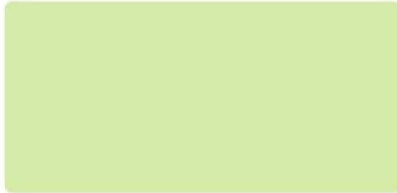
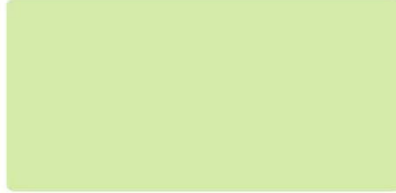
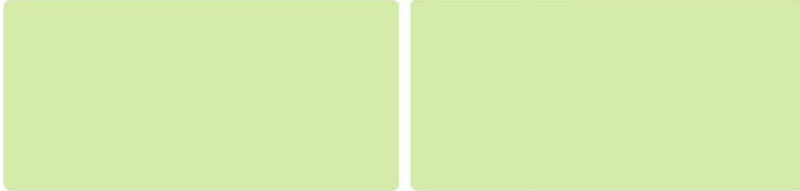


LOCAL FOODS, LOCAL PLACES

Technical Assistance Program



An Action Plan for
Strengthening the Local
Food Economy and
Downtown

Flippin, Arkansas

May 21, 2015



Community Story

Flippin is a city of about 1,350 people set in the beautiful Ozark Mountains of north-central Arkansas. Flippin and surrounding Marion County have an abundance of natural resources that fostered the county's cultural and economic development, beginning with the cotton industry in the 19th century and continuing until today with tourism. However, like many small towns and rural areas, Flippin has experienced episodes of economic growth and periods of economic stagnation. Today the city is looking to build a more resilient economic



Figure 1: Flippin is just south of the scenic Bull Shoals Lake.

base by building on existing assets such as its historic downtown, manufacturing base, and proximity to major tourist destinations.

Marion County's development began in earnest when steamboats arrived in the 19th century, allowing a short-lived cotton industry to blossom. Cotton gave way to lead and zinc mining in the late 19th century. The Iron Mountain Railroad arrived in Flippin in the early 20th century and supported the growth of banking and other services that revolved around mining. However, the mining boom was short lived and collapsed shortly after World War I. Agriculture soon made a comeback as the county's key industry when several tomato growers began supplying the United States Army. However, the tomato industry withered shortly after World War II. Much of the land used to grow tomatoes was converted to pasture for livestock.¹

Tourism became a much more important component of the area's economy following World War II. Today the region has a small agricultural sector, especially relative to the state's major agricultural counties in the Delta region. But tourism continues to flourish in the county thanks to its proximity to the Ozark Mountains, Bull Shoals Lake, and the White and Buffalo Rivers. Flippin also has a steady base of manufacturing jobs due to the presence of Ranger Boats and Micro Plastics. Ranger has built bass boats in the city for nearly 50 years.²



Figure 2: Main Street Flippin has a mixture of local businesses and empty storefronts.

¹ The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture. <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=789>. Accessed February 5, 2015.

² Welcome to Flippin, Arkansas. <http://www.flippinweb.com/>. Accessed February 5, 2015.

Despite the jobs in Flippin supported by tourism and manufacturing, the city’s downtown has suffered from a general lack of activity that had led to high vacancy rates in its remaining storefronts. City leaders are beginning to focus on how they can encourage more restaurants and shops to fill the empty spaces downtown and to support the existing businesses. One of their primary strategies is to market the area’s local foods and products to tourists and factory workers that travel through the city each day. The city will launch a farmers market just north of downtown Flippin in the summer of 2015. The market will be located on State Route 178, which is a key highway between the city and Bull Shoals Lake. Also in early 2015 Flippin was pursuing a grant to build a new sidewalk connecting its major centers of activity – downtown, the new farmers market, the schools, and Hickey Park.



Figure 3: The workshop attracted participation from throughout the community and state.

These two major initiatives – the sidewalk and farmers market – occurring in tandem have the potential to increase activity in the downtown and bring people together from throughout the community and those visiting from out of town. In 2014, Flippin requested assistance through the Local Foods, Local Places technical assistance program to develop an action plan for furthering these two projects while also identifying strategies to increasing the supply of local produce and bolster the city’s new, but already successful, school garden program. These actions have the potential to improve quality of life in Flippin by spurring the creating of new food-related businesses, keeping more food dollars in the local economy, attracting investment to the downtown area, and improving public health by providing easier access for residents to healthy and local produce.

Flippin’s vision for a stronger local food system and community made it a good match for Local Foods, Local Places. This new program is supported by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), and the Delta Regional Authority (DRA). The program works with communities across the country to help them realize the following benefits of a stronger local food economy:

- More economic opportunities for local farmers and business;
- Better access to healthy local food, especially among disadvantaged groups;
- A revitalized downtown that is the economic anchor of the community

These agencies worked with the community to develop the following action plan.

Engagement

Flippin hosted a workshop on March 31 and April 1 to develop this action plan. The workshop brought together key local, state, and federal agency representatives to envision a better future for Flippin and to identify the critical next steps for getting there. Among the attendees were local representatives including elected officials, school district representatives, business owners and farmers, and concerned citizens; state representatives of the Arkansas Health Department, Arkansas Coalition for Obesity

Prevention, Arkansas Agriculture Department, and Arkansas Economic Development Commission; and federal representatives from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Agriculture-Rural Development. Contractors from Renaissance Planning facilitated the workshop. Workshop attendance is provided in the appendix.

The workshop included three sessions. The first session provided an opportunity for residents to talk about their values and their concerns for the future. This critical information provided overall direction for the remainder of the workshop and the goals that are presented below. The second work session dug into opportunities for improving the local food economy and revitalizing downtown. The discussions during the first two work sessions led to the five goals this action plan aims to achieve:

1. Organize and manage the farmers market for long-term success.
2. Farmers are better connected and sharing their knowledge with each other and new farmers in order to grow the supply of locally-grown foods.
3. Build the relationship between Main Street businesses, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Farmers Market.
4. Main Street is a more walkable place and more people in Flippin are walking for fun, errands, exercise, and to see people.
5. Develop and expand the Flippin School District School Garden.

During the final work session, attendees identified specific actions that the community can take to achieve these goals. Figure 4 is a summary of the workshop process.

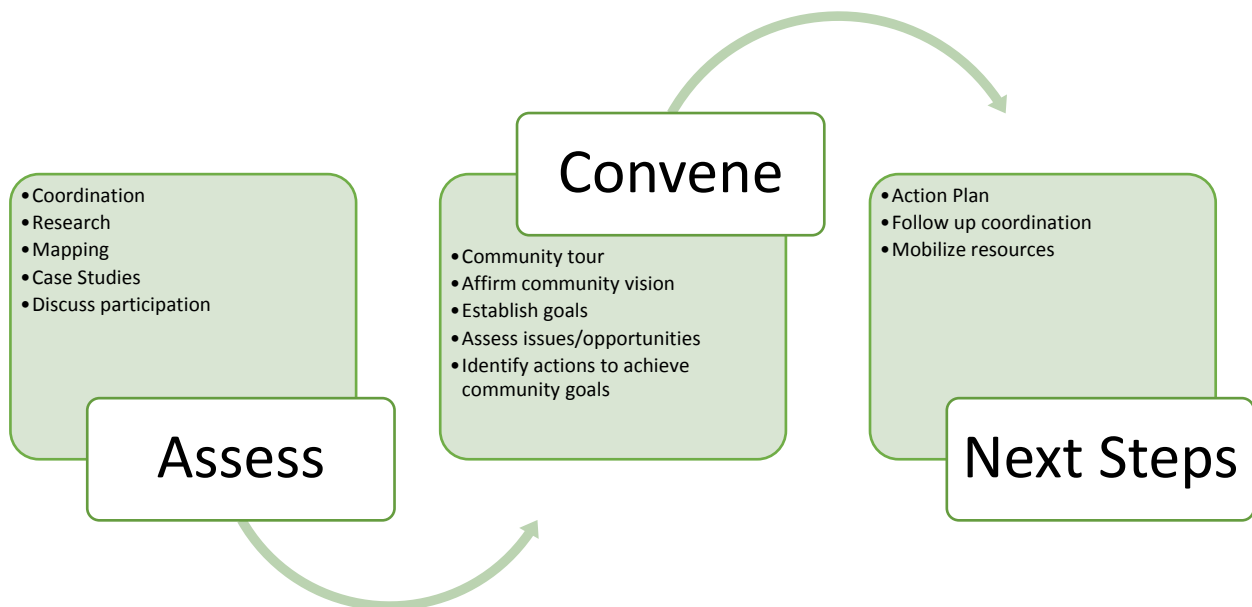


Figure 4 - Technical Assistance Process Diagram

Vision

The workshop yielded a clear and concise vision of Flippin emerging as a city with a vibrant Main Street that is a gathering place for the community. Main Street is a place where tourists stop to enjoy an authentic and charming small town Main Street and buy local foods and products to use during their stay or take home. The city also emerges as a hub for local foods in the region, with many citizens buying locally-grown produce and growing some of their own food at successful community gardens.

This vision depends on a few keystone projects. The first is a farmers market that sells local produce and items that will appeal to Flippin’s residents and visitors passing the city on Route 178. The second is a large community garden and educational farm on a large parcel just north of the city’s school complex. The third project is an inviting sidewalk that connects these emerging cogs in the local food economy with the city’s downtown and popular Hickey Park. These major assets are in close proximity running north to south, but there is not an inviting and safe pedestrian connection between them.

During the workshop, people shared their thoughts about why these local foods and walkability initiatives are especially important to Flippin’s future. Their responses are summarized in Figure 5 below.



Figure 5: Workshop Participants’ Thoughts on Why Local Foods and Walkability are Important for Flippin’s Future

Strengths, Challenges, and Opportunities

While the vision paints a picture of a bright future for people living and growing up in Flippin, workshop attendees realized that the city needs to make a few changes in order to realize the vision. So the attendees spent time exploring Flippin’s strengths, challenges, and opportunities. This section presents the strengths and opportunities that can support the vision of a healthier and thriving Flippin, and some of the challenges that may hold the city back if they are not addressed.

Strengths

- **Natural Environment** – Flippin is located in the rolling Ozark Mountains near the scenic Bull Shoals Lake and the White River. These natural assets attract visitors from near and far. Much of the traffic heading to Bull Shoals Lake passes just west of downtown Flippin on Route 178. The natural environment has also supported the development of Ranger Boats, which makes fishing boats and sells them nationwide from its long-time headquarters in Flippin.
- **Manufacturing Jobs** – Ranger and Micro Plastics bring many steady manufacturing jobs to Flippin. This is a strength because many communities of a similar size that are far from major urban centers have lost a substantial number of manufacturing jobs. Ranger in particular is a nationally-known brand that sells boats throughout the country and attracts people who tour the factory and shop at the gift store.
- **Friendly People** – Many workshop attendees pointed out that Flippin is a very friendly and welcoming community. This is a key trait as the community looks to increase patronage at its businesses by out-of-town visitors.
- **Community/School Garden Program** – Flippin has a lot of momentum and energy behind its farmers market. A big part of the reason is the community garden taking shape behind the school complex. Thanks to the dedicated efforts of school staff, students, and gardeners, the school has a growing and popular community garden.

Challenges

- **Small Ag Economy** – The region’s relatively small agricultural sector is a challenge to building a stronger local food economy. Although Marion County has nearly 500 farms, very few grow vegetables or fruits, and they bring in much less revenue than their counterparts in the Arkansas Delta. As a result, many of the vendors at surrounding markets are gardeners. Table 1 shows that Marion County had nearly 485 farms in 2012, yet only seven were producing either vegetables or fruits. While the county generated nearly \$40 million in agricultural sales in 2012, only \$38,000 came through direct to consumer channels such as farmers markets and roadside stands. This figure has significant room to grow considering that the City of Flippin’s residents spend about \$3 million on food each year.³

³ ESRI. Retail Goods and Services Expenditures – Flippin, AR.

Table 1: Agricultural Statistics for Marion County, Arkansas

U.S. Agriculture Census Figure	2012
Total Farms	485
Vegetable Farms	7
Fruit, Tree Nut, and Berry Farms	1
Livestock, Poultry, and their Products Farms	382
Total Agricultural Sales	\$ 39.6 million
Agricultural Sales Direct to Consumers	\$38,000

- **Human Capacity** – Flippin is a small city and its residents are often balancing many responsibilities, including multiple jobs. Flippin shares this challenge with many rural communities. There simply not many people available to share the burden of taking on additional responsibilities. This fact underscores the importance of keeping this action plan focused on a small set of actions that workshop attendees and residents of Flippin can take on in the near-term and short-term.
- **Walkability** – Workshop attendees expressed several concerns about their perceived level of comfort and safety walking in the downtown area. Among the top concerns were that traffic on Main Street is too fast; missing sidewalk segments; the lack of a strong connection between the school, downtown, and Hickey Park; and a culture that prefers driving.
- **Lack of Downtown Businesses** – The downtown area has some successful restaurants, but also has several buildings that lack tenants. Workshop attendees expressed a desire to see more businesses and a wider variety of businesses go into downtown.

Opportunities

- **Connecting Flippin** – Flippin is pursuing a Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) grant through the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department. The grant would provide funds to construct a new sidewalk from the farmers market and school complex on the north side of town through the heart of downtown and to Hickey Park on the south side of downtown. While this may seem like a fairly simple project, it has tremendous potentially for physically connecting Flippin’s main draws and new initiatives. Hickey Park and the downtown are regional destinations for shopping and entertainment. Meanwhile, the school complex will soon be home to the farmers market and already has a thriving community garden. Connecting these projects to the downtown via an inviting sidewalk can stimulate economic development.
- **Local Leadership** – Flippin has many engaged and energized citizens that are ready and willing to pitch in on many of the actions listed in this plan. Many of the city’s residents possess the kind of can-do and self-starter mindset that is a critical ingredient in success.
- **Tourist Traffic** – Flippin is situated on Arkansas Route 178, which can become crowded during the summer months with tourists heading to and from Bull Shoals Lake and the White River. Flippin has some retail outlets that serve this traffic, but the farmers market and downtown have potential to attract more people to stop and spend some time in town. In other words, these tourists are potential customers.

Action Plan

The workshop led to a focus on five major goals that Flippin would like to achieve. Each of these goals is supported by a set of actions that will help Flippin overcome the obstacles, or take advantage of opportunities, so that it can achieve these goals. The actions are steps that Flippin can take in the near term to move towards its vision of a strong local food economy and downtown, which generate new jobs, a healthier population, and enhance quality of life.

The five goals are described below along with the supportive actions. The goals and action items are presented in Appendix A in their complete form, which includes a time frame, lead role, supporting cast, cost, funding sources, and near-term steps.

Goal 1 - Organize and manage the farmers market for long-term success

- Action 1.1 - Establish the organizational structure, bylaws, and vendor rules.
- Action 1.2 - Apply for an Employer Identification Number (EIN) and set up a bank account.
- Action 1.3 - Get SNAP connected and advertise, partnering with Michele Rodgers at the Department of Human Services, the local health department, and other social services.
- Action 1.4 - Provide electricity access for each vendor with on-site refrigeration.
- Action 1.5 - Advertise the farmers market to potential vendors and customers through several channels, including the newspaper, social media, upcoming events, presentations at community meetings and the senior center, and city water bills.
- Action 1.6 - Locate musicians to perform at the farmers market.
- Action 1.7 - Acquire equipment needed to start the market including tents, booths, a trailer to haul the equipment, and marketing materials.

Goal 2 - Farmers are better connected and sharing their knowledge with each other and new farmers in order to grow the supply of locally-grown foods

- Action 2.1 - Build a database of farmers and gardeners for ongoing use and to identify people to invite to the Whole Farm Conference planned for Fall 2015.
- Action 2.2 - Conduct outreach to Marion, Searcy, and Stone County farmers inviting them to participate in the Whole Farm Conference and to sell to local markets.
- Action 2.3 - Organize a meeting of market managers from throughout the region to lay out a program for the Whole Farm Conference in fall 2015.
- Action 2.4 - Hold a 2-day Whole Farm Conference for local farmers to network and share practices in all areas of sustainable agriculture.
- Action 2.5 - Form a growers co-op in the area

Goal 3 - Build the relationship between Main Street businesses, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Farmers Market

- Action 3.1 - Present the sidewalk plan (farmers market to Hickey Park via Main Street) with the Chamber of Commerce and introduce the idea of moving the farmers market downtown within 3 years (in the North 2nd Street non-vehicular section).
- Action 3.2 - Present the Local Foods, Local Places Action Plan to the Chamber of Commerce.

Goal 4 - Main Street is a more walkable place and more people in Flippin are walking for fun, errands, exercise, and to see people

- Action 4.1 - Install “Welcome to Downtown Flippin” signs at Main Street and 4th Street (east end) and Route 178 (west end) with space for temporary promotional signs (such as for the farmers market) to hang from the welcome sign.
- Action 4.2 - Build the sidewalk and crosswalk project connecting the farmers market, schools, downtown, and Hickey Park.
- Action 4.3 - Beautify the areas along the new sidewalk alignment with potted trees, herbs and other edible landscapes, benches, and improve pedestrian-scale lighting.
- Action 4.4 - Paint City Hall, install a new welcome sign, and plan the future of the City Hall site, which will include a new fire station and renovation of the city hall).

Goal 5 - Develop and expand the Flippin School District School Garden

- Action 5.1 - Install hoop houses and procure growing supplies.
- Action 5.2 - Expand the garden to include an orchard and a vineyard.
- Action 5.3 - Install fences and procure chicken tractors to support rotational grazing of goats and chickens.
- Action 5.4 - Pave walkways to and within the community garden and provide wheelchair accessible gardening area.
- Action 5.5 - Build an outdoor classroom.

Implementation

Figure 6 below lists the series of actions Flippin and its partners are planning to take in order to realize the goals listed in the previous section. The city's first step is to get the farmers market up and running for a portion of the 2015 growing season. Several workshop attendees are also planning to hold a conference in the fall of 2015 to begin strengthening the connections among the region's small farmers.



Figure 6: Timeline of Next Steps

The timeline is likely to change based on available resources and shifting objectives, but it is a good starting point. In addition to the major milestones listed in this timeline, the workshop participants also set goals for the number of farmers they would like to see in the region. They identified 18 small farms in operation as of April 2015 and would like to see that number grow to about 25 by 2025 and 35 by 2030. They would also like to see more mid-sized production farms that are growing and selling produce to local and regional markets. There are few of this type of farm in 2015, but they would like to see eight by 2025 and 15 by 2035.

High Priority Actions

Flippin identified a pair of actions as high priorities for implementation in the short term. The city plans to seek implementation assistance of up to \$25,000 through the Delta Regional Authority's Rural Communities Advancement Program (RCAP) to take the following steps:

- Fabricate and install "Welcome to Flippin" and "Welcome to Downtown Flippin" signs at the city's main gateways in order to encourage tourists to stop and visit the city and shop at the local businesses (Action 4.1). The Welcome to Downtown Flippin sign may arch over Main Street on the west end of downtown (near the intersection with Route 178).
- Beautify the areas along 2nd Street and Main Street with potted trees, herbs and other edible landscapes, benches, and improve pedestrian-scale lighting (Action 4.3).

Livability Principles Advanced by Action Plan

The Local Foods, Local Places program is supported by the Federal Partnerships for Sustainable Communities. The Partnerships includes EPA, DOT, and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). These agencies have been working since 2009 to incorporate livability considerations into their policies and funding programs. This section describes how Flippin's Action Plan supports the livability principles.

Provide more Transportation Choices

The sidewalk project connecting the school complex, downtown, and Hickey Park will strengthen the connection between these major attractions, creating a more inviting environment for pedestrians and encouraging people to walk to school, the park, the farmers market, downtown, and between these places. Flippin is a fairly small city and walking can play an important role in the transportation mix if safe and inviting pathways are provided. The sidewalk project fills a clear gap.

Promote Equitable, Affordable Housing

The workshop did not focus on housing and attendees did not identify housing affordability as a major issue. However, there is long-term potential to add apartments above shops as downtown revitalizes.

Enhance Economic Competitiveness

Flippin has potential to attract more spending by the tourists passing through the city on Route 178. It also has a solid manufacturing base for a city of its size. A more vibrant and attractive Main Street will contribute to the city's quality of life. As such, it is one way to capture some of the economic potential represented by the tourists and workers that may choose to settle in Flippin. The farmers market also contributes to quality of life and makes the community an even more attractive place to live and work.

Support Existing Communities

Flippin is an existing community with large sunk investments in transportation, water, sewer, communications, and energy infrastructure. This plan lays out some initial steps that Flippin can take to make downtown and existing neighborhoods more attractive to investment. This approach to development makes full use of existing local infrastructure, which is good for stressed local budgets.

Coordination and Leverage Federal Policies and Investment

The Local Foods, Local Places workshop brought together people from many state and federal agencies. The new relationships formed both within the city and with people outside of the community can attract new resources to support implementation of this action plan. It is important to nurture these new relationships by finding ways to stay engaged with each other.

Value Communities and Neighborhoods

This action plan demonstrates a strong value for Flippin’s communities and neighborhoods. It lays out a path for investing resources in these places and building social capital by connecting people through local foods, community gardening, and more vibrant public spaces, such as the downtown and future farmers market.

Appendices

- Appendix A – Action Plan Implementation Details
- Appendix B – Local and Regional Maps
- Appendix C – Key Health and Agriculture Data
- Appendix D – Workshop Participants
- Appendix E – Funding Resources
- Appendix F – References
- Appendix G – Presentation Slides