

CASE STUDY

# ROLLING GROCER





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Select photos throughout case study are courtesy of Rolling Grocer.





## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Rolling Grocer is a full-service nonprofit grocery store in Hudson, New York, that was established in 2018 by a group of local organizations and community members seeking to improve food access and affordability. The store has a strong commitment to sourcing from local farmers and aims to “provide convenient, quality food for all – no matter the income level – with a priority placed on low-income residents.”<sup>1</sup>

A particularly innovative feature of this store is its Fair Pricing System, which aims to make high quality and local food accessible to low-income residents. Similar to a sliding scale, the system has three tiers: the blue tier receives at-cost pricing (selling at a 10% profit margin to cover delivery fees, so the store breaks even), the orange tier receives discounted pricing (selling at a 25% profit margin), and the green tier receives standard pricing (selling at a 40% profit margin).

This case study shares the story of how Rolling Grocer came into existence and how it evolved to address challenges and emerging needs over time. Lessons learned from this case study aim to support other communities and retailers seeking to expand local food access for all.

### OVERVIEW OF ROLLING GROCER

**LOCATION** — Hudson, Columbia County, New York

**POPULATION** — 5,900

**OWNERSHIP STRUCTURE** — Fiscally sponsored by local nonprofit

**YEAR ESTABLISHED** — 2018

**KEY PARTNERS** — Hawthorne Valley Association, Long Table Harvest, Chester Agricultural Center, Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation, Hudson River Bank and Trust Foundation, the Galvin Foundation, the Novo Foundation, the UNFI Foundation

**PROBLEM** — Many Hudson community members face food insecurity. Since a relatively high percentage of residents lack transportation, groceries are inaccessible to many.

**SOLUTION** — Local organizations and community members establish a mobile market to reach underserved residents, and then transition to a brick-and-mortar facility. The Fair Pricing System makes local and organic food more affordable.

**KEY OPERATIONS** — Retail sales at brick-and-mortar grocery store

**INCOME SOURCES** — Sales to wholesale and retail customers



## SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS AND LESSONS LEARNED

**Business Model and Operations:** While initially a mobile grocery that served locations across Columbia County, Rolling Grocer now has a brick-and-mortar storefront that also offers local delivery free of charge to anyone in the county. Originally a semi-autonomous project of Hawthorne Valley Association and then fiscally sponsored by the Chester Agricultural Center, Rolling Grocer has now incorporated and is applying for its own 501(c)(3) non-profit status from the IRS.

**Financial Strategy:** For Rolling Grocer's Fair Pricing System to work, prices for lower income shoppers are subsidized by profits from higher-income shoppers and philanthropic dollars. The store's typical fundraising goal each year is between \$250,000 and \$300,000. Long-term funding commitments, rather than one-time donations, are paramount.

**Equipment, Technology, and Infrastructure:** Rolling Grocer uses a customer-oriented Point of Sale system to manage the three-tiered pricing model. It can isolate sales by different suppliers, allowing the store to easily track profits generated from local vs. non-local products.

**Product Offerings:** In 2024, Rolling Grocer purchased from 50 local producers and local food accounted for 17% of sales. The store hopes to increase this to one-third of sales, though they face barriers including limited space, seasonal fluctuations in agricultural production, and a shortage of local processors. Because some food items are unavailable locally, Rolling Grocer fills in the gap by purchasing from UNFI, a national distributor.

**Partnerships and Community Engagement:** Extensive community outreach was conducted before establishing Rolling Grocer, helping to build loyalty and trust among customers, employees, and donors. The store leveraged the expertise of local organizations to make fewer mistakes when starting up. Rolling Grocer also combines orders with a nearby store to receive volume discounts from UNFI.





# INTRODUCTION

Established in 2018 by a group of local organizations and community stakeholders, Rolling Grocer is a nonprofit grocery store that has successfully made food more accessible and affordable for residents in the town of Hudson and Columbia County, New York.

What started as a mobile market transitioned to a brick-and-mortar grocery store that now provides free delivery to anyone in the county. Rolling Grocer primarily carries organic food, with a strong commitment to purchasing from local producers. To make this high quality food more accessible to residents with fewer resources, the store implements an innovative Fair Pricing System, similar to a sliding scale. In 2024, 1,700 individual customers were enrolled in the system, with 60% receiving subsidized pricing.

While demand for local food is growing across the country, it may be unevenly enjoyed: in 2021, 32% of households living below the federal poverty line were food insecure, meaning they had “limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods,” which correlates to poor health outcomes.<sup>2,3</sup> Numerous factors influence food insecurity, including food costs and transportation.<sup>2</sup> Thus, Rolling Grocer has gone above and beyond to ensure all in the community – regardless of income – have more opportunity to consume organic and locally sourced foods.

This case study highlights Rolling Grocer’s efforts to improve food access and support the economic stability of local producers. It provides an overview of how Rolling Grocer was established, how it evolved over time, key operations, challenges, and lessons learned along the way. By sharing this story, other communities and retailers will be better equipped to expand local food access for all.





# HISTORICAL, GEOGRAPHIC, AND ECONOMIC CONTEXT

The town of Hudson in Columbia County, New York, sits along the Hudson River at the foot of the Catskill Mountains. Located two hours directly north of New York City with a population of just under 6,000 people, it is the most urban part of the predominantly rural county.<sup>4</sup>

As the first U.S. city to incorporate in 1783, Hudson got its start as a prominent trade hub. By the 1970s, the town had experienced the familiar boom and bust cycle of industrial cities across the country. Today, the community is undergoing another transformation as a surge of newcomers from larger cities move to the area for its affordability and slower pace.<sup>5</sup>

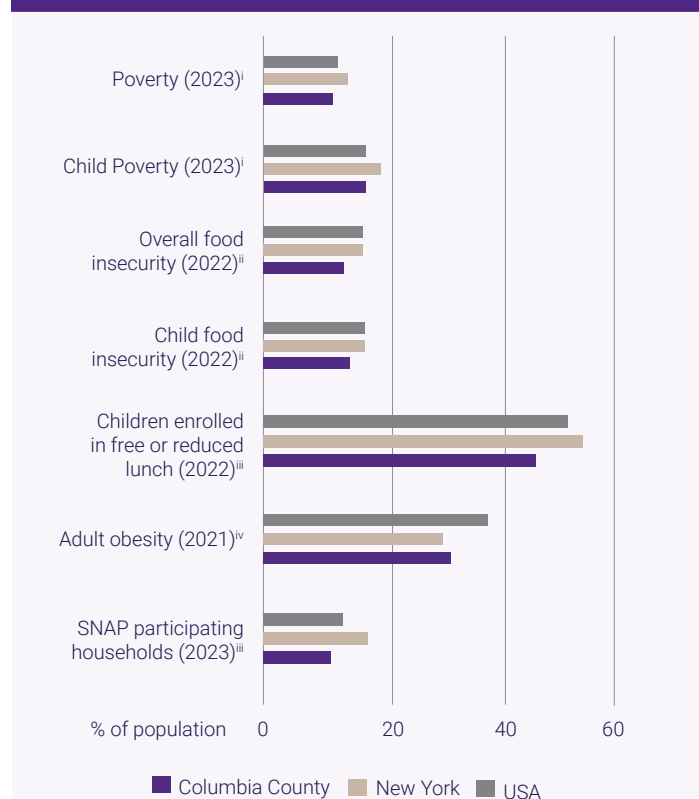
Several socioeconomic characteristics set Hudson apart from the rest of Columbia County. Most racial and ethnic minority families reside within Hudson city limits, where the median household income (\$55,394) is significantly lower than the county's median household income (\$83,619).<sup>1,6</sup> Thus, while there is considerable wealth in the area, much of it lives outside the city. Furthermore, food access remains a challenge for many Hudson residents. While Columbia County ranks second lowest in the state of New York for adult food insecurity,<sup>7</sup> a disproportionate number of Black residents (28%)<sup>8</sup> and Latino residents (20%)<sup>9</sup> struggle with hunger and unreliable access to food. Roughly 1 in 4 Hudson residents are without vehicles and live more than one-half mile from a supermarket.<sup>10</sup>

**DEMOGRAPHIC COMPARISONS**  
of Hudson, Columbia County, and New York

VARIABLE	HUDSON	COLUMBIA COUNTY	NEW YORK
Population	5,900	61,245	19,872,319
Median household income (in 2023 inflation-adjusted \$)	\$55,394	\$83,619	\$84,578
Median age in years	40.9	49.5	39.6
% of population under 18, over 65	16.4, 18.2	16.3, 25.4	20.7, 17.4
% of population 25 & older who earned a bachelor's degree or higher	39.0	38.1	39.6
<b>Race/ethnicity, as a percentage of the population:</b>			
White	67.4	84.8	57.1
Black	12.1	3.2	14.7
Asian	12.3	2.2	8.9
American Indian and Alaskan Native	1.2	0.2	0.5
Native Hawaiian, Other Pacific Islander	0.0	0.0	0.0
Two or more races	5.8	6.7	8.9
Some other race	1.2	2.8	9.8
Hispanic or Latino	7.6	6.0	19.6

Source: 2023 American Community Survey 5-year estimates

**FOOD ACCESS AND POVERTY COMPARISONS**  
of Columbia County, New York, and United States



**Sources:** (i) 2023 American Community Survey 5-year population estimates (ii) Feeding America's Map the Meal Gap, 2022 (iii) National Center for Education Statistics, 2022 (iv) CDC's Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2021

# ORIGINS OF ROLLING GROCER

## DEFINING THE PROBLEM

While several specialty food stores operated within Hudson city limits, full-service grocery stores with a wide selection of offerings were located at the edge of town. This made access to groceries difficult for the relatively high population of residents without adequate transportation.

To address this challenge, local nonprofits Hawthorne Valley Association (HVA) and Long Table Harvest (LTH) received a “Fresh and Healthy Food for All” grant through the Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation (BTCF) in 2016. The grant provided \$150,000 in funding – renewable by request for up to five years – to support short- and long-term strategies to increase healthy food access in the community.

The organizations gathered information from residents to better understand their experiences and desires for the community. The Hudson Core Group, composed of nonprofit representatives and community stakeholders, formed to explore possible solutions. Meeting every other week throughout 2017, the group performed additional surveys, ten longform interviews, and a series of listening sessions to collect feedback.

***Input from the community was loud and clear: “We need a grocery store in town.”***

## ORGANIZATIONAL PARTNERS



Hawthorne Valley Association (HVA) has been in Columbia County since 1972. Its mission is “to renew soil, society, and self by integrating agriculture, education, art, and research.” Originally founded by a group of educators and farmers following teachings of Rudolph Steiner (founder of biodynamic agriculture and Waldorf education), today HVA operates a 900-acre working biodynamic farm with a large organic grocery store called the Hawthorne Valley Farm Store, which grew out of their farm stand started in 1981. Other initiatives of the non-profit include a place-based learning center to help visiting students learn about agriculture, a K-12 Waldorf School, a farm summer camp, as well as other centers dedicated to outreach, research, agriculture, the visual arts, and philosophical education.<sup>11</sup>



## LONG TABLE HARVEST

Long Table Harvest (LTH) started operating in Columbia County in 2016 to support the community’s emergency food needs. One of its primary goals is to “[connect] farm surpluses to emergency food sites and community based organizations while closing the food loop through sustainable surplus redistribution.”<sup>12</sup> Through its Gleaning Program, LTH has distributed food from over 64 farms to over 46 recipient sites in Columbia, Dutchess, and Greene Counties. Over 315,000 pounds of mostly organic food – produce, meat, eggs, and dairy – have been gleaned since the organization began. In collaboration with the Hudson Core Group and Hawthorne Valley Association, LTH helped create and manage Rolling Grocer until 2020.<sup>13</sup>





## FIRST STEPS

While a brick-and-mortar storefront was part of their long-term vision, such an endeavor would require more time, resources, and planning. In the short-term, the Hudson Core Group decided to start a mobile market to immediately begin addressing community needs.

In 2018, with funds from the Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation grant, the group purchased equipment, including a 17-foot trailer, refrigerators, freezers, a generator, and a Point of Sale system. Hauled by a donated truck, the mobile grocery visited various landmarks throughout the week, such as the library and the hospital, where community members typically gathered. Originally named Rolling Grocer 19 to represent the 19 townships of Columbia County, the market offered a variety of fruits, vegetables, meat, dairy, and grains.

Rolling Grocer (RG) operated as a semi-autonomous project of HVA, allowing the mobile market to run as a nonprofit without incorporating and applying for its own 501(c)(3) status. This arrangement enabled the project to accept tax-deductible donations and receive grants. RG paid a fixed percentage of its budget into HVA's central management to receive services like accounting, payroll, HR, and reporting. Staff were hired specifically to run the grocery store, including a three-person management team. Employees answered to the HVA Board of Directors.

In addition, HVA provided critical knowledge and infrastructure to operate the grocery store. For decades, HVA had been operating the Hawthorne Valley Farm Store, a 4,500-square-foot organic market located 15 miles away. RG placed weekly orders through Hawthorne Valley Farm Store, and their orders were stored in a staff room of HVA's fermented food processing plant in Hudson. Before each run, the mobile market would restock with these items. When it wasn't in use, the trailer was kept at an HVA parking lot.

Heeding community feedback, the initiative decided to primarily carry organic foods. While not everything is available locally, the store prioritizes food that is grown in the region: **"By providing a market for local farmers and producers, prioritizing sourcing from environmentally-conscious farmers and distributors in our area, Rolling Grocer supports the direct reinvestment of local spending back into community businesses."** Still, these foods are typically more expensive and therefore inaccessible to community members with fewer resources. To make high quality food more affordable, they established a Fair Pricing System. Similar to a sliding scale, the system has three tiers: at cost pricing, discounted pricing, and standard pricing. Customers simply select the tier that best fits their current circumstances, and prices are adjusted accordingly.



## GROWTH & EVOLUTION

During the winter of 2018, the RG trailer was not insulated well enough to keep foods from getting too cold. Also, it could only accommodate two or three people at a time, which was not adequate to meet customers' needs. As a result, the Hudson Core Group began searching for a brick-and-mortar storefront.

Early in 2019, only about six months after the mobile market started operating, a new opportunity emerged when the Galvin Foundation made a 1,400-square-foot building available for lease in downtown Hudson. RG seized the chance to take it over. They were given a discounted rental rate of \$1,700 per month, compared to an average of \$5,000 for other commercial leases on the same street. The building needed little remodeling to become a grocery store. They moved the coolers and freezers from the trailer into the building, as well as the backstock that had been stored in the HVA

staff room. Using donations from community members, they built wooden shelves for produce and purchased additional wire shelving racks.

In March of 2019, the brick-and-mortar storefront opened with 800 square feet of customer-facing retail and 600 square feet of storage. Even though they dropped the trailer, the name "Rolling Grocer" remained: the store established a Rural Access Delivery Program to "[bring] healthy local foods to low-income, low-access seniors and others in rural areas."<sup>14</sup> In 2022, RG was awarded a USDA Local Foods Promotion Program (LFPP) grant, totaling \$423,000 in federal funds plus \$110,000 in matching funds over three years. The grant helped RG expand and promote its delivery program. The program currently averages 6-8 deliveries per week,



which they hope to expand to 20 deliveries per week. In addition, through the LFPP grant, the store expanded local food offerings and developed a Prepared Foods Department that utilizes local products.

In 2023, RG accomplished a store reset: they tore down a non-loadbearing wall, reconfigured the layout, and purchased new coolers. By 2024, the store grossed \$1.17 million, with locally sourced food accounting for roughly 17% of sales. Over 1,700 individual customers were enrolled in the Fair Pricing System.

While HVA and RG maintain a strong partnership, fiscal sponsorship transitioned to the Chester Agricultural Center in 2021, allowing HVA to develop and incubate additional community initiatives. Now, due to the store and delivery program's growth, RG is working to obtain its own 501(c)(3) nonprofit tax status.



## TIMELINE OF Rolling Grocer

### 2016

Hawthorne Valley Association and Long Table Harvest receive a grant from a local foundation to explore food access improvements in the community.

### 2017

The Hudson Core Group, composed of nonprofit representatives and community stakeholders, is established to gather information on community needs and explore solutions. The group hosts community listening sessions, conducts interviews, and distributes surveys.

### 2018

Rolling Grocer (RG), a mobile grocery store that visits underserved communities in the area, is established.

### 2019

After facing weatherization challenges with the mobile unit, RG opens a brick-and-mortar storefront in downtown Hudson.

### 2020

RG suspends in-store shopping due to COVID-19 but offers delivery and curbside pick-up.

### 2021

RG undergoes management transitions and transfers fiscal sponsorship to the Chester Agricultural Center (CAC).

### 2022

RG receives USDA grant to expand local food offerings and bolster home delivery program.

### 2023

RG completes a store reset, removing a non-loadbearing wall, reconfiguring the layout, and purchasing new coolers.

### 2025

RG receives Certificate of Incorporation and is currently applying for nonprofit tax status.

# OPERATIONS

## FAIR PRICING SYSTEM

Since its inception, RG has implemented a Fair Pricing System to make organic and local food more affordable for customers with fewer resources. The pricing model has three tiers based on the MIT Living Wage Calculator<sup>15</sup> for Columbia County: the blue tier receives at-cost pricing (selling at a 10% profit margin to cover delivery fees, so the store breaks even), the orange tier receives discounted pricing (selling at a 25% profit margin), and the green tier receives standard pricing (selling at a 40% profit margin). When combined, the average profit margin across the entire store is roughly 20%. Every item on the shelf lists three prices corresponding to each tier.

Shoppers enroll in the Fair Pricing System at the register just once. Behind the register is a large chart explaining the three-tiered pricing model. To enroll, customers first confirm that they live within 30 miles of the store (individuals who live farther away can still shop using green tier pricing). Then, they self-select their tier, taking into consideration household size and combined household

income. On each subsequent visit, customers only need to give their last name when checking out, and the Point of Sale (POS) system automatically adjusts their prices. Shoppers are free to change their tier as personal circumstances change.

## COLLECTIVE PURCHASING OF NON-LOCAL FOOD

To source products that are unavailable locally, RG collaborates with Hawthorne Valley Farm Store. By combining orders placed through UNFI, a national distributor, both stores secure deeper volume discounts and pass savings onto customers.

Hawthorne Valley Farm Store has multiple accounts through UNFI, and RG is one of them. Using this account, RG places two orders weekly, usually about \$5,000 per order. UNFI delivers the consolidated order to Hawthorne Valley Farm Store, and staff sort out RG's order. Sorting can take 2-3 hours since each item is checked off the invoice. RG pays the Farm Store \$10,000 annually to cover the cost of this labor. Twice per week, RG employees drive 15 miles to Hawthorne Valley Farm Store to pick up their order.

## ROLLING GROCER'S FAIR PRICING SYSTEM

This system includes three tiers. The orange category represents a "living wage" range.

Number of People in Household (including children and elders cared for)	Combined Household Gross Income (before taxes and with a 40 hour week)	Number of People in Household (including children and elders cared for)	Combined Household Gross Income (before taxes and with a 40 hour week)	Number of People in Household (including children and elders cared for)	Combined Household Gross Income (before taxes and with a 40 hour week)
1 Adult	Under \$35,000/year OR Under \$16/hour	1 Adult	\$40-50,000/year OR \$19-24/hour	1 Adult	Over \$50,000/year OR Over \$23/hour
1 Adult with 1 Dependent	Under \$50,000/year OR Under \$23/hour	1 Adult with 1 Dependent	\$65-75,000/year OR \$31-36/hour	1 Adult with 1 Dependent	Over \$70,000/year OR Over \$31/hour
1 Adult with 2 or more dependents	Under \$60,000/year OR Under \$28/hour	1 Adult with 2 or more dependents	\$80-90,000/year OR \$31-38/hour	1 Adult with 2 or more dependents	Over \$85,000/year OR Over \$38/hour
2 Adults	Under \$55,000/year OR combined Under \$26/hour	2 Adults	\$60-75,000/year OR combined \$28-36/hour	2 Adults	Over \$80,000/year OR combined Over \$36/hour
2 Adults with 1 Dependent	Under \$70,000/year OR combined Under \$33/hour	2 Adults with 1 Dependent	\$75-85,000/year OR combined \$36-40/hour	2 Adults with 1 Dependent	Over \$90,000/year OR combined Over \$40/hour
2 Adults with 2 or more dependents	Under \$80,000/year OR combined Under	2 Adults with 2 or more dependents	\$85-100,000/year OR combined \$40-48/hour	2 Adults with 2 or more dependents	Over \$110,000/year OR combined Over \$48/hour

Source: Rolling Grocer 19. Fair Pricing System. [www.rollinggrocer19.org/fair-pricing-system](http://www.rollinggrocer19.org/fair-pricing-system)



## SOURCING LOCAL FOOD

Every week, RG works directly with local producers who supply vegetables, fruit, meat, dairy, and more. Availability lists and purchase orders are exchanged via email, and producers deliver to the store. Because local producers have individual accounts in the POS system and their invoices are recorded upon receipt, RG can accurately track the number of local producers, the sales volume of each local producer, and the total sales of locally sourced foods.

RG prioritizes sourcing local food from producers in Columbia County. However, based on availability, the store also orders local food through a regional distributor, Hudson Harvest, which supplies food grown in the Hudson Valley.

“This only works if you have a circle of donors who are wealthy around you and willing to make not one-time donations, but long-term donations every year...We’re doing it this way because of where we live and who we are. We’re catering to rural people on EBT and very wealthy people from New York City. That’s quite a spread.”

**Rachel Schneider**  
Project Director at Rolling Grocer





## INPUTS

### PARTNERSHIPS

with Hawthorne Valley Farm Store  
to order from a national supplier  
and reduce the cost of goods



ROLLING  GROCER

## OUTPUTS

### IMPROVED COMMUNITY

health and wellbeing



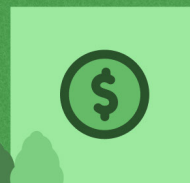
### LOCAL JOBS

that pay **livable wages**



### SUBSIDIZED ACCESS TO LOCAL & ORGANIC FOOD

through **tiered pricing system**



### COMMUNITY SUPPORT

through investments from:

- Private donors
- Grants
- Customer sales



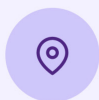
### LOCALLY GROWN FOOD

delivered to the store on a  
consistent weekly schedule

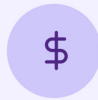




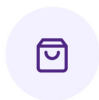
## 2024 IMPACT SUMMARY



**\$182,000**  
IN LOCAL FOOD PURCHASES



**\$200,000**  
IN LOCAL FOOD SALES AT  
ROLLING GROCER



**\$341,000**  
FEDERAL AND PHILANTHROPIC  
DOLLARS FUNdraISED



**1,700**  
COMMUNITY MEMBERS ENROLLED  
IN THE FAIR PRICING SYSTEM,  
WITH 60% IN SUBSIDIZED TIERS



**\$1.17 MILLION**  
IN OVERALL SALES AT  
ROLLING GROCER



**50 LOCAL  
PRODUCERS**  
SUPPLYING TO ROLLING GROCER



**14 PART-TIME STAFF  
EMPLOYED**  
WITH HOURLY WAGES STARTING  
AT \$18 PER HOUR



**115**  
**DAILY SHOPPERS**  
ON AVERAGE, AT ROLLING GROCER



# OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

RG experienced several transitions since moving into the brick-and-mortar space.

One year after opening, the store temporarily suspended in-store shopping due to COVID-19. However, it still offered curbside pickup and delivery services, allowing customers to place orders online.

The store also experienced staff turnover. Between the stress of the pandemic and the fact that all three store managers were new to grocery retail, co-managing became more and more difficult. As a result, the original three-person management team disbanded. To fill in the gap, full management briefly transitioned to Hawthorne Valley Farm Store in January of 2021. In June of 2021, RG once again hired its own Store Manager. Today, RG also has a Home Delivery Manager and continues to have a Project Director who supports fundraising efforts and nonprofit administration. The store uses outside services to manage bookkeeping and accounting.

In addition, RG's original POS system was ineffective. It was unable to accurately track inventory data, which led the store to be overstocked or understocked on certain items. In addition, there was a lag in prices being updated, leading to financial loss. Finally, the system was not equipped to handle a three-tiered pricing structure, and applying the correct price for each customer was clunky. Eventually, RG installed a new POS system that provides detailed sales, inventory, and product reports.







## KEY FINDINGS AND LESSONS LEARNED

### BUSINESS MODEL AND OPERATIONS

While the original mobile grocery model was a cost-effective way to immediately address the community's food access needs, the trailer's inability to withstand the heat of summer and cold of winter created barriers to being a regular, reliable source of food for residents. Even if it had been better insulated, residents had to schedule their grocery shopping around the mobile market's hours, which was inconvenient. Rachel Schneider, Project Director of RG, recommends that other communities skip the trailer and go straight to opening a brick-and-mortar storefront. Otherwise, communities should consider investing more to get a refrigerated vehicle, like those used by food distributors, that can withstand the elements.

RG's tiered pricing model has shown to be effective in sustaining and growing the grocery store when paired with long-term philanthropic funding. In 2024, 1,700 individual members were enrolled in the Fair Pricing System. The majority of shoppers (60%) were in subsidized tiers, with the majority of overall sales (43%) receiving at-cost pricing. According to RG, "It is essential to us that each customer feels a sense of freedom when choosing their tier, while gently being reminded of need vs. privilege and the importance of community."<sup>16</sup> By only having them enroll once, the system helps maintain the privacy of shoppers.

Thus far, RG has been a fiscally sponsored project (first through HVA and then through CAC), meaning it operated as a nonprofit

grocery store without having to incorporate and apply for tax-exempt status. Partner organizations "incubated" the initiative during its startup phase, providing strategic oversight from a board of directors and financial stewardship. Now with its finances and operations in order, RG is ready to stand on its own. The store received a Certificate of Incorporation in early 2025 and is currently applying for nonprofit tax status. RG recently developed its own Board of Directors to govern the organization.

***"It is essential to us that each customer feels a sense of freedom when choosing their tier, while gently being reminded of need vs. privilege and the importance of community."***

The standard margin necessary to maintain organic and natural food stores is between 35-40%. However, RG struggles to make a 20% margin because the majority of shoppers receive discounted pricing. The nonprofit model is therefore necessary for RG to achieve its mission of making high quality food more affordable: the organization will continue to rely heavily on grants and donations to subsidize the price of food. Nonprofit status means donors can receive tax deductions for their financial contributions.

## FINANCIAL STRATEGY


For RG's Fair Pricing System to work, prices for lower income shoppers are subsidized by profits from higher-income shoppers and philanthropic dollars. In 2024, roughly 22% of income came from philanthropic donations, which covered roughly half of the store's operating expenses.

Long-term funding is paramount to RG's story. For instance, their initial grant from Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation gave them time to assess the food access landscape, gain community buy-in, establish a mobile market, and then transition to a more suitable and long-term solution. The initiative's growth and evolution may not have been possible without committed funds over several years. The same is true moving forward as RG continues to offer subsidized pricing, which is largely underwritten by philanthropy and private donations.

According to Rachel Schneider, Project Director at Rolling Grocer, **"This only works if you have a circle of donors who are willing**

**to make not one-time donations, but long-term donations every year...We're doing it this way because of where we live and who we are. We are serving both the rural and urban parts of our county, including people with lower incomes as well as those who are wealthier and relocated from New York City or who come as tourists. That's quite a spread."**

This financial strategy appears to be sustainable in its current context, where there is an abundance of wealthy community members who are willing to shop and donate to keep the store well-funded. This model may be more challenging to implement in less affluent areas, where there may not be enough wealth to maintain low prices and provide competitive wages. In addition, having an experienced grant writer on the team is crucial to support the organization's ongoing fundraising needs.



***"On one side, you have the people who really need the store in order to get good food at great prices, and then you have the other side, which is the [people] who shop there to help support the mission...Everything kind of meets in the middle, and they're really meeting their mission goals in that location."***

**Jeremy Laurange**  
Director of Retail Operations at  
Hawthorne Valley Farm Store



# EQUIPMENT, TECHNOLOGY, AND INFRASTRUCTURE

It was important for RG to have a customer-oriented POS system to manage the three-tiered pricing model. Though it was difficult to track initially, the store resolved this problem in 2020 when it switched to ECRS Catapult\* – the same system used by Hawthorne Valley Farm Store. It was customized to create different price levels for each item in the store, allowing RG to manage and track its customer base with ease. According to Jeremy Laurange, Director of Retail Operations at Hawthorne Valley Farm Store who helped RG with the transition, **“It’s an expensive piece of equipment, but it was a game changer in terms of management, especially for what RG is doing with their mission...[Having] equipment that was able to seamlessly make those changes was paramount.”**

ECRS Catapult keeps a detailed account of inventory, both local and non-local. Staff enter invoices when orders are received, and the system automatically updates product quantities with each sale, eliminating the need for manual stock counts. It also allows RG to isolate sales by different suppliers, so they can easily track profits generated from local vs. non-local products. While the system is costly, having a stable backend system that generates accurate data has been instrumental in the store’s growth.

ROLLING GROCER EQUIPMENT AND TECHNOLOGY	
VEHICLES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 sprinter van</li> </ul>
COOLERS AND FREEZERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 8 coolers/freezers in retail area</li> <li>• 5 coolers in backstock area</li> <li>• 2 chest freezers</li> </ul>
SHELVING, DISPLAY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bulk bins</li> <li>• Baskets</li> <li>• 7 wire rack shelving units for groceries</li> <li>• 3 display shelves</li> </ul>
TECHNOLOGY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 cash registers using ECRS Catapult*(Point of Sale system)</li> </ul>

**\*Note:** Brand names appearing in this publication are for product identification purposes only. No endorsement is intended, nor is criticism implied, of similar products not mentioned.



PRODUCT OFFERINGS

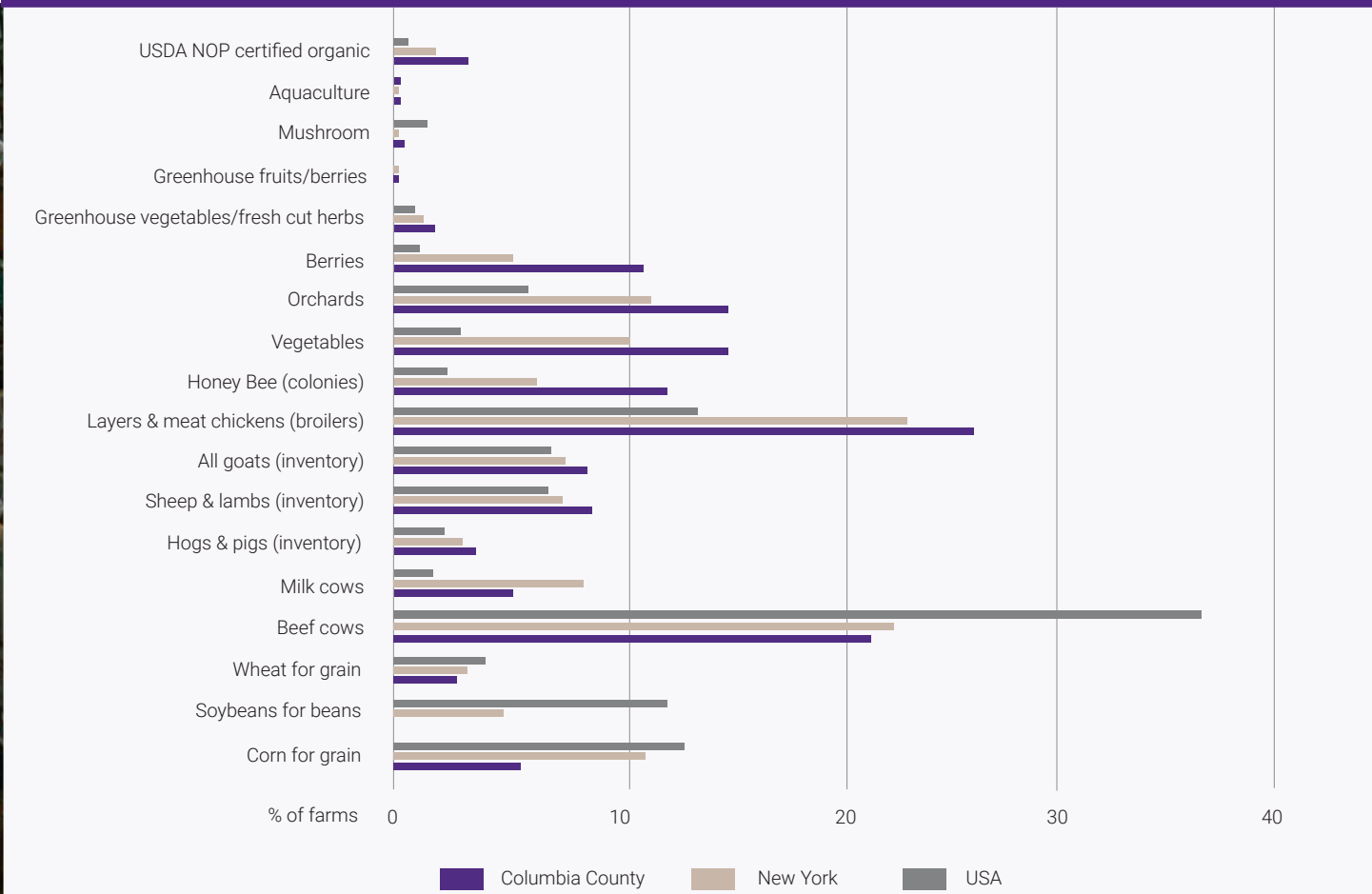
RG has an abundance of local, small-scale farmers within ten minutes of the store. As of 2022, Columbia County boasted 444 farms with a median size of 69 acres.<sup>17</sup> Many of these farms produce a wide variety of vegetables, fruit, meat, eggs, nuts, dairy, honey, and maple syrup which allows more opportunity for RG to stock their shelves with local products.

Local food sales have steadily grown at RG. In 2022, it had \$85,000 in local food sales. In 2023, local food sales increased to \$135,000. In 2024, RG made \$182,000 in local food purchases and had \$200,000 in local food sales – roughly 17% of overall sales. To

promote local offerings, RG displays photos of their local producers throughout the store, highlighting the connection between the food customers eat and the people who grow it.

RG’s next goal is for one-third of sales to be locally sourced products. Should sales hover around \$1.17 million annually, this would translate to a 100% increase, or doubling, of local sales. Their current barriers to achieving this goal are space limitations, seasonal fluctuations in agricultural production, and a shortage of local processors. Most manufactured grocery items (like crackers, chips, pasta, and other dry or frozen packaged goods) are unavailable locally.

FOOD ENVIRONMENT COMPARISONS  
of Columbia County, New York, and United States



Source: USDA NASS 2022 Census of Agriculture



## PARTNERSHIPS AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

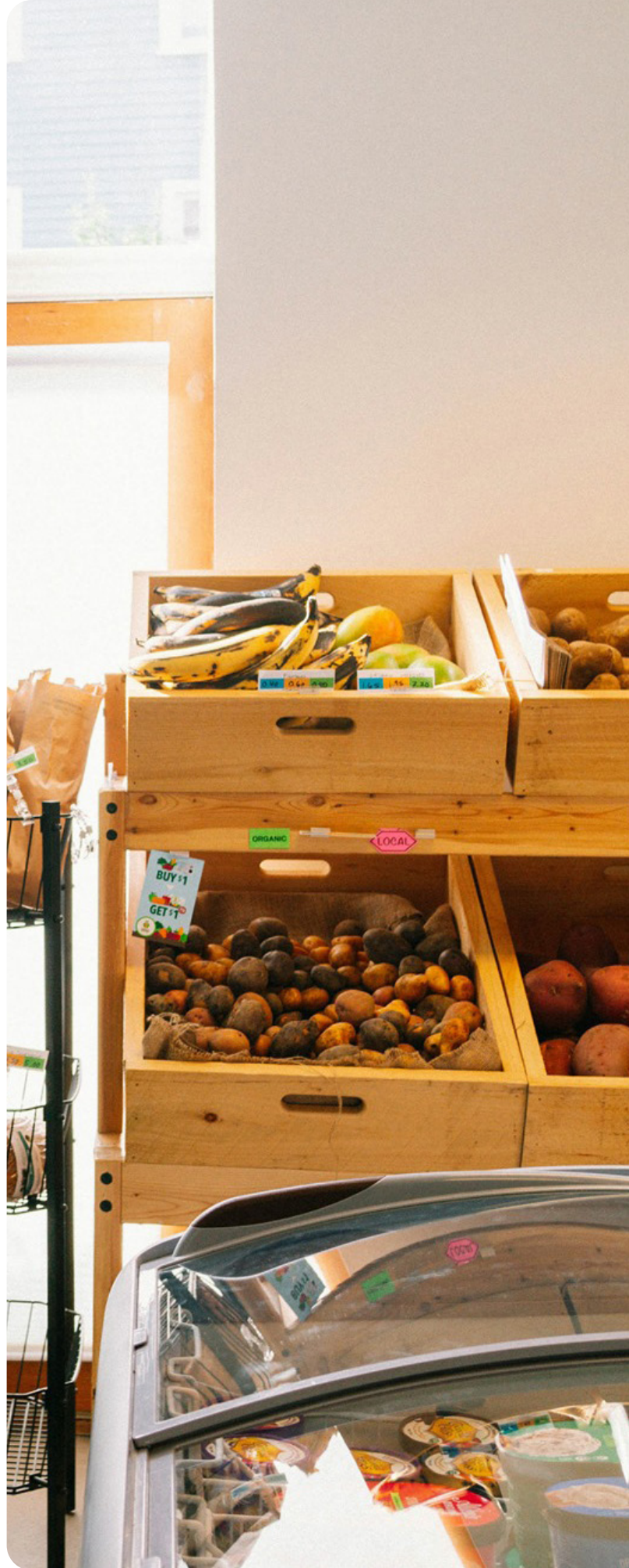
Community buy-in was essential for RG's success. Rather than assuming what residents might want, RG conducted extensive preliminary research to effectively address actual needs. This initial investment in community relationships paved the way for long-term shoppers, donors, and employees. In addition, RG effectively leveraged HVA and LTH's existing relationships to build trust.

RG's partnership with HVA also allowed them to make fewer mistakes when starting up. HVA already had grocery expertise through Hawthorne Valley Farm Store, which started as a small farm stand in the 1970s and eventually grew into a full-service grocery store with \$8 million in annual sales. These skills were easily transferred to support operations of the storefront. Hawthorne Valley Farm Store still supports RG with logistics and technology, since they both use the same POS system, and they continue their mutually beneficial arrangement of collectively purchasing from a national distributor.

***“Hawthorne Valley will always support RG in terms of purchasing support and getting their message out. We’re advocates for them. We advertise quite frequently for them. We put them in a lot of press releases. We try to highlight them as much as possible.”***

**Jeremy Laurange**

Director of Retail Operations at Hawthorne Valley Farm Store





# CONCLUSION

Rolling Grocer has been made possible through strong partnerships and authentic relationship with community members, allowing it to maintain a strong customer base and long-term committed funding. Although it experienced numerous transitions since its inception – moving from a market on wheels to a brick-and-mortar storefront – RG stayed true to its mission of making organic and local food accessible

to all, regardless of income. By prioritizing affordability through its innovative Fair Pricing System, RG is helping to grow the local food system: it makes local food more accessible to residents while increasing market opportunities for local farmers. The lessons learned from this case study aim to support other communities and retailers seeking to expand local food access for all.





# ABOUT THE PROJECT

## PROJECT OVERVIEW

This case study is part of a larger research project that highlights innovative models for increasing access to local foods in independent and locally owned grocery stores. Through in-depth explorations of businesses and organizations that are leading the way, we sought to answer the following research question: What lessons can be learned from innovative local sourcing models that could help locally owned, independent, and rural groceries become better integrated into local and regional supply chains? To read other innovative local sourcing case studies in this project, visit [www.ruralgrocery.org](http://www.ruralgrocery.org).

## PROJECT TEAM

This research project was carried out through a Cooperative Agreement between the Rural Grocery Initiative at Kansas State University and USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service. Funding was provided through USDA Cooperative Agreement No. 23-TMLRF-KS-0021. The Rural Grocery Initiative aims to sustain locally owned rural grocery stores to enhance community vitality and improve access to healthy foods. It does so by identifying, developing, and sharing resources that support grocers and rural communities. The Agricultural Marketing Service administers programs that create domestic and international marketing opportunities for U.S. producers of food, fiber, and specialty crops. It also provides the agriculture industry with valuable services to ensure the quality and availability of wholesome food for consumers across the country and around the world.

## METHODOLOGY

This research project was broken into four phases:

### PHASE ONE –

In Phase 1, the project team developed a Project Advisory Committee to confirm project goals. The Project Advisory Committee was made up of key stakeholders who convened virtually four times over the course of the project to provide feedback and direction.

### PHASE TWO –

In Phase 2, the project team solicited examples of innovative local sourcing models from across the country. As examples were received, the project team conducted preliminary research using secondary sources and saved this data in a catalog. This preliminary research allowed the research team to categorize models and determine which five examples to interview.

### PHASE THREE –

In Phase 3, the project team conducted interviews with two to four stakeholders (e.g. grocers, producers, distributors, community organizations, etc.) from each of the five distinct local sourcing models selected.

### PHASE FOUR –

In Phase 4, the team drafted in-depth case studies about each model and worked with a graphic designer to develop visuals. These resources were then promoted to partners and stakeholders.

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