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Food Security: Business Models in the United States and India

Case A: Food Gatherers in the United States

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization estimated that about 795 million people around the world were suffering from chronic undernourishment in 2014-2016.¹

Food Gatherers' Background

Founding of Food Gatherers

In November 1988, a small group of people decided to gather food from a few restaurants and grocery stores in the Ann Arbor, Michigan area so others less fortunate could have a better Thanksgiving. Using a borrowed van, they delivered the 50 pounds of food they had collected to hot meal programs in Ann Arbor and nearby Ypsilanti that provided meals to the needy. By 2016, the effort had grown into Food Gatherers,¹ a not-for-profit with 30 employees and 7,000 volunteers serving 150 non-profit programs and agencies.² The main premise remained the same: to collect food and provide it to partners who supply it to the needy in the form of groceries or cooked meals. As of 2016, Food Gatherers earned a 4-star rating from Charity Navigator³ and was widely recognized as one of the premier not-for-profits in the U.S. working in the field of food security.⁴

Food Gatherers' Objectives and Reasons for Success

Eileen Spring, the President and CEO of Food Gatherers (FG), suggested that one reason for Food Gatherers' success was its being deeply embedded in a community that had both food needs and a thriving food ecosystem with excess resources.⁵ As such, there was both supply and demand for resources within the same community – and FG linked the two.

The community that Food Gatherers served was Washtenaw County, Michigan, which had a population of approximately 353,000 in 2015. Ann Arbor, with about 114,000 full time residents as of 2010, was the largest city in the county and was home to the University of Michigan. Ypsilanti was the only other city in Washtenaw County with more than 10,000 residents. The median annual household income in the county in 2009 was approximately \$54,600, compared to the average for the state of Michigan of about \$44,700. The percentage of the county population below the poverty level in 2009 was 14.6%.⁶

i Food Gatherers engages in other activities related to food security, including a training program for careers in the food industry and advice to individuals and families on qualifying for government-provided food assistance benefits.

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