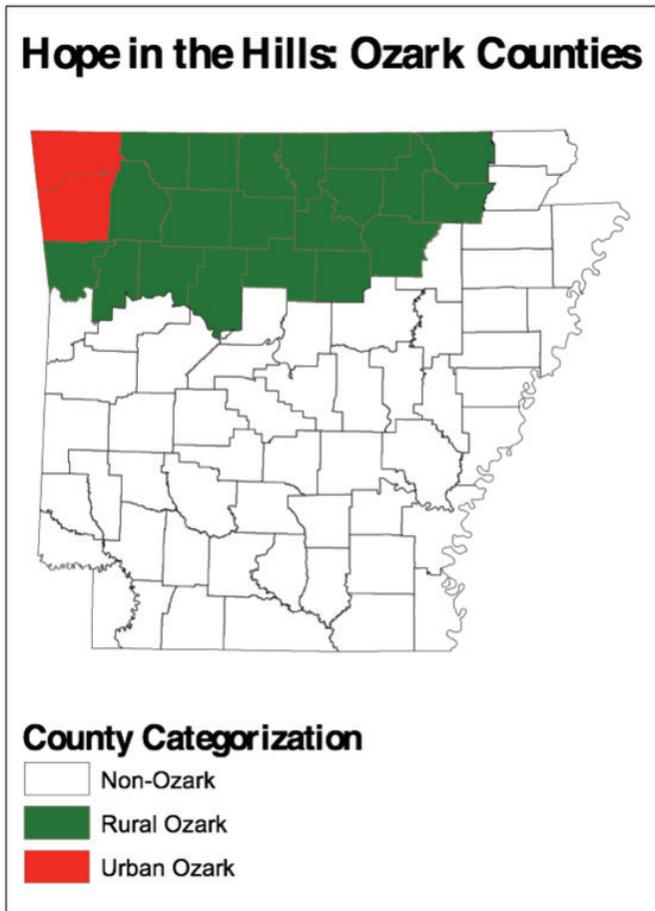
This is not to say that the Ozarkers were or are the hillbillies of Hollywood. They did not, as Blevins writes, make “moonshine or corn liquor” to the extent which movies and myth propagate (Blevins 2002). Rather, it is an understated pride that characterizes the Ozarks, one where families and communities are tightly knit, self-sufficient, and slow to invite change—but change happens. Simply put, they are courageous in the face of challenge and intent on making their community a better place.

As later analysis will show, it is folly to only pour resources into a region that is skeptical of change by outsiders. Such efforts only work to create institutions that attract little community participation because they are founded on little community support. A better strategy would be to empower localized actors and policy leaders to create change from within; a bottom-up strategy, rather than top-down.

The Present Day Ozarks

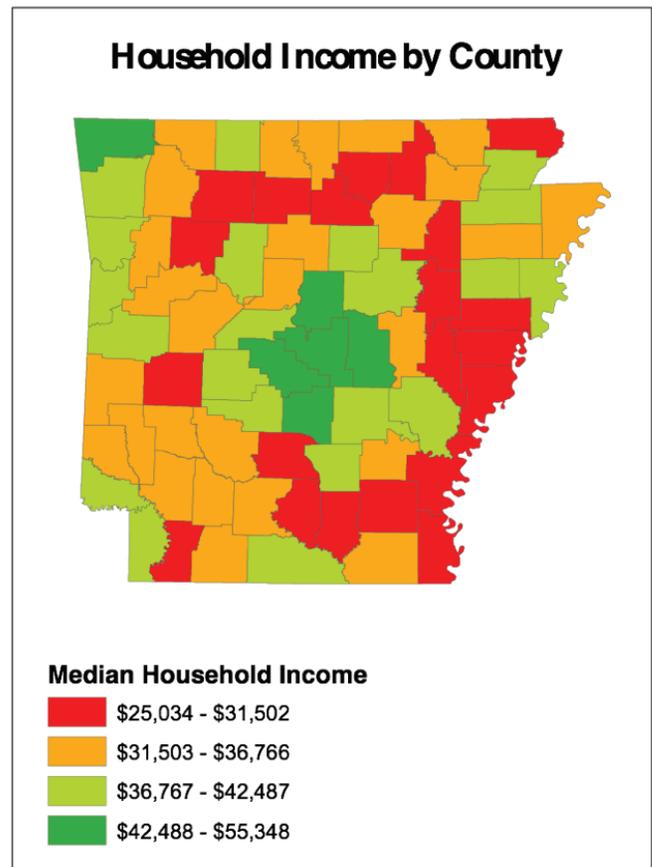
Because this research deals with only those counties in the most need of childhood hunger relief efforts, this report defines the Ozarks in a more constrained manner. Most notably, the urban counties of Benton and Washington have been omitted because they retain higher levels of income, more varied demographic and cultural diversity, and higher childhood food security rates relative to other northern Arkansas counties. Thus, this report classifies the Ozarks: Baxter, Boone, Carroll, Cleburne, Crawford, Franklin, Fulton, Independence, Izard, Johnson, Lawrence, Madison, Marion, Newton, Pope, Randolph, Searcy, Sharp, Stone, and Van Buren (Map 3). To illustrate these relationships clearly, several maps have been provided for reference, which were created through the use of the most recent census data available. Together, these maps show that many of the factors present in the historical development of the Ozarks remain present in the modern region.

Map 3



numbers, the Ozarks have a close-to-typical regional median household income of \$34,526.90. Almost 16 percent of the total population lives in poverty. However, looking at the data graphically, and at the county level, one is able to see the astonishing patterns that are often present between Ozark counties. The two maps, located below, highlight this pattern vividly. Dividing the counties into naturally broken groupings, one can see that all but a few Ozark counties simultaneously fall into both the least wealthy and least impoverished groups. The rural Ozarker lives on the knife's edge of poverty: too rich to receive government social services, but too poor to afford healthy food.

Map 4



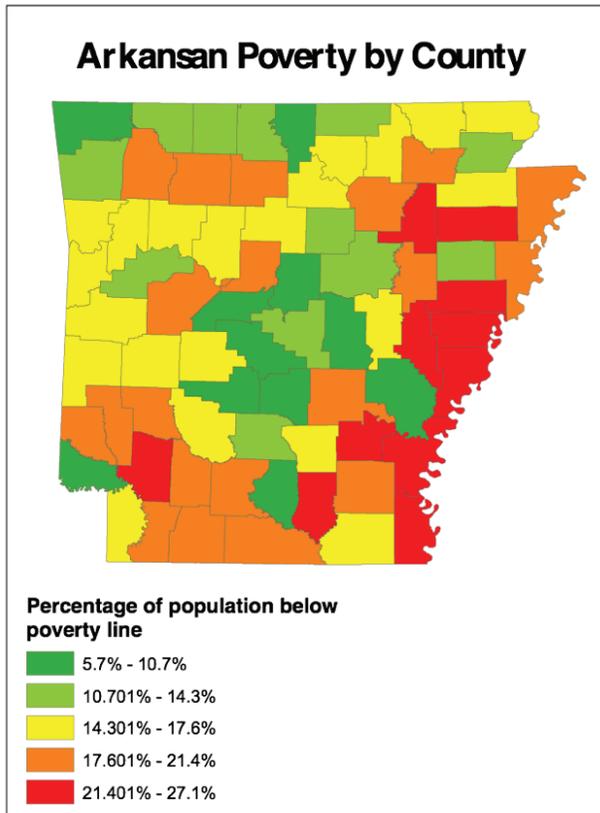
Food Security in the Ozarks: background and current policies

At its core, food insecurity is an issue characterized by two factors: access and income; hunger is a supply and demand side issue (Bitler and Haider 2010). This relationship makes food security a problem of economics, dependent upon labor and supply chains. But in the short-term, connecting people to food, often times without the ability to show them the way to the nearest grocery, makes attaining short-term food security a particularly nuanced challenge. This section provides the background needed to parse the Ozark manifestation of childhood food insecurity.

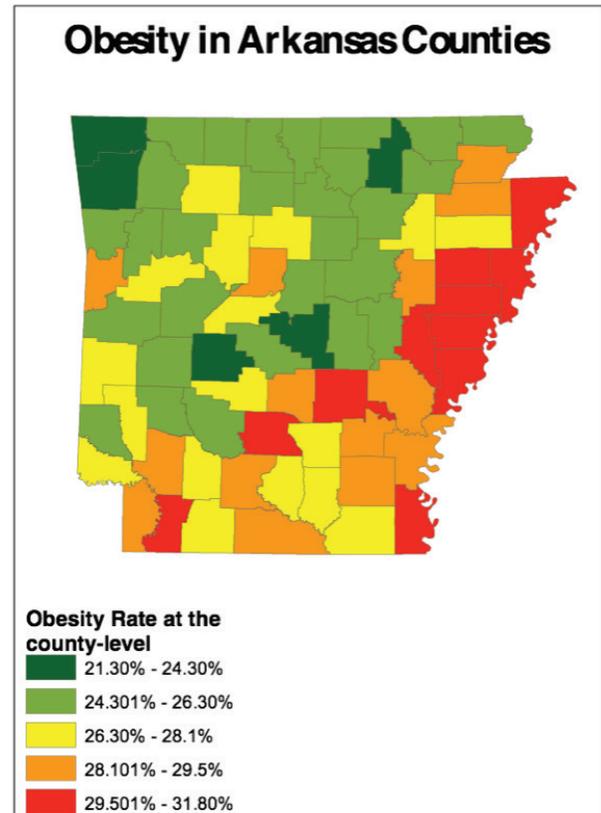
On the surface, the Ozarker with low income does not appear all that dissimilar from the rest of Arkansas's low-income population.⁶ Simply looking at the

⁶ Arkansas's median household income is \$35,861.81, while the poverty rate is 16.681 percent.

Map 5

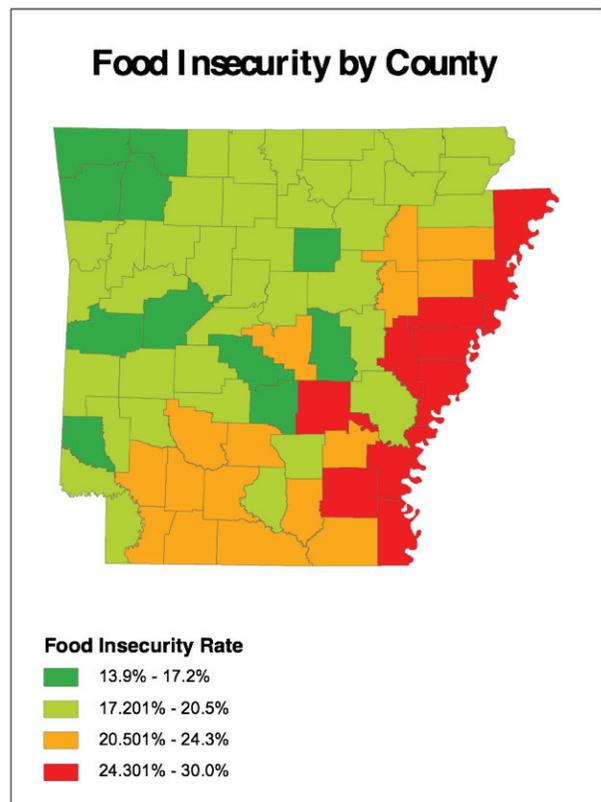


Map 6



Further analysis suggests that the relationship between obesity and hunger is related to this life on the knife's edge of poverty. Maps 6 and 7, shown at right, illustrate how these two public health epidemics co-exist. For those who can afford healthy food but cannot afford the transportation costs associated with traveling to a traditional grocery store, cheap food purchased at gas stations, liquor stores, and quick marts is often the best available food option.

Map 7



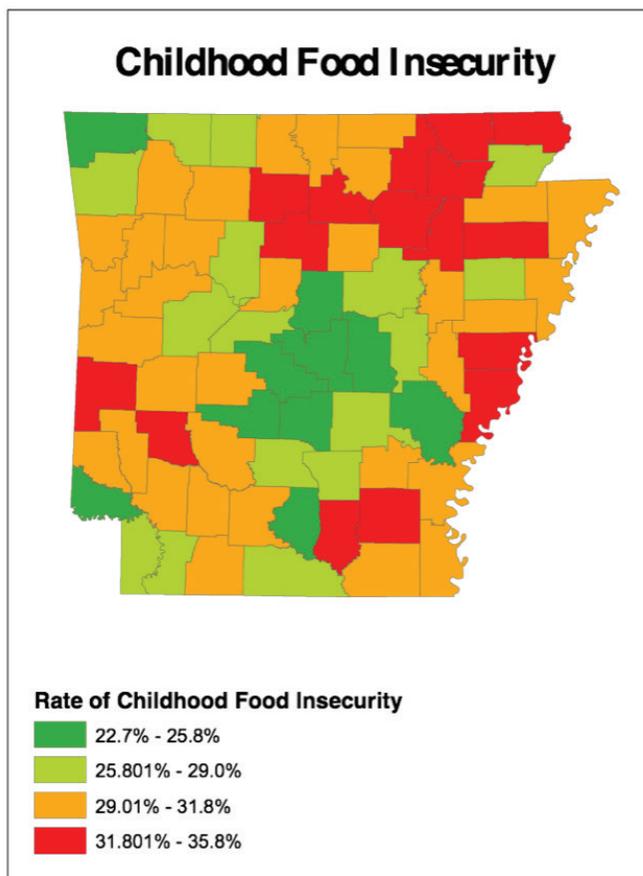
While the interplay between health and food access impacts all people who live in low-income and low-food-access areas, the high rate of childhood food insecurity implies that Ozark families have a uniquely difficult set of barriers to overcome. The Ozarks have the majority of counties with the highest rates of childhood hunger in Arkansas; between 31 and 35 percent of children in the Ozarks live in a state of food insecurity (Map 8 on the next page). That's more than any other region, including the Delta.

It is important to note, that because children are not considered independent economic actors until they are over the age of 18, state and local governments tends to provide aid for child populations. Such is the case in Arkansas. However, trying to adequately distribute limited means for sometimes high levels of need is a difficult task. Thus, without access to federal programs and state social services, the nonprofit sector must intervene and deliver the vital social services these children. In the Arkansan context, the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance, its member food banks, and constituent pantries are the primary nonprofit actor dedicated to statewide anti-hunger efforts.

The Current Ozark Food Security Strategy

In order to increase their impact without increasing costs, current federal and state policies working to combat childhood food insecurity rely on partnerships between state governments, nonprofit organizations, and decentralized state actors. In the Arkansas context, we can see this play out in the partnerships between: the Department of Human Services and the Department of Education; state and regional nonprofit actors such as the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance and subsidiary food banks; and local actors such as school districts, churches, and food pantries.

Map 8



Although such a model—where the federal government provides funds to state governments who, in turn, provide nonprofits the resources they need—allows for flexibility in program and resource allocation, local nonprofit affiliates are often tasked with keeping up local involvement year-to-year. However, what is seldom understood is that this is a difficult task: running a food pantry often involves long hours and personal sacrifice on the part of the food pantry manager.

These challenges are especially problematic in the Ozark context, where a local food pantry or summer meal feeding site manager might be willing to sponsor a meal program with Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance support one year, only to resign the next. While this sort of inconsistency in program participation hurts the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance’s impact, it is worse for those Ozark children who rely on the services. For this reason, it is imperative that local champions are equipped with the tools they need to be successful year-after-year.

In an effort to combat this inconsistency in program offerings, the Arkansas No Kid Hungry Campaign works to build personal relationships across Arkansas, as well as by offering grant funding to member

pantries. Ideally, these partnerships are run by so-called “local champions” who can build sustainable programming by leveraging their personal relationships in the community to which they belong. It is in this way that local champions are central to creating a food secure Ozarks for all children. Who knows the Ozarks better than a resident of the Ozarks; who is better able to overcome outsider skepticism than someone from within?

To provide a clear picture of how engaging with local champions makes a difference in the lives of real people, consider two examples:

The first is at the Food Bank of North Central Arkansas (FBNCA), based in Norfolk. Their service area includes five of the nine underserved counties targeted by the No Kid Hungry Campaign, a challenging amount of communities to service, indeed. However, under the leadership of Executive Director Jeff Quick, the FBNCA has met and exceeded these challenges. To date, FBNCA has convened multiple meetings of key school administrators, local elected officials, and other community leaders to build awareness of childhood hunger, develop solutions to the problem, and start new programs that have broad based community support. It is in this way that the Food Bank of North Central Arkansas has, in many respects, found the key to solving childhood hunger in the Ozarks, and it begins with combining community consensus and trained leadership around the issue. As will be discussed later in this report, such a model might be used across the Ozarks.

While Jeff Quick of the FBNCA helps develop local champions, the Searcy County Hometown Health Initiative is an example of a local organization headed by a remarkable local champion. In 2013, the Searcy County Hometown Health Initiative prioritized child nutrition as a key goal and worked with the No Kid Hungry Campaign to establish the first-ever summer meals program in the county. That program now serves hundreds of kids at six sites, utilizing over 90 volunteers to deliver meals throughout the summer,

the most challenging time of year for a food insecure child to achieve consistent access to food. By creating a coalition of community health, education, and civic leaders focused on developing programs to improve the health of their residents, the Searcy County Hometown Health initiative has brought new life to Searcy County’s fight against childhood hunger. Just as was true in the case of FBNCA, the Searcy County Hometown Health Initiative makes community ownership the corner stone of its success.

As highlighted by the Food Bank of North Central Arkansas and the Searcy County Hometown Health Initiative, local champions can help build a successful model for childhood hunger relief in the Ozarks. Because they are uniquely positioned to create public awareness of the issue, and because they have a working knowledge of the topic at hand, these two organizations were able to build a strong support team and a sustainable hunger relief program in a rural county. The remainder of this report asks the naturally following question: how do we create more local champions, and what sorts of policies are needed to ensure they are involved for years to come?

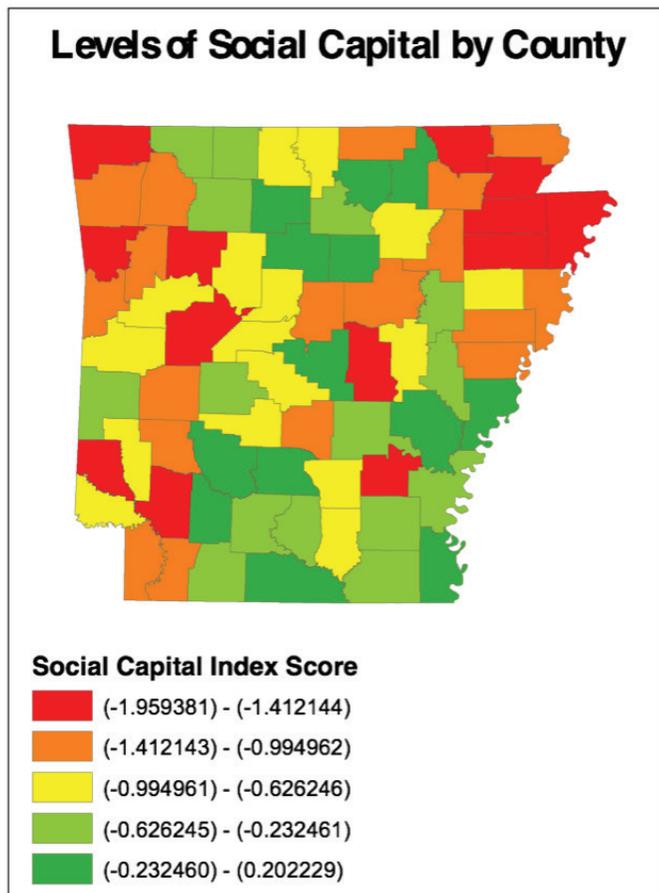
Foundations for Relief: Social Capital and Leadership

Social Capital

Within the past two decades, the study of community has become central to the policy process. Robert Putnam’s Social Capital Theory—which deals with understanding community relations—stands as one of the most important recent contributions to the study of public policy. The premise of understanding social capital, Putnam writes, is that “social networks have value” and can be leveraged to improve the welfare of individuals or whole communities (Saguaro Seminar, Harvard University).

When a group of neighbors informally keep an eye on one another’s homes, that’s social capital in action....Barn-raising on the frontier was social

Map 9



capital in action, and so too are e-mail exchanges among members of a cancer support group. Social capital can be found in friendship networks, neighborhoods, churches, schools, bridge clubs, civic associations, and even bars (Saugaro Seminar, Harvard University).

When the alternative is true, however, communities begin to unravel: the roads do not get repaired, the schools begin to fail, and grocery store down the road becomes more appealing than the one down the street. The powerful effects of a unified community are vital to creating societal change, whether that change be the simple installation of a new stop light or ensuring total childhood food security. This is especially true in Ozark communities, which, as we have argued, value community more-so than other areas. Thus, without high-levels of community buy-in - that is, social capital - no Ozark childhood hunger relief strategy will be

successful. And no food pantry manager will see the need to remain involved in year-in and year-out.

Using data published by Penn State University, shown on Map 9, simple analysis suggests the counties with the most social capital are those located in the South Delta and the central Arkansas Ozarks. Other researchers have shown the same result in the Missouri Ozarks, suggesting that such a relative treasure trove in social capital has been consistent across the most recent decade (Stout, Harms, Knapp and Vess 2011). This finding implies a reason to see a hopeful future in the Ozarks: this immense policy opportunity to utilize and empower community networks would be mindless to waste.

Local Leadership

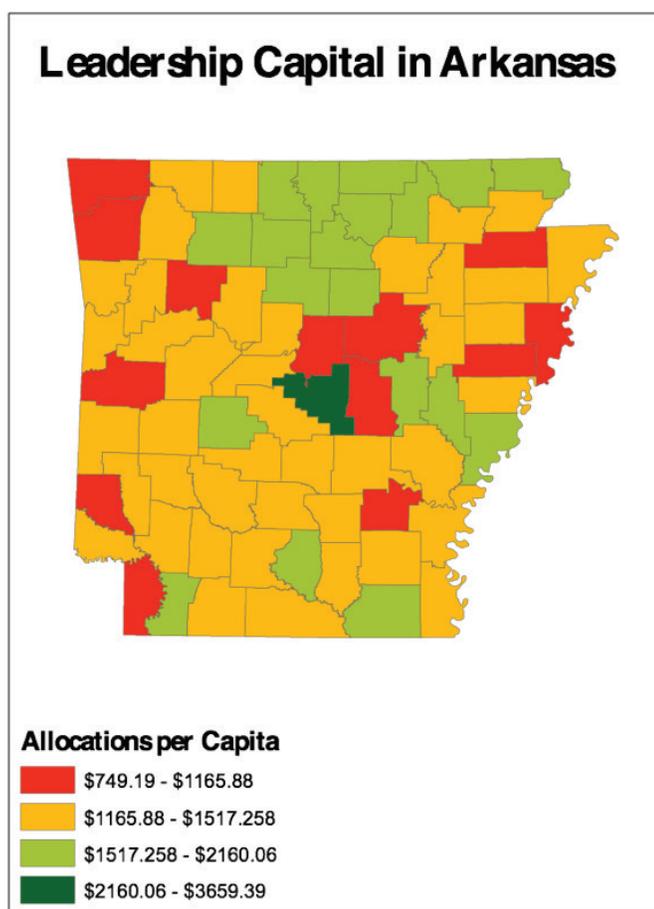
Though politics and government are often thought of as synonyms, the definition of politics is more broadly defined in the study of political science. Classically, the academic field of politics is the study of power: where it is held, how it influences our collective decision making, and how it's distribution changes over time. Thus, to be an effective political or community leader, one must use their power effectively.

While we all know a good community leader when we see or read of one - the person who is able to garner resources for their constituency by leveraging their influence - capturing that phenomena at the local level is a difficult business. Some areas are lucky to have scores of qualified, effective, dedicated leaders who improve their communities - so many that their effect can be understood in metricized form. Thus, just as this report has discussed the notion of "social capital," it will also use the notion of "leadership capital" as well. Unlike social capital, however, there is not a previously accepted metric for capturing local leadership levels.

In light of this data shortage, this paper uses a research-specific metric. First, we aggregated, and normalized by

population totals, the amount of money allocated by the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance, the Arkansas State Government, and the federal government at the county level. Secondly, those three averages were then averaged again to create an average of the averages.⁷ The resulting metric is expressed in dollar terms and shows that the Ozarks has received a higher-than-standard amount of resources given their population size: their leaders are more effective at the type of transactional leadership needed in public affairs (Map 10). Taking this foundation in solid leadership and turning it into an asset for food security efforts must become a priority for the state's food security efforts. Failing to do so would perpetuate millions of dollars in lost economic activity and human development costs.⁸

Map 10



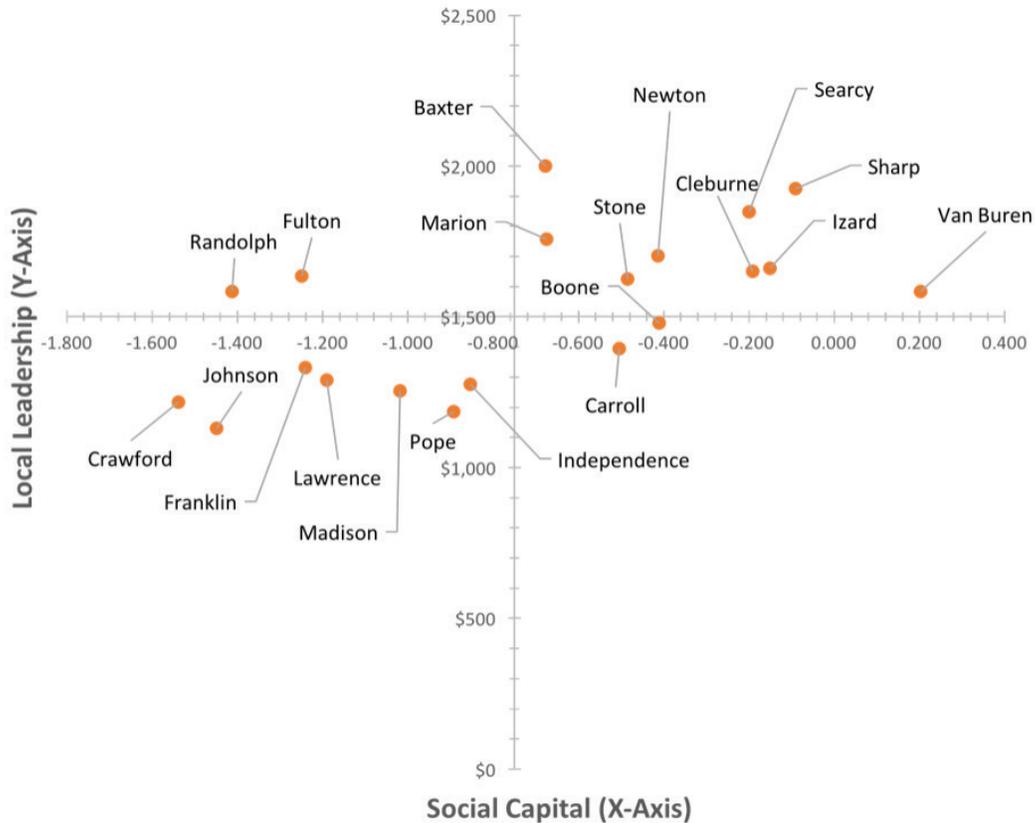
Bringing it together—quadrant analysis

The Cartesian plot provided on the following page graphically depicts how each of the Arkansas Ozark counties compares to each other on the basis of social capital and local leadership. More particularly, each county in the Ozarks is placed in one of the four regions: those with high local leadership, and high social capital; high local leadership, and low social capital - and vice versa; and low local leadership, and low social capital. Depending upon the quadrant a particular county lies within, different types of policies might be necessary: for some counties, policies focused on social capital and local leadership development (steps 1 and 2) might be necessary, whereas other counties (those in the upper right-hand quadrant) could serve as locations for best-practice and new-practice development (step 3).

⁷ Typically, one wants to avoid using averages of averages, as the originally averaged terms you are choosing to average are seldom likely to be equal in value. To answer this concern, the three sources of funding were weighted equally, representing an equal valuing of local, state, and federal leaders.

⁸ According to Feeding America's Map the Meal Gap Survey, the average cost of a meal in Arkansas is 2.72 cents/day. When multiplied by the number of food insecure children in the Ozarks, 33,510, that figure reaches \$91,147, and represents the amount of money lost when each child misses but one meal per year. If that population misses 10 meals a month, that represents nearly one million dollars in lost economic activity.

Quadrant Analysis



Policy Solutions

Having investigated the culture of the Ozarks, the present-day challenges to create a food secure region, and discussed the current levels of community interconnectedness and local leadership, the remainder of this report will focus on what to do next. To that end, this report proposes a three step childhood food insecurity strategy for the Ozarks: (1) build up community relationships and awareness around food insecurity; (2) educate and train additional local champions, then empower them to make childhood food insecurity an issue that they work to solve; and (3) develop new, innovative solutions to childhood Ozark food insecurity by creating services that consider local customs and culture.

Step (1): Social Capital Development

Creating social capital is an imperative part of creating a food secure Ozarks because it is the best way to create stability in social services offerings at the local level. In this way, it is vital that communities develop programs that boost social capital; even those unrelated to food security - are beneficial, and could be created through partnerships with nonprofits such as religious institutions and Boys and Girls Clubs. Importantly, the goal here is not to eradicate childhood food insecurity via social capital development, but rather, to create the conditions within which food security can be achieved.

Table 1: Framework for developing social capital: Emery (2013) ⁹

Ideal Type	Bonding Strategies	Bridging Strategies
Type 1: Low bonding, low bridging	Provide opportunities for youth with similar interests to meet and share progress on their projects or activities. Provide opportunities for an adult to mentor youth.	Find ways to introduce youth to other youth and adults with similar interests. Link students up to safe and appropriate online communities of interest.
Type 2: Low bonding, high bridging	Same as above. Engage youth working on individual projects in group activities.	Build on bridging social capital finding ways youth can bond with adults and other youth with similar interests.
Type 3: High bonding, low bridging	In addition to bringing in speakers from the community, work with youth to identify projects that provide opportunities to work with adults on a common project. Link the youth to other groups with similar interests, including activities such as webinars, blogs, and Facebook entries.	Use the trust and norms of reciprocity developed through close ties to develop strategies so the group can reach out to others in the community to determine how they might make a difference. Focus on bringing other organizations in to plan a program that will make a difference in the community.
Type 4: High bonding, high bridging	Link the activities that build bonding social capital to projects that make a difference in the community and lead to opportunities for enhancing bridging social capital.	Build on opportunities that create bridging with adults, other youth, and community organizations so that ongoing activities create additional social capital.

Previous research has identified that social capital development efforts can be broken into four distinct categories: “structural opportunity to meet, ‘know-how’ of social interaction, sense of belonging, and an ethos of mutuality” (Seferiadis, Cummings, Zweekhorst, Bunders, 2015). Each of the wide variety of activities designed to create social capital, therefore, fit into one of these four areas. Still, one crucial point remains present throughout all social capital research: policies must contain a long-term definition of success. For that reason, it is crucial that social capital development focus particularly on children and youth, as is suggested by Emery in her chapter within the *New Directions for Youth Development* report, published in 2013.

More broadly, however, Emery provides a cogent framework for social capital development, which is designed to work in rural areas as well as in urban environments. The whole of the theory relies on what Emery calls, ideal types, of which there are four: Type 1 tends to focus on the individual, Type 2 on mentorship, Type 3 on group focused work, and Type 4 on community events. None of these is superior to the other, but rather that they all work in unison to create a sustainable level of connectivity between each member in society. As a community moves through the types, the momentum builds, thereby “spiraling up to the whole of the society” (Emery 2013, 51).

⁹ Other researchers too have provided framework for developing social capital at the local level, including the leader of Social Capital Theory movement, Robert Putnam, who provides a list of social capital developing activities on the Sguaro Seminar, Harvard University website.

Table 2: Ozark Hunger Institute

Weekend One: Contextual Education	Weekend Two: Skill Based Education
<p>Simply put, this weekend follows the notion that policy without context is either ill-informed or ineffective. This week works to develop a holistic view.</p> <p><i>Learning Elements:</i></p>	<p>This weekend will feature particular programs designed to help local champions run the program that they are tasked with managing; focusing on both soft and hard skill development.</p> <p><i>Learning Elements:</i></p>
<p>(1) A survey of the Ozarks, with a particular emphasis on its history, sociology, economic breakdown, and current events.</p> <p>(2) Foundations of Arkansan education, healthcare, and food security policy—specifically the use of food banks and USDA programs that rely on local actors.</p>	<p>(1) Easterling’s four skills for effective civic leadership mentioned below form the cornerstone during this week.</p> <p>(2) Following the basics the program would move into skill-based work, such as accounting, paperwork overviews, and other necessary processes that are unique to the programs in question.</p>
<p>Step (2): Local Leadership Development</p> <p>Just as social capital enhancement is vital, local leadership development must become a priority if a food secure Ozarks is to be created. Our rapidly changing world demand leaders who are knowledgeable but also adaptable to continually changing contexts. “Prospering in these turbulent times requires strong civic leadership, [that is able to] ... [step] forward to solve community-level problems or to promote action that advances the community’s overall well-being.” (Easterling 2013).</p> <p>The process of cultivating such development within leaders, however, might take on multiple forms, depending upon the context. While this makes leadership development seem very difficult, we argue that such training does not necessarily have to be a burden. Rather than a perfectly tailored program, Easterling argues that leadership development programs should work toward a certain core-set of abilities, including the ability to: “1. Diagnose Situation 2. Manage Self 3. Intervene Skillfully 4. Energize Others (Easterling 2013).” Still, because the ways in which a leader does these things might change with the context, it is also important for local leadership programs to discuss cultural norms, as well.</p>	<p>One method for developing better local champions is to have them attend an Ozarks childhood food security program. Such programs could center on a holistic approach to development, utilizing research on education, poverty reduction, management, as well as an introduction into food security policy. Moreover, training programs could be decentralized. That is, through county courthouses or community centers, with various programs depending upon the needs of local actors.</p> <p>Some research on this topic of leadership development suggests using a long-term program, as those tend to create higher levels of buy-in by the trainees (Mackenzie and Marnik 2008). But, as we have discussed, local champions often do their work voluntarily, and do not have the time to allocate, say, ten weekends to a credentialing programs. In an effort to keep the disincentive to participate minimal, this research suggests employing the use of two, weekend-long courses. However, it is important to note that in an effort to alleviate the cost of such a program, grants and outside funding must become a priority.</p> <p>In addition to how long the program takes, various other factors should be considered in the development of a childhood hunger relief training program for the Ozarks. First, consistent with what some research has</p>

suggested, this program is most likely to be effective if local champions teach other local champions. Secondly, in light of prior section findings, our proposed program would focus not only on hard-skill development but also instruction on the historical and sociological dynamics at play in the Ozarks. Finally, as is also consistent with prior research, “service-learning, cultural immersion, and community-based research” must take on central roles in these efforts (Wagner and Mathison 2015). If done successfully, AHRA and local food banks will both strengthen local champions, improve outcomes, and inspire collaboration between actors as they work to improve their community (Getha-Taylor and Morse, 2013).

Table 2 highlights one example of how this Ozark Hunger Institute (which is branded for the purpose of example) might be structured.

Step (3): Develop Ozark-minded Solutions to Childhood Hunger

Any attempts at solving hunger must be dually focused both on the short-term and long-run. Which is why no one person can do it alone: we all have a role to play in fighting childhood hunger in the Ozarks, whether you’re a teacher, concerned parent, physician, state legislator, or the Governor. Arkansas’s problems have never been easy to solve, but we have the resources to change our present circumstances for the better.

This section is dedicated to the description of four policies that would aid in reducing the rate of childhood food insecurity in the Ozarks. Though they cover a range of models, from market-based to government-based, the central objective of each is to use AHRA’s influence as a state leader on food security issues to empower local communities. They are sensitive to the unique history of the region and the distinctive culture that flows from it. By piloting the programs in counties with relatively high social capital and high leadership, the state will fill two needs with one effort: creating best practices while

also actively working to feed hungry children in the Ozarks.

1. *Create less stigmatizing pantry models:* Food pantries are an old concept, with which many local communities are acquainted. However, as recent research has shown, there are good ways to structure food pantries, as well as bad ways. The most recently acclaimed model mirrors the structure of a grocery store, even down to the use of a shopping cart, if possible. By creating models of food pantries that don’t contradict the self-sufficiency norms found in the Ozarks, providing temporary access to healthy food is immediately possible.
2. *Fill access gaps by offering free or low-cost public transit:* Work with local churches and community members to create a carpooling system that connects low-income Ozarkers to grocers in nearby towns. Use a signup method located at the schools or community centers, like city hall. The costs can be offset by state or AHRA grants. And the best part is that this idea could actually help to improve social capital levels in the Ozarks, opening more possibilities for solutions in those counties possessing social capital deficits.
3. *Create an Ozark Donor Network:* The AHRA and the regional food banks ought to seek out donations for Ozark specific projects, and for those developed by members of the Ozark Hunger Institute. By generating an Ozark-specific fund, you also help to improve grant allocations without having to take away from general resources.
4. *Conduct more research:* Because the context within which we solve problems is dynamic, iterative research must be a priority for the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance. By partnering with universities and colleges in Arkansas and Missouri, the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance could become a trendsetter in hunger relief research and policy development. To this end, creating

a small fellowship fund (that is built around the design and testing of different solutions to food insecurity in the Ozarks) for college-aged students is strategically indispensable. If created, such a fund would help to create more thought leaders in food policy, while also providing more useful research for AHRA to utilize in their daily operations.

Conclusions

Because it is home to 33,510 food-insecure children, the Arkansas Ozarks need a new, comprehensive strategy for combating childhood hunger. To that end, this research has attempted to fill two gaps in the current research: a contextualized history of the Ozarks, and a plan that is designed in light of that history and that works to engage all levels of the community, from the parent to the policy leader. Moreover, this has not been a report aimed at activating state and federal policy makers alone. Indeed, this research highlights the way in which every person can help create a food secure Ozarks.

More particularly, this research has shown that the Ozarks are defined by a cultural history that is resistant to outside change and is self-reliant. In light of this fact, the Ozarks need childhood hunger champions with local ties to the community. Only by creating a grassroots network of hunger advocates will the region retain long-term and stable programming, which is essential to the health and development of Ozark children. Social capital and local leadership development thus become crucial, providing the building blocks by which such stability can be achieved. By marrying the culture of the Ozarks with the most innovative solutions to childhood hunger, those 33,510 food insecure children will have a better chance at an improved tomorrow.

Acknowledgements

When I was young, I spent weekends on my family's farm in a rural community called Scott. While our farm is an unassuming patch of land, it has been in my

family for nearly one hundred years. Today, we grow produce using traditional techniques; spinach and hogweed are mixed to shield the tender greens from insects. Looking at my mosquito scars, I figure that I have spent hundreds of hours on the back porch of our farmhouse listening to stories about neighbors helping neighbors. Even when I was young, everyone seemed to understand that in a rural community, all people's lives and economic survival were interwoven—for better or worse.

It is to those stories, and the people who told them, that I owe my life and work. My mother and father taught me incredibly selfless lessons: love your neighbor, help those in need, always be kind. Likewise, my siblings taught me so much about humility, patience, and the value of being intentional with one's words and actions. I was also fortunate to have incredible academic mentors, most especially Professor Jay Barth, whose kind words and extraordinary mentorship has, and will continue to, shape my life.

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