"How might we cultivate a more connected and responsive food system network to ensure food access during times of crisis?"
From the loss of income to supply chain disruption, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the functionally inequitable and environmentally-destructive food system in this country.

Within the first month of the pandemic, Baltimore emergency response coordinators reported that almost one-third of the city was relying on food assistance—a significant increase from pre-COVID-19 times. The sheer volume of emerging assistance requests and the gap between hyper-local food needs and increased wasted food have resulted in uncoordinated and inequitable resource distribution.

Across the country, these challenges have resulted in over 43 million individuals and families relying on nutrition assistance programs. Supporting this market not only has the potential to address immediate hunger relief but also provide the necessary reciprocal support to the local food producers for long-term food system resilience.
Problem

Current Situation

Food Assistance

$28 million

To keep up with growing demands for food from an ever-increasing number of Marylanders seeking assistance, Maryland Food Bank has set a goal to raise $28 million over the next 12 months.

Source: Maryland Food Bank

SNAP

43 million people

The use of SNAP, the nation's largest food and nutrition assistance program, has shot up in the fallout from the pandemic. Nationally, the number of SNAP recipients has grown to more than 43 million people, an increase of 6 million since March.

Source: In These Times
Solution

Learning from Nature

Looking to nature’s unifying patterns, it was evident that reciprocity was the common thread of the biological strategies we discovered. Found in our own backyard of the Chesapeake forest, we were especially inspired by the local symbiotic relationship between native white oak tree and ectomycorrhizal fungi.

We translated this natural inspiration to design a symbiotic and interconnected food distribution infrastructure, like that between trees and the mycorrhizal network.
MyOak Public Market exists primarily as a reciprocal online platform to increase food access to vulnerable populations and the economic potential of local food producers.
MyOak Public Market

Customers

SNAP Benefits Recipients + Vendors

We retain a 10% commission on product sales + offer vendor memberships.
Estimating Market Size

**TAM**
Total money spent by SNAP users
$70 billion + $1.5 billion = $71.5 billion

**SAM**
SNAP users shopping at farmers markets in US
$22.4 million

**SOM**
SNAP users shopping at farmers markets in MD
$334,000 + $673,000 = $1,007,000
MyOak Public Market

Competitors & Strategies

Prioritising farmers, small scale vendors and customers equally

The small scale vendors can access this platform with ease

Selling Locally grown food directly

(Partnering with local farmers + no middle man)

Actively collaborating with the community hubs to strengthen community wealth and economic stability

Reducing delivery fees and food waste from shuttered restaurants and producers

More customized, personalized on selection of produce

Building a sustainable food system network within the community

Advantages of MyOak Public Market compared to current SNAP options

SNAP Recipients

Grocery Markets

Walmart  ShopRite  Amazon

Source: USDA Online Purchasing Pilot 2020
MyOak Public Market

Social Impact

Goal

MyOak Public Market’s goal to increase the number and strength of connections between producers and consumers is achieved through a community-led, technologically-driven distribution system to deliver locally produced food.

Expected Impact

- Providing a healthy, local food to food insecurity community as well as increasing revenue for the local vendors
- Find ways to utilize the SNAP benefits into the system
- Find ways to engage food insecurity populations with the online platform

Success

- Usability & satisfaction tests
- Develop sustainable revenue
- Test logistics by running a pilot
# Measuring Impact with HEART Metrics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Signal</th>
<th>Metrics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Happiness</strong></td>
<td>• Customers/vendors enjoy the service and easily navigate it</td>
<td>• A satisfaction rating from survey</td>
<td>• Satisfaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• User feedback from the workshop</td>
<td>• Comments from the participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Engagement</strong></td>
<td>• Customers/vendors easily find the service and learn about it</td>
<td>• Engage more with the service</td>
<td>• Number of website visits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• More people acknowledge about the service</td>
<td>• Location of people visiting the website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adoption</strong></td>
<td>• Customers/vendors find the service easy to use</td>
<td>• Sign up as a customer/vendor</td>
<td>• Numbers of users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Registration rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Retention</strong></td>
<td>• Have repeat customers use the market</td>
<td>• Stay active in the service</td>
<td>• Repeat customers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Vendors continue using the service</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Length of time vendors use the service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Task Success</strong></td>
<td>• Service people facing food insecurity</td>
<td>• Food insecure customers find the service more convenient and time-saving</td>
<td>• Number of sales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Reduce food surplus for vendors</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Number of Deliveries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Number of new food items added on to the market</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
An interdisciplinary team of friends and former student peers united together by the pursuit of advancing equity and environmentalism. Eesha Patne (Product Designer, India), Eunsoo Kim (Graphic Designer, South Korea), Hanah Murphy (Food System Designer, USA), Judy Chen (Landscape Architect, Taiwan), and Sasha Avrutina (Graphic Designer, USA) have completed their M.A. in Social Design at the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA). During their time in the program, they participated in the Biomimicry Global Design Challenge. By merging their human-centered practice with biomimicry principles, they could form their own unique design practice based on "Life-Centered Design."
MyOak Public Market

Next Steps

01. Focus group workshops
Conduct focus group workshops in the coming few months to bring the stakeholders to the table and understand how this system would work for them.

02. Strengthening the network
Connect vendors, restaurants, farms, community hubs, etc.

03. Solidifying Business Model
Build a sustainable revenue model and develop a long term business plan.

04. Expanding customers
Expand MyOak customers to food secure market and develop programs to connect with cities, institutions, and other hopeful market communities. Implement MyOak market in multiple locations across the United States to expand customers geographically.

Please connect with us!

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