



## Sankofa Fresh Stop Market Program Overview

### Executive Summary

The Sankofa Fresh Stop Market represents a comprehensive grassroots strategy for addressing food insecurity in low-income/low access communities in New Orleans Lower Ninth Ward, with a population of 4,100 residents, by providing ongoing consistent access to locally sourced whole foods in an under resourced area designated as a USDA Food Desert. Health, nutrition, and food safety education will also be offered through Sankofa's Healthy HeartBeats program. The Fresh Stop Market will operate on a historic commercial thoroughfare in the Lower Ninth Ward. The Fresh Stop Market will accept Veggie RX vouchers from Healthy HeartBeats program participants, as well as cash, SNAP benefits, credit cards, and Farmers Market Nutrition Program Vouchers. The Fresh Stop Market project will primarily reach citizens of the Lower Ninth Ward as well as surrounding neighborhoods and serve as an intermediary to distribute food from local farmers and fishers.

### Issue/Problem/Need

Louisiana is the second-largest seafood supplier for the U.S. market, producing more than 850 million pounds of seafood each year. Yet, the state is also a region with significant disconnected systems that support local and regional farmers and significant food disparities,<sup>1</sup> resulting in a glaring contradiction for hundreds of thousands of residents of the state who struggle with hunger. According to Feeding America, in Louisiana 783,400 people (258,630 children) face hunger.<sup>2</sup> Louisiana suffers from a food gap, defined as the failure of the market economy to serve the basic human needs of those who are the most impoverished. This food gap has resulted in significant numbers of residents facing food insecurity. Louisiana has the second highest rate of food insecurity in the United States that is rising faster than the rest of the country. For Orleans Parish specifically, this number is 22.8%.

Historically, low access has contributed to food insecurity in New Orleans. Tulane University researchers found that disparities in access to supermarkets existed prior to the federal levee system failure in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 with the Lower Ninth Ward as the most severely damaged section of New Orleans. A 2007 report on food access in New Orleans states, "supermarket access declined for all census tract neighborhoods, but was especially limited for African American tracts, which were 71 percent less likely than other tracts to have access to a supermarket. Access improved slightly in 2009, but was not any better than pre-Katrina disparity levels."<sup>3</sup> By 2011, food disparities in New Orleans remained, as the City was included as one of the top ten urban food deserts in the United States. Many efforts to address food insecurity in New Orleans failed to connect to lower socioeconomic African American communities impacted by health disparities and the highest rates of food insecurity. In New Orleans, the recent closing of two urban farms and food markets located in designated food

<sup>1</sup> Fitzgerald, K. J. (2018, December). Hungry at the Banquet: Food Insecurity in Louisiana.

<sup>2</sup> "Hunger in America is Changing" (2018). Feeding America. <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/>.

<sup>3</sup> Rose, D., N. Bodor, J. C. Rice, C. M. Swalm, & P. Hutchenson (2011). "The Effects of Hurricane Katrina on Food Access Disparities in New Orleans." *American Journal of Public Health* 101(3):482-4.



deserts were led by folks who were not from those communities. These initiatives also lacked a community-driven strategy. The model of these groups included a disconnect between the alternative food markets they offered and the neighborhood residents and stakeholders, which may have also contributed to failed outcomes of these initiatives.<sup>4</sup>

Between 2013-17, according to the New Orleans Data Center, the population of the Lower Ninth Ward was 4,188 with 1,556 total households. Ninety-one percent of the Lower Ninth Ward population are African American and thirty-two percent lives in poverty. The Lower Ninth Ward confronted significant obstacles in its attempts to recover from the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. Access to healthcare and healthy, affordable food in the Lower Ninth Ward remained severely compromised. Some argued food security in that neighborhood was almost nonexistent. The closest supermarket was two and a half miles away, cut off from all foot traffic and separated from Lower Ninth Ward residents by many obstacles. Affordable fruits and vegetables were not a norm in the neighborhood and access was very limited. Such was the narrative prior to the successful development of the *Sankofa Fresh Stop: A Healthy Food Hub* funded by a 2015 LFPP Planning grant. Today, the Sankofa Community Development Corporation has secured funding to build a permanent indoor fresh produce store at the same location where the food oasis was created by the *Sankofa Fresh Stop: A Healthy Food Hub*. The Sankofa Fresh Stop Market is possible because of the significant insight, learning, and the tremendous capacity developed since the LFPP planning grant was awarded to the organization in 2015. The Sankofa Fresh Stop Market strategy is transformational, sustainable, and mutually beneficial for both local and regional farmers/producers and neighborhood residents.

The Sankofa Fresh Stop Market has become a brand for healthy, affordable food and nutrition in the Lower Ninth Ward and Greater New Orleans area. On the supply side, the Sankofa Fresh Stop Market will make wholesale purchases from regional and local farmers/producers. These goods will be available for purchase by Lower Ninth Ward Residents and beyond. The wholesale purchases from farmers/producers significantly benefits these operations. To continue to have this beneficial impact for farmers/producers, the Fresh Stop Market will also build demand ongoing. One of the strategies to build demand for the fresh produce and whole foods offered at the Fresh Stop Market will include a partnership with Xavier University Health and Wellness Center, College of Pharmacy. Through this partnership, pharmacy students will complete health assessments and assist with healthy cooking demonstrations within the Healthy HeartBeats (HHB) and Fresh Stop Market program.

HHB leverages impactful programming developed by the Sankofa Community Development Corporation with leadership from Community Health Ambassadors (CHAs), who serve as peer educators, community leaders and coaches, and weavers, championing the importance of healthy, local food. The Healthy HeartBeats (HHB) nutrition education and healthy cooking classes also lead to the purchase and consumption of healthy, local food at the Fresh Stop Market. HHB program participants receive Veggie RX produce vouchers, which they redeem at the Fresh Stop Market to purchase fruits and vegetables.

Sankofa CDC also operates mobile markets which bring fresh food to community-based spaces from the Fresh Stop Market. The mobile markets address the lack of transportation as a barrier to healthy food

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<sup>4</sup> Fitzgerald, K. J. (2018, December). Hungry at the Banquet: Food Insecurity in Louisiana.



and also help increase access to healthy, local food. A robust marketing, branding, social media is another strategy employed to help promote the benefits of whole foods and the availability of locally sourced food at the Fresh Stop Market. These demand strategies all reinforce one another, with pathways that lead back to the Sankofa Fresh Stop Market as a core food distribution and access space.

In this way, the work of the Sankofa Fresh Stop Market in the Lower Ninth Ward improves healthy, affordable, local food access; improves connections between local and regional farmers/producers to neighborhood residents; and increases education on and consumer demand for healthy, local food. This work is realizable, straightforward, and more important now than ever as a result of the mounting disadvantages that chronic low access in low-income communities create, especially with regard to food insecurity.

In the Lower Ninth Ward, young adults have grown up in a broken food system for multiple generations, where healthy, fresh food access—and therefore intake—was not the norm, resulting in poor attitudes about healthy food consumption and healthy food opportunities in the community. Furthermore, many stores in the Lower Ninth Ward do not have fresh produce and unhealthy options are aggressively marketed. While food that is unhealthy with a higher fat and salt content is often pleasing to eat, unhealthy eating habits become a troublesome legacy that is passed to future generations.

Research shows that communities with the highest rates of food insecurity have a higher prevalence of diseases such as diabetes, obesity, and persons with some form of disability.<sup>5</sup> The abundance of research supporting a link between food insecurity and health outcomes resulted in the 2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans acknowledging the connection.<sup>6</sup> Louisiana is one of the least healthy states, with one of the highest rates of adult obesity, diabetes, and hypertension, with adult obesity at 36.2%.<sup>7</sup> The rate for African Americans is even higher at 42.6%. The obesity rate for high school students in Louisiana is 17% (the 8<sup>th</sup> highest in the nation). Obesity rates for adults ages 26 to 44 is 36.5% (and 42.9% for adults ages 45 to 64).<sup>8</sup> Statewide, 13.6% of adults have diabetes, which is the fourth highest rate in the country. Louisiana has the sixth highest rate of hypertension in the country with 39% of afflicted adults.<sup>9</sup>

Many children are raised in the Lower Ninth Ward within an environment of unhealthy eating choices, which impacts their lives at an early stage. Current public policy and marketing practices within current food systems also contribute to the development of a fast food culture, within which children become accustomed to processed foods, sugar sweetened beverages and meals that are high in added sugar, fat, and salt. Healthy food habits of parents can be passed on to their children and encourage the

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<sup>5</sup> Gundersen, C., A. Dewey, A. S. Crumbaugh, M. Kato, & E. Engelhard (2018). "Map the Meal Gap 2018." Feeding America. <https://www.feedingamerica.org/sites/default/files/research/map-the-meal-gap/2016/2016-map-the-meal-gap-all-modules.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Holben, D. H. & M. B. Marshall (2017). "Position of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics: Food Insecurity in the United States." *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics* 117(12): 1991-2002.

<sup>7</sup> Warren, M., S. Beck, & J. Rayburn (2016). "The State of Obesity 2018: Better Policies for a Healthier America."

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.stateofobesity.org/states/la/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.stateofobesity.org/states/la/>



consumption of more fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. If children develop healthy eating habits during their early years, they may suffer less chronic diseases such as obesity and diabetes as they grow into adulthood.

Community-level strategies are particularly important for significant impact. Community Health Ambassadors (CHAs) have demonstrated effective results in Sankofa CDC's programs. CHAs receive train-the-trainer food health education through the Healthy HeartBeats nutrition and cardiovascular health education program. As 'community weavers', CHAs contribute to evidence-based strategies for cultivating grassroots leadership. The CHA program is an intentional approach to help people connect to information and offer opportunities for self-empowerment with their leadership, voice, and collective wisdom. Because of their ability to provide culturally relevant information and their understanding of community language, assets, values, and needs, CHAs become successful peer educators and community coaches. CHAs keep residents connected to the Sankofa Fresh Stop Market, assist neighborhood residents to modify eating behaviors, promote better health, build strength in the community, build their leadership and advocacy skills, and create behavioral and social changes through natural social ties, and in this way, increase healthy food consumption, and food health education to reduce health disparities.

In summary, challenges in the Lower Ninth Ward cluster around access, systems, and norms. This includes limited access to information resulting in insufficient knowledge of healthy food preparation and poor attitudes about healthy food consumption; high incidence of diet-related health conditions; and health disparities as well as limited access to affordable local healthy food system infrastructure including access to local and regional farmers and producers resulting in food insecurity; food swamps; and food gaps. While the challenges are clear and supported by evidence, what is also critical is for sustained transformational change, addressing access barriers require a community-based approach with neighborhood residents on the front line.

Implementation funding will support a full-time staff member responsible for the market operations; part-time Community Health Ambassadors (CHAs) who are neighborhood residents on the front lines educating the Lower Ninth Ward on food health and healthy food to create the new normal for this demand; and comprehensive marketing, branding, social media, and evaluation strategies to increase sales at the permanent facility. These efforts will:

- Strengthen the Sankofa Fresh Stop Market as an intermediary that both supports and promotes local and regional food businesses.
- Allow Sankofa Fresh Stop Market to expand whereby the retail space is open more hours each day, more days each week, and year-round and in this way realize additional sale of goods purchased from local and regional farmers/producers.
- Support the processing, aggregation, distribution, and storage of local and regional food products that are marketed and sold locally.
- Provide both direct and indirect producer-to-consumer marketing.
- Benefit communities in LI/LA census tracts according to the ERS USDA Food Access Research Atlas.



- Both improve and expand Sankofa as an existing food business that supports locally and regionally produced agricultural products and food system infrastructure.

### Goals & Objectives

The goal for this work is to create the supply of, and the demand for healthy, local, affordable food in the Lower Ninth Ward in New Orleans and beyond. This will be actualized through four key objectives.

- **Objective 1:** Support for two (2) full-time staff members to operate the Sankofa Fresh Stop Market with locally sourced foods for three years to:
  - (a) recruit eight (8) new and retain (25) existing local and regional farmers/producers as suppliers;
  - (b) expand food purchases from local and regional farmers/producers as suppliers for the Fresh Stop Market by 20 % each program year;
  - (c) increase access of healthy, local foods for consumers;
  - (d) serve additional under-resourced areas and low-income customers with healthy, affordable, local food through the Sankofa Fresh Stop Market, the Mobile Markets, Veggie Rx vouchers and SNAP benefit acceptance
- **Objective 2:** Support for Community Health Ambassadors (CHAs) training and participation during the program period to:
  - (a) receive train-the-trainer food health education (Healthy HeartBeats program) and become community coaches subsequent to training;
  - (b) expand CHA enrollment to 5 new CHAs in Year 1; 5 new CHAs in Year 2; and 5 new CHAs in Year 3;
  - (c) create opportunities for community members to receive peer education around healthy eating and food purchasing practices;
  - (d) actively recruit new participants, improving leadership and facilitating the transformation of healthy eating as the new normal and as a strategy to prevent or manage chronic disease.
- **Objective 3:** Successfully lead annual marketing, branding, and social media campaign to:
  - (a) create a local brand for fresh foods;
  - (b) promote brand recognition around healthy food consumption; and
  - (c) scale impact of the Sankofa Fresh Stop Market brand.
- **Objective 4:** Complete annual external and internal evaluations to:
  - (a) annually disseminate findings;
  - (b) have ongoing improvement through implementing recommendations;
  - (c) measure program outcomes (e.g., customer demographics, neighborhoods served, number of customers, increased food access, pounds of food sold, revenue generated, health and wellness knowledge, POS sales, etc.)

**Intended Beneficiaries:** local and regional farmers/producers (between 25-33); and residents of the Lower Ninth Ward and adjacent neighborhoods (approximately 4,100 stakeholders).

- **Local & Regional farmers/producers** will benefit from increased revenue for increased wholesale purchases from the Sankofa Fresh Stop Market; increased sale and consumption of local products; increased revenue from capturing SNAP benefit purchases captured; and the marketing, branding, and social media strategy will secure and retain customers that further support an increased demand for products.
- **Stakeholders** will benefit from increased knowledge of healthy food preparation and healthy eating demonstrations; increased nutrition and heart health knowledge; increased access to healthy, local affordable food; improved food security; inclusive local food system; community residents trained as Community Health Ambassadors with improved leadership skills, increased connection with peers, and advocates for health in their communities.

**Short-term Impact** for local and regional farmers/producers:

- **Aggregation/Distribution.** Produce is stored in a 10' x 30' Basso commercial refrigeration unit within a climate-controlled environment to prolong the life of the produce. The produce on display at the Fresh Stop Market is also displayed in a climate-controlled space with refrigeration units to ensure shelf life of food has longevity. Food sold at the Sankofa Fresh Stop Market highlights the local producers and farms from where it was grown. The Fresh Stop Market manages distribution services that facilitate regional producers/local farmers delivering produce along with the pick-up of produce from regional producers/local farmers.
- **Processing.** When produce is purchased from farmers and producers, it is washed, bundled, sorted, labeled, checked for quality assurance and stored at the appropriate levels in the commercial refrigeration unit or dry storage in a climate-controlled environment to maintain quality of product.
- **Resale.** A Resale Certificate and Occupational License from the Louisiana Department of Revenue allows the Fresh Stop Market to re-sell local produce and food items purchased wholesale from farmers and food producers.
- **Strong intermediary.** Sankofa Fresh Stop Market serves as an intermediary business between food producers and customers in an area with limited fresh food availability. The food storage facilities and logistics systems at the Fresh Stop Market enable the acceptance of deliveries and pick up of local produce from local farmers and wholesale distributors for sale at the Fresh Stop Market and Mobile Market locations.
- **Awareness.** Increase awareness of local foods for potential new Fresh Stop Market customers by strategic marketing and branding (e.g., nutrition education, seasonality of local foods, awareness of local/regional growers, awareness of the benefits of regional food systems).
- **Visibility.** The Sankofa Fresh Stop Market is on St Claude Ave, a major thoroughfare in an under-resourced, low socioeconomic neighborhood. According to the US Department of Transportation, there are 35,000 people that use St Claude Ave daily.
- **Location.** The Sankofa Fresh Stop Market is located in a historic commercial business district in the Lower Ninth Ward, a historic downtown New Orleans neighborhood. St. Claude Avenue is used for residents of both Orleans Parish and St. Bernard Parish to connect to the Greater New Orleans area.



- **Revenue generation.** The Fresh Stop Market will increase revenue for local farmers, as well as the sale and consumption of local products. It will capture more SNAP benefit purchases. The Fresh Stop Market serves as an anchor location in the Lower Ninth Ward to provide fresh local produce to residents. The Fresh Stop Market will also expand market opportunities for agricultural producers as a wholesale purchaser of their fruits, vegetables, and local food products.
- **Customer retention.** The Fresh Stop Market will utilize market business and operational and marketing systems to recruit and retain customers.

**Long-Term Impact** for local and regional farmers/producers:

- Increase brand impact of the Fresh Stop Market and locally sourced food through marketing, promotions, social media and evaluation strategies.
- Increase revenue for local farmers through consistent customer retention and growth.
- Increase sale and consumption of local products at the Fresh Stop Market and Mobile Market.
- Increase capture of SNAP benefit purchases at the Fresh Stop Market and Mobile Market.

**Outcomes**

- Outcome 1: To Increase Consumption of and Access to Locally and Regionally Produced Agricultural Products.
- Outcome 2: To Increase Customers and Sales of Local and Regional Agricultural Products.
- Outcome 3: To Improve the Food Safety of Locally and Regionally Produced Agricultural Products.
- Outcome 4: To Establish or Expand a Local and Regional Food Business Enterprise.

**Potential Adaptation of Project by Others**

The Fresh Stop Market model is a replicable, scalable, and viable strategy for low access and low-income areas. The project holds the potential to improve access for both farmers/producers and neighborhood residents. The approach makes access and intake of healthy, affordable local foods the new normal. The marketing, branding, social media and evaluations plans can be utilized as a resource for potential adaptation by others.