



Social Enterprises  
Knowledgeable Economies  
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# Community Conversations about the Good Food Junction Co-operative

Emily Hurd

**A research report prepared for the Northern Ontario, Manitoba,  
and Saskatchewan Regional Node of the Social Economy Suite**

Funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada  
Conseil de recherches en sciences humaines du Canada

Entreprises sociales  
économies intelligentes  
et communautés durables



## THE GOOD FOOD JUNCTION CO-OPERATIVE

I WISH TO ACKNOWLEDGE AND THANK THE FOLLOWING INDIVIDUALS AND organizations who contributed so importantly to this research project and without whom this work could not have been done:

- all of the individuals who took the time to participate in our community conversations
- the Central Urban Métis Federation Inc. and St. George's Residence for allowing us to use their space for the conversations
- the Station 20 West Development Corporation board of directors and Paul Wilkinson, project manager
- the Good Food Junction Co-operative board of directors and Janice Sanford Beck, president
- Quint Development Corporation and Len Usiskin, manager, and community co-director, Social Economy, Community-University Institute for Social Research

I particularly wish to thank our community partner on this project, CHEP Good Food Inc., Karen Archibald, CHEP's executive director, and Colleen Hamilton, CHEP's Aboriginal partnership co-ordinator. They were wonderful to work with — enthusiastic, helpful, and willing to participate in so many ways.

Not least, I also wish to acknowledge the people at the Community-University Institute for Social Research who supported this project and filled these roles at the time: Dr. Louise Clarke, university co-director and the principal investigator; Dr. Isobel Findlay, university co-director, Social Economy; and Maria Basualdo, community-university research liaison.



This paper is part of a collection of research reports prepared for the project  
*Linking, Learning, Leveraging*  
*Social Enterprises, Knowledgeable Economies, and Sustainable Communities,*  
the Northern Ontario, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan  
Regional Node of the Social Economy Suite,  
funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

The project is managed by four regional partners —  
the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives and the Community-University  
Institute for Social Research at the University of Saskatchewan,  
the Winnipeg Inner-City Research Alliance, and later  
the Institute of Urban Studies at the University of Winnipeg,  
and the Community Economic and Social Development Unit  
at Algoma University.

The project also includes more than fifty community-based organizations  
in four provinces, the United States, Colombia, and Belgium.

This particular research paper was administered by  
the Community-University Institute for Social Research (CUISR).  
The opinions of the author found herein do not necessarily reflect  
those of CUISR, the Linking, Learning, Leveraging project,  
or the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

We acknowledge the following for their contributions to this publication:  
Lou Hammond Ketilson, principal investigator, Linking, Learning, Leveraging project  
Isobel M. Findlay, university co-director, Social Economy, CUISR  
Len Usiskin, community co-director, Social Economy, CUISR  
Isobel M. Findlay and Bill Holden, co-directors, CUISR

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Editing, cover and interior design by Nora Russell  
Centre for the Study of Co-operatives

Printed in Canada  
12 13 14 / 3 2 1

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## ABSTRACT

**T**HE NEIGHBOURHOODS JUST TO THE WEST OF DOWNTOWN Saskatoon have experienced a long period of disinvestment, with attendant declines in the quality of housing stock, relatively high poverty rates, and limited access to good food, among other problems. Two local social enterprises have spearheaded initiatives to stop and reverse these trends: Quint Development Corporation and CHEP Good Food Inc. (CHEP). Together and with other groups they have been working to develop a major revitalization project called Station 20 West, which includes a community enterprise centre housing a grocery store, the Good Food Junction Co-operative. In the fall of 2009, at the request of CHEP, the Community-University Institute for Social Research (CUISR) committed to completing research that would assist CHEP and the Good Food Junction Co-operative board (GFJ) in putting together a business plan for the proposed grocery store. Specifically, CUISR was to gather information from local area residents on their current grocery shopping experiences, any key barriers that might dissuade people from switching from their current stores to the GFJ, and, more positively, what they would like to see in a new grocery store located in their area. CUISR undertook the research as part of a large research project on the social economy — Linking, Learning, Leveraging: Social Enterprises, Knowledgeable Economies, and Sustainable Communities — funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

The CUISR intern and principal investigator worked collaboratively with CHEP's executive director and Aboriginal partnership co-ordinator to design, conduct, and analyze the research. The approach was to recruit residents from key groups for a series of focus groups. Because many area residents felt "researched to death," the team took great care to create a series of five questions in accessible language and to conduct the groups in an open, non-

threatening way. The CUISR researchers and CHEP staff met with three groups comprising forty-four people in what were called “community conversations” about the Good Food Junction in January 2010.

In general, participants were not particularly satisfied with their current shopping experiences at supermarkets on the fringe of or outside the area, and, as they heard about the proposed Good Food Junction grocery store, expressed an interest in giving it a try. They provided a wealth of information on specifics of what they disliked about the supermarkets and, conversely, what they would like to see at the GFJ that would entice them to switch. The researchers, in consultation with CHEP staff, distilled three key themes from the findings:

- how participants weighed the key factors of price and convenience (proximity) in their decision of where to shop
- the trade-offs that the GFJ board could make to balance stocking brand name and generic products, having a broad range of products and services, and the need to specialize in a midsized grocery store catering in large part to low-income customers
- the importance of the local dimension of the store, which the GFJ could use to build support for the grocery store, namely, making customers feel welcome and treated with respect by staff from the area

Related to this third theme, we noted that many participants responded positively to the ideas and intent behind social enterprises such as the GFJ, which balance economic and social goals and thereby improve the quality of life of people in the area. They appreciated a store designed for them and staffed by members of the local community. Much was learned through the conversations about how to create a community food store that would have healthy food at fair prices and be responsive to its members’ needs.

## INTRODUCTION

**T**HE GOOD FOOD JUNCTION CO-OPERATIVE IS A GROUP DEDICATED TO building and operating a food store in Station 20 West, a social enterprise at the heart of area redevelopment in the core neighbourhoods of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. This report records the findings of a research partnership between CHEP Good Food Inc. (CHEP), a key proponent of the Good Food Junction Co-op (GFJ), and the Community-University Institute for Social Research (CUISR) to ascertain the grocery shopping preferences among key groups in the neighbourhood. Given the intended participants, the partners decided that a series of informal focus groups or “community conversations” would be the best way to gather the needed information.

In the remainder of this introduction, we provide background on the Station 20 West and Good Food Junction projects, including their socio-economic context and data on similar food providers elsewhere, and on the origins of the research project. The second section of the report presents information on our collaborative approach to designing, implementing, and analyzing the results of the project. The third section presents the findings from the community conversations, while the fourth discusses the key themes emerging from the findings as well as some limitations.

### **Saskatoon and the Core Neighbourhoods**

Saskatoon is a prairie city experiencing resource-driven population growth, from 202,400 in 2006 to an estimated 234,200 in 2011 (City of Saskatoon 2011), with the attendant economic benefits and challenges. The cost of living, especially housing, continues to rise, with the result that some people are increasingly impoverished as they struggle to pay for necessities, while others become more affluent. Problems are particularly acute in the

core neighbourhoods (to the west of downtown Saskatoon) as a result not only of recent price increases, but also long-term disinvestment in the area. In a case study titled *Growing Pains: Social Enterprise in Saskatoon's Core Neighbourhoods*, Diamantopoulos and Findlay (2007) state:

In the post–World War II period, private sector investment in Saskatoon systematically fled to the outer city. More recently, government supports to disadvantaged residents who are concentrated in older core neighbourhoods have been scaled back, too. In keeping with the development pattern across North America, the result has been a hollowing out of these older, central city neighbourhoods. Despite certain significant, but atypical and isolated exceptions, the market and the state have failed inner-city Saskatoon, driving jobs, services, and people from the Core. (1)

The authors note that this has led to many problems. Citing City of Saskatoon statistics, they report that poverty is high, with two-fifths of core families living on less than \$20,000 a year. Aboriginal families in the area are even more disadvantaged, with average annual incomes of only \$16,500. As a consequence of this poverty, crime has risen, much of the housing stock is poorly maintained, overcrowded, and increasingly unaffordable, and the people experience disproportionately more health problems than those in more affluent areas of the city (Lemstra and Neudorf 2008).

Two social enterprises have been active in promoting revitalization in the core neighbourhoods for many years. Quint Development Corporation was created in 1995 by representatives from the community associations of five core neighbourhoods to strengthen the area's economic and social well-being through a community-based economic development approach. They are “guided by a holistic approach that integrates economic, social, ecological and cultural development with a goal to revitalize and reclaim communities” (Quint 2010a). They are active in a broad range of affordable housing initiatives, business renewal, and employment development. Like Quint, CHEP Good Food Incorporated takes a community development approach in its mission of working with “children, families and communities to improve access to good food and promote Food Security” (CHEP 2010). Believing that food is a basic right and that poor nutrition adversely affects many aspects of quality of life, their initiatives include delivering “Good Food Boxes” consisting of fresh (and often local) fruit and vegetables to Saskatoon citizens at reasonable prices, providing nutrition programs for children, maintaining a collective kitchen, cultivating community gardens, and promoting government policies to enhance food security.

### **Station 20 West and the Good Food Junction Co-operative**

Starting in 2003, Quint and CHEP spearheaded plans for redeveloping a site in the heart of the core neighbourhoods that would contribute to fulfilling their respective mandates and be a catalyst for other revitalization. The plans called for two major components. First, the Saskatchewan Housing Authority would construct affordable rental housing units and the Saskatoon Public Library would build a branch library; both projects opened in 2009. Second, Quint and CHEP would build a community enterprise centre to be called Station 20 West. The centre would house offices for some community-based organizations, including Quint and CHEP, spaces for some health services and for University of Saskatchewan outreach, and, most importantly, a grocery store called the Good Food Junction Co-operative. Over the intervening years, the Station 20 West board experienced many ups and downs, with major support from the provincial government given and then withdrawn (Clarke, Diamantopoulos, and Findlay 2008), but it eventually received sufficient broad-based support from groups and individuals in the community for construction to begin in July 2011 (Quint 2010b).

The Good Food Junction Co-operative board and members aspire to contribute significantly to food security for core residents, offering convenient access to healthy, fairly priced food, often locally grown. They also hope to create local jobs and “stimulate a virtuous cycle of growth with the [GFJ] as a cornerstone for growth and the development of other business in our neighbourhood” (Good Food Junction 2010).

Several studies on the current situation and the experience of similar food stores address the potential importance of the GFJ Co-op for food security and the attendant health benefits for area residents in what some call a food desert because of the scarcity of affordable, healthy food (Saskatoon Community Clinic 2008). Cummins and MacIntyre (2006) provide evidence that the inability of residents in low-income areas to access healthy, fairly priced food can result in poor nutrition and high-calorie consumption. Specifically in Saskatoon, Peters and McCreary (2008) studied the geography of services and show how “economic and social processes have resulted in the depletion of core neighbourhood infrastructure, both commercial and institutional” (80). In five high-poverty neighbourhoods on the west side of Saskatoon, for example, the total number of grocery stores declined from twelve in 1984 to

five in 2004, and only two neighbourhoods had a major grocery store chain in a bordering area. Moreover, the research shows that even smaller food stores, convenience stores, and confectionaries were moving away from the core neighbourhoods and that grocery prices were marginally higher in these low-income areas. In recent years, only one store with groceries, Giant Tiger, has opened, while new supermarkets have proliferated in the more affluent neighbourhoods of the east side of Saskatoon. Low-income West Side residents have been left with few options, most of them high cost — a few local convenience stores, fast food outlets on the main arteries, and an inconvenient bus trip or expensive taxi ride to a supermarket outside the area.

Fortunately, there are several stores from which the GFJ can draw inspiration and knowledge to achieve its social, economic, and environmental goals. Two are based in Oakland, California. The Mandela Food Cooperative is designed to meet both social and economic goals, serving those members of society who were previously underserved by grocery retailers. The store provides people with good-quality food and the opportunity to “leverage untapped local buying power into new business and employment opportunities” (Mandela Foods 2010). The co-operative also gives nutrition classes and runs an economic investment program.

The People’s Grocery is a mobile food market also operating in Oakland. Its motto, “Healthy Food for Everyone,” emphasizes its focus on food justice (People’s Grocery 2010a). Though not a food store in a traditional sense, its mobile services allow the wider community access to healthy food. One of its goals is to change the way in which the food system works. Specifically, the organization believes in a food system that prioritizes the needs of the urban poor. Like CHEP’s Good Food Boxes, the People’s Grocery provides “Grub Boxes,” prepackaged boxes of fresh fruit and vegetables for community members. Other programs include an Urban Agriculture Program, a Food Justice and Urban Agriculture Allyship Program, and Health and Nutrition demonstrations (People’s Grocery 2010b).

Neechi Foods Co-op Ltd. of Winnipeg, Manitoba, is a Canadian example of a food store with a community economic development (CED) approach. It was incorporated in 1986 as an Aboriginal workers’ co-operative in the inner city and began regular operations in 1990 (Wuttunee, Chicilo, Rothney, and Gray 2008). Although it received some start-up funds and faced many economic challenges over the years, Neechi has achieved its goal of becoming profitable. It sells grocery items, Aboriginal speciality items, and provides catering services. Following CED principles, Neechi seeks to create and maintain a strong and self-reliant local

economy for people in the community by keeping money in the community and promoting Aboriginal pride and employment (Loxley 2002).

## METHODS

THE COMMUNITY-UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL RESEARCH (CUISR) is committed to nurturing partnerships between community-based organizations and faculty and graduate and undergraduate students at the University of Saskatchewan. Using a participatory community-based research approach, CUISR responds to needs articulated by the community and works collaboratively with community partners to design, conduct, and interpret the research. In this section we describe each of these three steps.

### **Designing the Project**

CUISR, Quint, and CHEP have worked closely together over the years. This particular project began in the fall of 2009, when Dr. Louise Clarke, CUISR's then university co-director, CUISR intern Emily Hurd, and Maria Basualdo, CUISR's community-university research liaison, met with Len Usiskin, manager of Quint, and Karen Archibald, executive director of CHEP, to discuss how best to obtain community input on the Good Food Junction. Such input was considered crucial not just for decision making on the business plan, but also as part of the overall engagement strategy of the project partners. With Janice Sanford Beck, president of the GFJ Co-operative board of directors, the partners decided that they wanted information on a) the shopping patterns of core neighbourhood residents; b) any key barriers that might dissuade people from switching from their current stores to the GFJ; and c) more positively, what they would like to see in a new grocery store located in their area. The partners worked collaboratively on the wording of the questions to ensure both research rigour and appropriate language for the intended audiences. The final versions are as follows:

1. Since this conversation is about access to good affordable food, we want to start by asking you, Where do you currently shop? Does where you shop meet your needs?
2. The Good Food Junction will be located on 20th Street, between Avenues K and L. Is

this closer to you than where you shop now? If it is closer, and you no longer had to take a bus/car/cab to shop, would this be a good enough reason for you to switch from where you currently shop to the GFJ?

3. It is important to the GFJ that you can find the items you need at its store. The proposed GFJ will be a medium-sized store with a good selection of bakery and dairy products, eggs, meat, fruit, and vegetables. It will also have many boxed and canned goods, but a somewhat limited selection of brands. Does this selection of items meet your needs?
4. Given how we have described the GFJ, we would like to know how often you would shop there.
5. The GFJ will be community owned and managed. Overall, how important is it to you/others to have a store like this on 20th Street (in or near your neighbourhood)?

While question five is not strictly about shopping habits, the research team decided it was important to provide participants some information about the nature of the store in order to see if they would react differently to the GFJ than to a regular, privately owned store. The conversation protocol used at the sessions also included prompting questions to elicit specific information; these are detailed in the findings section below.

To obtain the required information in an engaging and nonthreatening way, the team decided to hold a series of informal focus groups with area residents. The term adopted was “community conversations,” since many residents were apprehensive or critical of being “researched to death.” A number of different groupings were considered, but the team settled on three:

- Group One — residents of the Station 20 West low-income housing project
- Group Two — residents of a nearby seniors’ apartment building
- Group Three — single women with children living in group housing in the area

Continuing the collaborative approach, the partners agreed that CUISR would pay for the research internship to do background research and conduct the conversations, while CHEP would provide logistical support for the conversations. The research intern would provide a preliminary report and incorporate feedback from CHEP and the GFJ board in her final report. CUISR’s submission to the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board was approved in December 2009, enabling the project to proceed. The partners also discussed the possibility of having a University of Saskatchewan business student assist in creating a revised business plan, but this goal was not realized due to lack of time and funds.

## Conducting the Conversations

The community conversations were organized and carried out in January 2010. CHEP's Aboriginal partnership co-ordinator, Colleen Hamilton, took primary responsibility for recruiting community residents (see Appendix A for the invitation) and arranging the conversations. The arrangements included securing a venue, organizing babysitting and transportation for those who needed them in order to attend, and providing food appropriate for time of day and participants. CUISR was able to support recruitment by providing a small honorarium for participants: \$25 cash for the Station 20 West residents and seniors, and a Good Food Box voucher for the participants in the third group. Table 1 summarizes attendees at each of the three community conversations.

Table 1: Key Features of Participants

	<b>Group One</b> Station 20 West Residents	<b>Group Two</b> Seniors	<b>Group Three</b> Broader Neighbourhood
<b>Date</b>	7 January 2010	12 January 2010	21 January 2010
<b>Location</b>	CUMFI	St. George's Seniors Residence	CUMFI
<b>Number participating</b>	7	19	18
<b>Ethnicity</b>	Roughly half Aboriginal and half Caucasian	Caucasian	Aboriginal (majority) and Caucasian
<b>Gender</b>	6 females, 1 male	Slightly more females than male	All females
<b>Children</b>	All individuals had children	No dependent children	All the women had children
<b>Other</b>	5 participants lived in the Station 20 West housing, 2 lived nearby		The women were split into 2 groups for the conversation
<b>Research team members present</b>	Hurd, Clarke, Hamilton, and Archibald	Hurd, Clarke, and Hamilton	Hurd, Clarke, Hamilton, Archibald, and Basualdo

The sessions began with CHEP welcoming everyone and introducing the team members present. The researchers then explained the background to the GFJ project and the purpose of the conversations as well as the reasons for, and meaning of, the ethics release form the participants needed to sign (see Appendix B). Participants were given the opportunity to ask questions or raise concerns regarding the process and to get some food. Once the forms were signed, the student intern asked the questions and all members of the team present were able to probe for information in a conversational way. The sessions were recorded; permission for audio recording was included in the ethics release. When everyone seemed to have had their say — spanning one to two hours — the researchers thanked everyone and distributed the honoraria or vouchers. Child care for those in Groups One and Three requiring it was provided in an adjoining room.

The questions and conversational approach seemed to be effective. In general, participants seemed happy that we were asking for their opinions and were forthcoming and candid in offering them. In Group One, participation was high and lively. The student intern presented a summary of the Group One conversation to the GFJ board two days after it occurred and the feedback was positive, so the researchers decided not to make any changes to the format or questions. Group Two participation was also good, but a few individuals tended to dominate the conversation and several participants spoke only when directly asked a question. This may be attributed, in part, to the fact that more people attended the session than anticipated and the three team members present could not engage well with everyone in such a large group. As a result, we asked Archibald and Basualdo to attend the Group Three conversation and were able to divide participants into two groups with two team members assisting with each one. Although participation was high, several participants once again spoke or shared their opinion only when they were directly asked a question. In sum, we are satisfied that the opinions gathered represent a good cross-section of key low-income target groups for the GFJ, but we acknowledge that the forty-four individuals who attended are not fully representative of the area's demographic groups. Time and money constraints meant that we were unable to engage with newcomer (often visible minority) groups or with people from the working and middle-class households in the area.

### **Compiling and Interpreting the Results**

The student intern made extensive notes, not verbatim transcriptions, from the audio tapes and any notes taken by the research team. She then summarized key tendencies

in the opinions expressed as well as important minority or conflicting views for each of the five questions. Using these summaries, she identified key themes and then discussed preliminary findings first with the principal investigator and then with the CHEP team. Based on their feedback, she consolidated three of the themes. Once she had completed a full draft of the report, she presented it to the GFJ board and incorporated feedback into the final report to ensure that it accurately reflected the findings of the conversations and fulfilled the goals of the project.

## FINDINGS

**T**HIS SECTION PRESENTS THE FINDINGS FOR EACH OF THE FIVE questions posed during the community conversations. These findings are not quantifiable because the questions themselves were mainly open-ended and, as previously described, the format was conversational, with the researchers prompting participants for further information and participants responding to each other's comments.

### Question One

*Since this conversation is about access to good affordable food, we want to start by asking you, Where do you currently shop? Does where you shop meet your needs?*

*Prompting questions: Are you happy with where you shop? Yes/No. Why? Why Not? Do you like it? Is it close to where you live? Is it affordable?*

People in Group One told us they were largely dissatisfied with their current shopping options — Sobey's, the co-op, Superstore, and Giant Tiger — and usually shopped “wherever [they are] closest to.” They also said that it was difficult for them to find fresh, good quality produce in the area, especially at a reasonable cost. Only one of the seven participants, a woman, mentioned dissatisfaction at not being able to find locally produced food. Other factors contributing to their dissatisfaction included the distance they had to travel to a supermarket and their inability to find everything they needed at one place. Of this group, six of the seven participants had vehicles, while the seventh relied primarily on taxicabs and public transportation. Those with vehicles were able and willing to travel further to seek out better prices.

Group One was divided in their opinions regarding the importance of affordability in where they chose to shop. For some, price was the deciding factor. Others said they were sometimes willing to pay more for fresher products, closer proximity, convenience, and good service. While they might pay more for quality fresh products, they were unwilling to pay more for dried goods, bulk items, canned goods, and nonfood items just because of proximity. One woman stated that there were certain items, including cereal and soup, that she “only buys when it’s on sale.” One participant said, “I would pay a little extra for quality.” Others stated that the price of individual items was not as important as the total bill, so they would shop at the GFJ as long as their total grocery bill fit their budget, that is, was comparable to their current grocery bill.

Like Group One, Group Two indicated that they shopped primarily at the co-op, Sobey’s, Giant Tiger, and Superstore, and that they often had to go to more than one store to get the groceries they needed. A few of the participants shopped at Safeway. Many people in this group were satisfied with their current shopping location, especially with the co-op. Dissatisfaction was directed primarily at Sobey’s, where many said the customer service was poor, items were often missing from the shelves, and the store was understaffed. Since very few people in this group had cars, access was a key factor, and the co-op provided bimonthly bus service to the store. Some individuals had fellow residents, family, or friends do their shopping for them.

Group Three participants listed the same supermarkets as the other two groups and said that they regularly had to go to two or more stores to get everything they needed. The women also expressed general satisfaction with the co-op because it had good displays and customer service. They expressed more dissatisfaction with Superstore than people in the other groups because it was “too far away,” was “more like a warehouse than a store,” the staff were not helpful, and stock was moved around too frequently. Others added that Superstore was too busy, customer service was bad, line-ups were always very long, and it was too “full and packed by the end of the month.” This last point was particularly important for those women who tended to do one big monthly shopping. One woman said that she did not like Superstore because of its policy of only giving store credit for exchanged items instead of a cash refund. A few said that they sometimes shopped at Safeway, but that it was too expensive to shop there regularly. Most who shopped at Giant Tiger said that it had poor selection and high prices; in contrast, one woman commented that it “is cheap, but they only have junk food.” One woman bought her meat at Sobey’s, but purchased the rest

of her groceries at stores with lower prices. Another bought her meat from Prairie Meats, in large part because it delivers. Everyone in Group Three said that they would prefer “one-stop shopping,” undoubtedly because no one had a vehicle, although the shelter where some of the participants lived had a van that provided some transportation. Otherwise, the women had to rely on buses, cabs, or friends for transportation; some walked to the grocery store and took a cab back.

In sum, there was considerable dissatisfaction with the current alternatives, especially since no single supermarket offered one-stop shopping and many stores often had items missing from the shelves. With the partial exception of the co-op, poor customer service was a problem. Some of the women, primarily Aboriginal, said that they sometimes felt looked down upon by store staff or were looked at suspiciously as if they were out to steal things.

### **Question Two**

*The Good Food Junction will be located on 20th Street, between Avenues K and L. Is this closer to you than where you shop now? If it is closer, and you no longer had to take a bus/car/cab to shop, would this be a good enough reason for you to switch from where you currently shop to the GFJ?*

*Prompting questions: Would you like to be able to phone in your grocery order? Get your groceries delivered at a low cost? Would this make your grocery shopping less costly?*

The majority of the participants in Group One said that they would be willing to pay a slightly higher price for the convenience of shopping nearby. One woman said that for her to switch to the GFJ, “the prices would have to be as low as Superstore.” Even when the countervailing factors of time and transportation costs for shopping further away had been discussed, one participant said that she “thinks short term”; that is, she would shop at the grocery store that would save her money immediately.

While the people in Group Two expressed interest in having a grocery store nearby, this convenience did not seem to be as important a factor for these seniors as for people in the other groups. Because they were retired, they said that saving time was not a big issue and, as mentioned, they were satisfied with the bimonthly bus service provided by the co-op. Even if they relied on others to take them shopping, participants told us that they were quite willing to travel for better prices.

As with Group One, most of the people in Group Three told us that they would be will-

ing to try shopping at the GFJ for the convenience. Price, however, was a strongly motivating factor for them. While a few might be willing to pay a slightly higher price than at a distant supermarket, most said that they would expect to pay the same or even less than at Superstore.

While the close proximity to the GFJ would appeal to quite a few participants, there was particular interest in some of the other convenience options that we asked them to consider. The participants in Group One with young children were very interested in being able to phone in their orders. Since they lived adjacent to the GFJ, delivery was not as important to people in this group as it proved to be with those in the other groups. People in this group did say that if delivery were available from the GFJ, they thought that there should be a separate delivery fee rather than having the cost built into grocery prices.

The participants in Group Two were enthusiastic about the call-in and delivery options. They mentioned that one of the stores they already used had free delivery, so they preferred having the cost of this service factored into grocery prices. Some might be willing to pay a nominal separate fee for the convenience, especially in winter.

The women in Group Three were also enthusiastic about the delivery and call-in options, especially since they were all single parents. Some would be willing to pay a small fee for delivery —say \$5 — since that would be cheaper than having to take a cab home, but most preferred that the cost be factored into grocery prices. Other options they considered were having delivery as a benefit of membership in the co-operative, or free delivery for grocery purchases over a certain amount. The idea of online shopping received some interest, but because many of the women did not have regular access to computers, they generally preferred being able to phone in their orders.

### **Question Three**

*It is important to the GFJ that you can find the items you need at their store. The proposed GFJ will be a medium-sized store with a good selection of bakery and dairy products, eggs, meat, fruit, and vegetables. It will also have many boxed and canned goods, but a somewhat limited selection of brands. Does this selection of items meet your needs?*

*Prompting questions: What else would you need to persuade you to shop at GFJ, e.g., cultural foods, specialty items, bulk items?*

This question sparked a great deal of interesting discussion, especially regarding the importance of name-brand products. The seniors in Group 2 had the least amount of brand

loyalty and would prefer to purchase no-name or house brands at a lower price than the national brands, since they found little or no difference in product quality. In contrast, some participants in the other groups said there were some items that they would buy only if they were national brands, sometimes even a specific brand. These people said they would be prepared to wait for these products to come on sale, or they would even be willing to pay more for them than the house brands. Participants mentioned preferences for national brands in cereals, feminine products, and toilet paper. The following specific products and brands came up in the discussions:

- Diapers — Pampers and Huggies
- Other baby products — Orajel and Tylenol
- Soup — Campbell's
- Ketchup — Heinz
- Macaroni and Cheese — Kraft
- Coffee — Folgers
- Tea — Red Rose

For other items, including dried goods, pasta, rice, dairy products, and household cleaners, the brand was not important. The women in Group Three were somewhat more willing to consider no-name and house brands than the women in Group One.

There was also a lot of good discussion regarding other products and services that would encourage people to shop at the GFJ. One person in Group One said that she would like to see organic items stocked, while several others did not specify organic but did say they would like local produce. The majority of Group Two participants said that they wanted fresh produce at low prices regardless of origin. They equated local food with the relatively high prices for such goods at the Saskatoon Farmers' Market. In addition to the products listed in the question, participants said that they would like to see the GFJ stock laundry and cleaning supplies as well as greeting cards. The people in Group Two wanted the GFJ to deliver flyers to their residences so that they would know what was on sale. Customer loyalty or membership cards were a popular option with this group, although one person argued that the stores with them had high regular prices so that they could show a discount with the cards. They also mentioned the importance of cleanliness, nice displays, fully stocked shelves, friendly service, and not having to wait long in lines.

The women in Group Three echoed much of what was said by Groups One and Two,

and offered a number of other product and service suggestions that would encourage them to shop at the GFJ:

- a good variety of meats, canned meat and fish, fruit, eggs, and cheese, i.e., “all the food necessities that are on the food triangle”
- a good selection of baby products was particularly important for the women in Group Three (and for Group One)
- products for people with lactose and glucose allergies
- bannock
- a phone — either pay or courtesy — for people to call a taxi after they shopped because many people in the area do not have cell phones
- a van to pick up and return shoppers, especially those with mobility problems (the issue of this service being free or available for a cost was not discussed)
- the ability to custom order some products that the store did not carry
- customer appreciation days to thank people for their patronage
- the willingness to cash government cheques
- prepaid accounts so that customers could pay the GFJ a sum and then draw from it as needed over the month
- no limit on the number of sale items a customer could buy because limits are unfair to large families
- providing coffee for customers and cookies or candy for their children

The most interesting idea from Group Three was to offer part packages of certain key items such as diapers for those who could not afford to purchase the whole package, for example at the end of the month. Apparently this option is sometimes offered at another store in the area.

All three groups discussed the idea of the GFJ selling freshly prepared food items. It was popular among participants in Groups One and Two and less so in Group Three, where most participants equated it with the expense of eating out.

#### **Question Four**

*Given how we have described the GFJ, we would like to know how often you would shop there.*

*Prompting questions: Would you use it weekly, for your main shopping needs? More often, for convenience (products like milk, bread, etc.)? Would you use it for once-a-month ware-*

*house days, during which the GFJ would choose one or two days a month to sell things like toilet paper, diapers, canned goods, etc.?*

Participants in Group One told us that they would shop at the GFJ frequently — at least weekly for fresh items — because it would be so close to them. One person told us that she “likes the idea that food would be fresh ... we like to eat healthy, and because we have kids, we want them to learn to eat healthy too.” They were enthusiastic about the concept of warehouse days — periodic offerings of bulk items at a low cost. All of them said that they would plan their shopping around the warehouse days, particularly if they were held on or just after the twentieth day of the month (child tax day). One person commented that she thought a lot of people in the area would plan their shopping around the warehouse days.

Participants in Group Two also said that they would shop at the GFJ. The idea of warehouse days was popular, but the specific day of the month was not important to them. Several people stated that they would adjust their shopping routine to the GFJ sale schedule. When specifically asked — “Would you shop at the GFJ?” — they responded that it would depend what was there. They reiterated their interest in freshly prepared foods such as soups and baked goods, and added that they would like to have a small café onsite to socialize with neighbours. The basic consensus, though, was that if there was produce and fresh items, along with a modest stock of nonfood items, many would consider switching to shopping regularly at the GFJ.

The idea of “warehouse days” was fairly popular with most of Group Three, though some expressed reservations, particularly because some felt that the store might get too busy and congested during a monthly sale. Others in this group said that they were not willing or able to plan their shopping around a monthly sale. Still, some thought that the idea was a good one, especially if it was held around child tax day and lasted for two or three days. One participant said that she would like to see bulk meat offered at warehouse days. When asked about switching their shopping to the GFJ, many people said that it would depend on what was available, but they did like its convenient location and that it would be a community store.

On the issue of store hours, participants indicated that they would be satisfied with daytime hours, but they also valued the convenience of extended hours. Several people specifically noted that they would like the store to be open on Sundays. When asked about payment options, most participants said that cash and debit cards would be sufficient, that the store did not need to accept credit cards and cheques (though we note again the suggestion

above that it would be helpful if the GFJ would cash government cheques). Some participants would like a cash-back option with debit cards and many said they would use a free-standing ATM if it were available.

### **Question Five**

*The GFJ will be community owned and managed. Overall, how important is it to you/others to have a store like this on 20th Street (in or near your neighbourhood)?*

As mentioned above, members of the research team included this question to gauge community support for the GFJ as more than just another supermarket. In general, the responses were very positive. The participants in Group One were particularly supportive for several reasons. First, some people had a real interest in and knowledge of healthy food, so they welcomed the potential role of the GFJ in promoting the consumption of healthy food and teaching children the importance of choosing healthy food options. Second, several participants said that they were proud of their community and enjoyed living there. As a result, they were keenly interested in the plans for Station 20 West, the GFJ, and the benefits it could bring to the community. Third, issues of race and class seemed to be the subtext for some support. One person stated, “As a First Nations person, I do feel uncomfortable going to a store where the majority of the people are Caucasian,” so a local store that had a racially diverse staff would be important. Another person said, “I think if you hire people from the inner city, it’ll help more because they will understand what the people are going through that are from the inner city.”

Participants in Group Two, like those in Group One, had pride in their community and wanted to see it grow. If Station 20 West contributed to that strong sense of community, then they would be supportive. But their main interest seemed to be in having a local store that was also a meeting place to drink coffee and visit with their friends and neighbours. The co-op grocery store served as a meeting place for many of them, especially when there was a free bus to take them there, so a place down the street would be more convenient.

Most of the participants in Group Three appeared genuinely enthusiastic at the prospect of having a community-oriented grocery store in their neighbourhood, especially as we explained the philosophy behind the project. Several people made comments that echoed those from Group One about the importance of feeling that they belonged and were appreciated in a local store like the GFJ. One person said that she did not care who owned the store, but

she did care who worked there. Another told us explicitly that she wanted to see “some Native people working there.” A third wanted a “nonracist environment,” where shoppers are not looked upon with suspicion. Many of the women felt that they were looked down upon when they shopped; some had been accused of shoplifting. Someone commented, “They may not say it verbally, but you can see it [the suspicion] in their eyes and body language.” Interestingly, some people in both Groups One and Three said that they felt uneasy leaving businesses in the area when there were people outside loitering and harassing them for money or food. They suggested that the GFJ should hire a security person to prevent problems.

In sum, most of the participants were not likely very interested in the principles of local ownership and democratic member control. They did, however, have a strongly articulated sense that a local store should reflect and support the community around it. In turn, they would support the local store. A few people said that they appreciated the fact that CHEP and the GFJ Co-operative wanted their opinions. Moreover, the GFJ should have a suggestion box so that community members could provide input into the operations of the store.

## THEMES AND SUMMARY CONCLUSIONS

THE PRIMARY GOAL OF THIS PROJECT WAS TO PROVIDE CHEP, the Good Food Junction Co-operative board, and the Station 20 West Development Corporation board of directors with insight on where Core community members were shopping at present and to ascertain the likelihood of them making the switch to the GFJ. In general terms, we achieved this goal and the stakeholders in the GFJ can take heart that key target groups for the store — low-income households and seniors — were very enthusiastic about the potential of having a grocery store in the heart of their neighbourhoods. The reasons for this enthusiasm included proximity, dissatisfaction with their current shopping choices both outside and within the area, and the possibility of getting good food at a good price in an environment that welcomed and appreciated them.

The picture that emerges regarding the secondary goal — what people specifically want in a neighbourhood grocery store — is somewhat ill defined. We can say that people want a broad variety and for about the same price as they are currently paying at supermarkets on the fringes or outside the area. Nevertheless, the findings do provide the GFJ decision makers

with a lot of detailed information about what the participants do not like about where they currently shop and what would entice them to shop at the GFJ.

In this section we summarize the results in terms of three key themes we culled from the findings: the price-location calculus that people used in talking about where they would shop; the trade-offs between product/service range and specialization; and the importance of the local. Finally, as part of our commitment to collaborative learning, we present feedback from our key community partner, the executive director of CHEP, Karen Archibald.

### **The Price-Location Calculus**

Having a community store was vital to most participants because, as one person noted, “Right now, there is nothing close ... we don’t even have a convenience store to get milk at.” While the proximity of the GFJ was a desirable factor for all of the participants in deciding whether or not to shop there, the price of groceries was understandably even more important, especially for the low-income participants. Most people understood that time and transportation costs should be included in the total cost of groceries from supermarkets on the fringes of or outside the area, but these elements were not always important to people. The retired people in Group Two had the time and free transportation in the form of a biweekly bus to the co-op or family and friends with cars; some residents had their own cars. Some people in the other groups admitted that they took a short-term perspective and were only interested in the actual cost of the groceries they needed.

Despite the proximity of the GFJ, a consensus emerged that delivery and phone-in options would be a significant advantage for some people, especially those with young children or limited physical mobility. People also felt that the cost of these options should not be included in the price of groceries for everyone. There was no agreement on whether or not people would be willing to pay a small fee for these conveniences. Some said they would and one or two thought that it should be a benefit of membership in the co-operative.

### **Trade-offs between Range and Specialization in Products and Services**

Everyone said that they would be happy to try the GFJ as their main grocery store. It was also clear that they would actually switch only if it carried the items they

needed. Determining what to stock in a mid-sized store is, of course, a major challenge, and our findings on this issue were difficult to summarize due to the amount of information participants contributed. We have, however, identified five main points for the GFJ board to consider.

First, there did seem to be consensus on the importance of having fresh items. For some, this meant fresh produce because they were committed to healthy eating. For others, particularly some people in Groups One and Two, it meant having a selection of freshly prepared foods. For most, having fresh milk, bread, eggs, and meat available seemed to be a given, while having a wide selection of other grocery items was less important.

Second, most people identified unstocked shelves as one of the things they were most dissatisfied with where they currently shopped. Keeping shelves stocked can be a particular problem for mid-sized stores. We have already highlighted the importance of keeping fresh foods in stock. The list of other “must-have” groceries could be quite long based on what people said they wanted. Fortunately, there did seem to be consensus on several items that the GFJ could/should keep well stocked: baby products, personal care, and laundry and cleaning products. And participants indicated that they would not need a wide selection of brands for most of these items.

Third, national brands are important for people in Group One and for many in Group Three. Having “warehouse days” when these items are available seems to offer a reasonable trade-off for both the GFJ and customers. This arrangement would mean that the GFJ does not have to keep a wide selection of national brands on the shelves at all times, but also that customers can periodically get the items they want in bulk and at good prices. People in all three groups said that they were willing to plan their shopping around these special sales. This implies, of course, that the GFJ needs to plan and advertise the warehouse days carefully.

Fourth, another important trade-off has already been raised above: the potential competitive advantage of offering delivery and phone-in services relative to how much they would cost and what people would be willing to pay.

The fifth consideration concerns payment options. While the participants in the three groups did not want the option of paying by credit card, other customers may want it, which would add to GFJ’s costs. Offering cash back on debit cards and cashing government cheques would also carry some costs for the GFJ but may be an important service for cus-

tomers. Another potentially important service, but one that could be labour intensive for the GFJ, is repackaging certain items such as diapers into smaller lots so that people could afford necessities before their next cheque arrives.

### **The Importance of the Local**

Many participants in the community conversations emphasized that their community was a “good place ... with lots of opportunities and good ties.” This community feeling would incline them to support a community store like the GFJ. A few indicated that they were interested in seeing local products in the store. But the importance of the local that participants expressed most forcefully was having a store where they felt welcome, where staff looked like them and understood life in the core-area neighbourhoods. This represents a great opportunity for the GFJ to connect with people in the area, to hire and mentor community people who need jobs.

Participants had not previously heard the terms “social economy” or “social enterprise.” Once they understood the core idea of contributing to social objectives in the community as well as making a profit that would support community building, most were interested. Some became enthusiastic and wanted to be kept informed, perhaps even get involved in the co-operative. The Good Food Junction Co-op and Station 20 West have the potential to generate economic, social, and health benefits in the community by stimulating other development, providing a meeting place, hiring local people, and providing healthy food and education in nutrition. We are confident that promoting the significance of these organizations will continue to attract support. This support has come and should continue to build from Saskatoon residents, regardless of location or socio-economic status.

### **Feedback from Our Community Partners**

After completing the research and presenting it to the GFJ board, CUISR intern Emily Hurd spoke with Karen Archibald, executive director at CHEP, to discuss the benefits and limitations of the work. Ms. Archibald said that the collaboration had been positive and that the research had served a dual purpose for CHEP and the GFJ. It provided information that complemented the formal market research they had paid for. And because of the honorariums provided by CUISR (a cheque for \$25 or a voucher for a Good Food Box), it also

gave CHEP access to a group of community residents that they might not otherwise have reached. CHEP could promote not only the GFJ but also their other food programs and the Station 20 West project. There was some controversy about the latter, so it was good to be able to provide information and address concerns.

Ms. Archibald also thought that there was a mutual research benefit for both community and CUISR participants. The project offered a good opportunity to interact with university researchers who were working on something designed to have a positive community impact and who used an approach that was “respectful and interesting to the participants.” For their part, CUISR researchers benefited from learning methods and viewpoints with which they might not otherwise have become familiar.

Finally, Ms. Archibald said that the preliminary report had been very useful to the GFJ board. Members appreciated that Ms. Hurd had come to two meetings to present the results directly to community stakeholders in a clear and helpful way. Ms. Archibald also noted that CHEP was able to use some of the findings in their advocacy work. In sum, her assessment was that the research grant and the CHEP resources for this project had been used “very wisely.”

This research project has been successful on a number of levels. It combined a collaborative action research process, an informed and committed research team from both the community and the university, engaged and even enthusiastic participants, and useful research outputs. Based on this positive experience, the strong proponents of the Good Food Junction Co-op, and the support and goodwill of hundreds of Saskatoon residents, we are confident that the GFJ will evolve into a successful community-based enterprise.

APPENDIX A  
**Invitation to a Community Conversation about  
a Community Food Store**

Getting food that is both healthy and affordable in our area isn't always easy. People have been working together to bring a food store back to 20th Street.

CHEP and CUISR (a university group) want to talk to you about that proposed grocery store, to be located on 20th Street between Avenues K and L. The store will be called the Good Food Junction (GFJ).

The purpose of the GFJ is to improve access to good food in the local community. Such access has been identified in several community consultations as being very important for inner-city residents.

We want to listen to your advice and hear about your experience with grocery shopping, so that we can build a grocery store that is not only nearby but that also provides you with what you want at a store.

We need the input of people living right around the food-store location. We hope you will join CHP and CUISR for a conversation.

on: [date]

at: [place]

Supper will be provided.

An honoraria of \$25 will be paid as a thank you for your time and advice.

Please call Anita at 655-4575 to let us know that you are coming so that we can have enough food on hand.

APPENDIX B  
**Good Food Junction Community Conversations:  
Consent Form**

Child Hunger Education Program (CHEP) and the Community-University  
Institute for Social Research (CUISR)

You have been invited by CHEP to participate in community conversations about access to good, affordable food in the inner-city neighbourhoods. Before beginning, we ask you to read this form carefully. Feel free to ask any questions you have.

*Researchers*

Louise Clarke, university co-director, Community-University Institute for Social Research (CUISR), tel. 966–8409, e-mail [Clarke@edwards.usask.ca](mailto:Clarke@edwards.usask.ca); Emily Champ, master’s candidate, Dept. of Political Studies, tel. 229–0839, e-mail [eac688@mail.usask.ca](mailto:eac688@mail.usask.ca).

*Purpose of the Project*

With help from CHEP, CUISR is conducting conversations with four groups of residents to assist CHEP plan for the Good Food Junction (GFJ), a grocery store to be located on 20th Street between Avenues K and L. CHEP is committed to designing a store that will provide access to healthy, affordable food and will be economically sustainable. Specifically, we want:

- to gain a better understanding of how people in core-area neighbourhoods currently shop for groceries
- to learn about your grocery shopping needs and what it would take to persuade you to shop at the GFJ

We will use this information to write a report for CHEP that will help them to communicate grocery-shopping needs to other residents of the core neighbourhoods and to potential funders. You will have access to published versions of the completed study and you may also ask for a debriefing or feedback by contacting Professor Clarke at 966–8409.

This research is part of a larger project that CUISR is conducting. The initial objective is to develop a brief profile of social economy organizations in the area, including their history and goals, activities and practices, and resources and governance. The social economy is con-

ceptualized quite broadly to include enterprises and organizations that have a strong commitment to social as well as economic goals. They are generally characterized by governance structures that promote (democratic) participation by various stakeholders. This specific research relates to the larger study. We want to learn about how a grocery store that reflects the values of the social economy would function in this area of Saskatoon.

#### *Procedure*

These conversations will take approximately two hours. During this time, we will ask five main questions and some follow-up questions for clarification. We will record your answers, but you can tell the researchers that you do not want to answer a specific question or that you do not want your specific answer recorded. Once the conversation is over, you can go and sign up for some compensation for your time.

#### *Confidentiality*

Only the researchers will have access to the recordings and we will store them securely for five years. We will not identify you in any way in our reports; we may quote your answers, but you will be referred to simply as “participant.”

While we are committed to keeping the conversation confidential, we cannot guarantee that other members of the group will do so. Please respect the confidentiality of the other members of the group by not disclosing the contents of this discussion outside the group, and be aware that others may not respect your confidentiality.

#### *Risks*

There are no known risks associated with participating in these community conversations.

#### *Compensation*

CHEP is providing you with food and drinks for your participation. At end of the conversation, you will each receive \$25.00 cash or a CHEP Good Food Box voucher to compensate you for your time upon signing a form. No other compensation will be provided.

#### *Ethics Review and Consent*

This project has been reviewed and approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board on 9 December 2010.

I understand that I can ask questions at any time and that I can find out more about my rights in this project by contacting the Behavioural Ethics Office at the University of Saskatchewan (966–2084).

By signing this consent form, I am indicating that I understand the above information and agree to participate in these conversations.

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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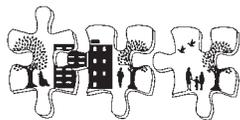
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Winnipeg Inner-City Research Alliance



Institute of Urban Studies  
University of Winnipeg

## Project Funding



Social Sciences and Humanities  
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en  
sciences humaines du Canada

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