

Food Deserts in Alachua County:

Unifying the Community

Jose Abreu

Jose Marichal

Maria Riveros

Juan Monsalve

Kenneth Sherman

The project was designated to support healthy nutrition by providing low income families with an accessible location where they can use the SNAP program. The target group for the proposal was the elders living in the Alachua County with no access to a close SNAP friendly facility. The main goal is to provide a safe community environment where the elderly in need can have access to the local farmer's products. Based on the need for healthy food and the necessity to help the elderly community, the research was focused on religious centers that can work as the point of gathering for these two matters. Religious center can work as the perfect fit, based on the existing large amount in Alachua County and the closeness to various farmers market; they can serve as the optimum point to create a solution. Since they are easily accessible and frequently visited by elderly people, they can provide an iconic landmark where people can reference for further SNAP usage.

Based on the Department of Elder Affairs of the State of Florida, "85,000 older Floridians benefit annually from community nutrition service programs, which leverage \$39 million in federal funding with money from local senior services levies, donations and volunteers" (Elder Farmers Market Nutrition Program, 2011). According to The State of Florida close to 20% of the recipients are not able to use these coupons due to accessibility problems, private providers or lack of information, together with the SNAP program, the elderly community can benefit from both programs if the accessibility to these markets is easier. As today the main problem is how to create a point of reference where the elderly community can relay in an easy and well located place where they can get healthy food in a convenient manner without traveling long distances and where their SNAP benefits would be accepted. With that in mind the usage of the religious center as a medium for the meeting point would work as the target location where

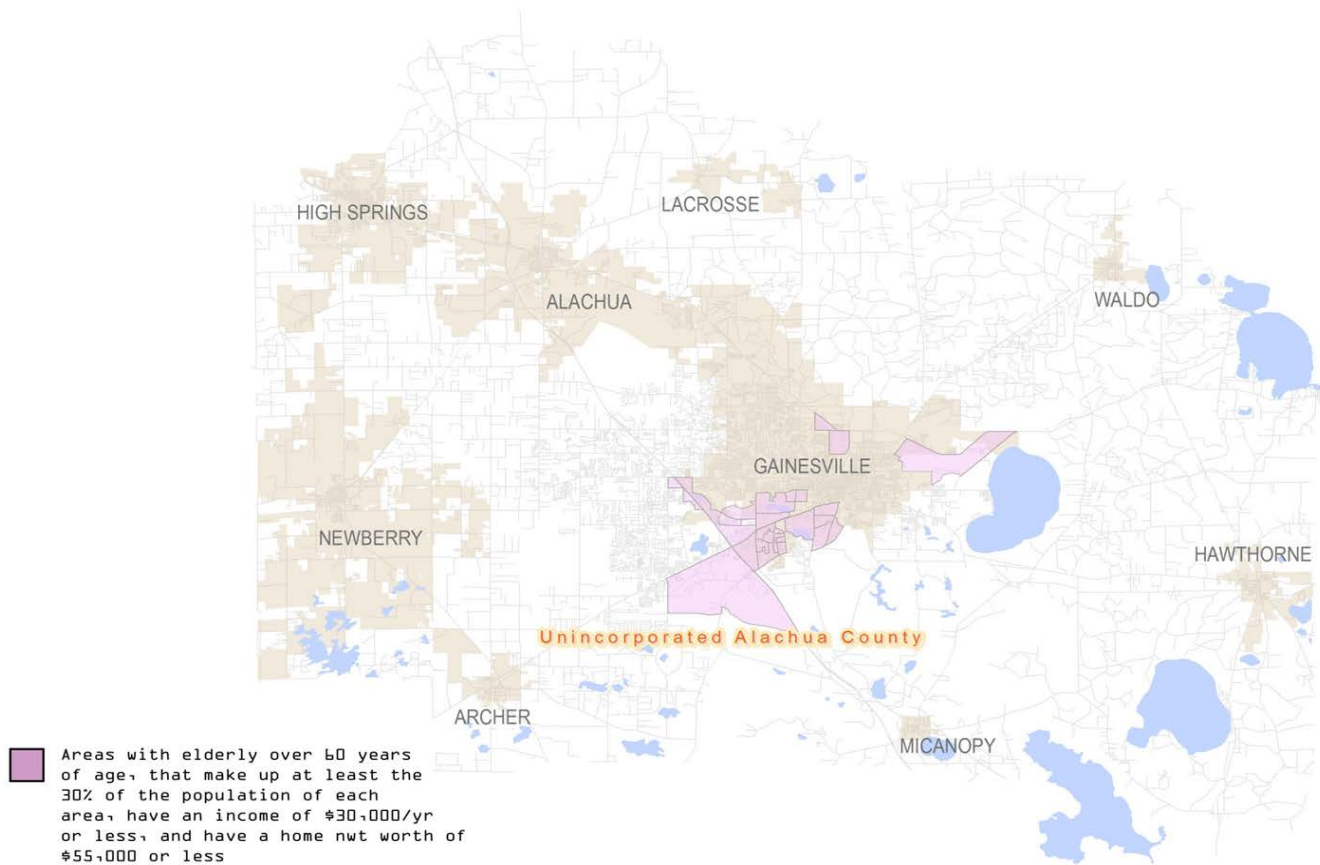
accessibility and availability will meet. Religious centers are commonly visited by the elderly community on a weekly basis and usually equipped with outdoor and indoor spaces that can serve as the selling point.

Our target group was the elderly community for a number of reasons. They are in need for benefits that would support a well-balanced nutrition. Since older adults are at risk for malnutrition, based on the country rates about 40 – 60% of hospitalized elder people are due to malnourish. Even though the lack of food can have many reasons one of them is the limitation in income as well as the quality of the meal itself. For those reasons the need to provide the elderly community with a better accessible place is eminent, in the way that they can get fresh products at a better price than the standard supermarkets. Prices are going to be cheaper, providing the elderly with more bangs for their bucks, better food at a better price would help to reduce the rates of malnutrition starting in Alachua County.

Our objective to accomplish our goal was to narrow down the elderly in need of economic help from the government. We then looked at the farmers market that where at least a mile close to bus stops, as transportation is the most important factor. In doing so we are increasing the consumption of farmer's products; we are bringing the community into these religious centers thus improving the quality of the community at the same time. Not only would the elderly community benefit from the numerous religious center existing, but also the religious center would have a venue to give back to the community implementing some of the volunteer programs that most of them have as a way to educate their followers. Independently

of the religion they practice, the elderly community can use the centers not only as a resource of healthy food but also as a method of getting involved in a new religion.

Using the GIS data we select all the elderly people over 60 years old that make up at least 30% of the population, which is able to make \$30,000 or less per year, as shown below.



One of our goals was to positively influence the local economy by using SNAP and to discover places where the food was healthy. To achieve both of these objectives we choose farmers markets as the main venue to utilize SNAP benefits. This would be optimal for the SNAP recipients who do not have access to these types of food, since farmers markets provide healthy locally grown food. By making farmers markets accessible to SNAP users both the local economy and the needs of the SNAP users are positively influenced. One challenge of using

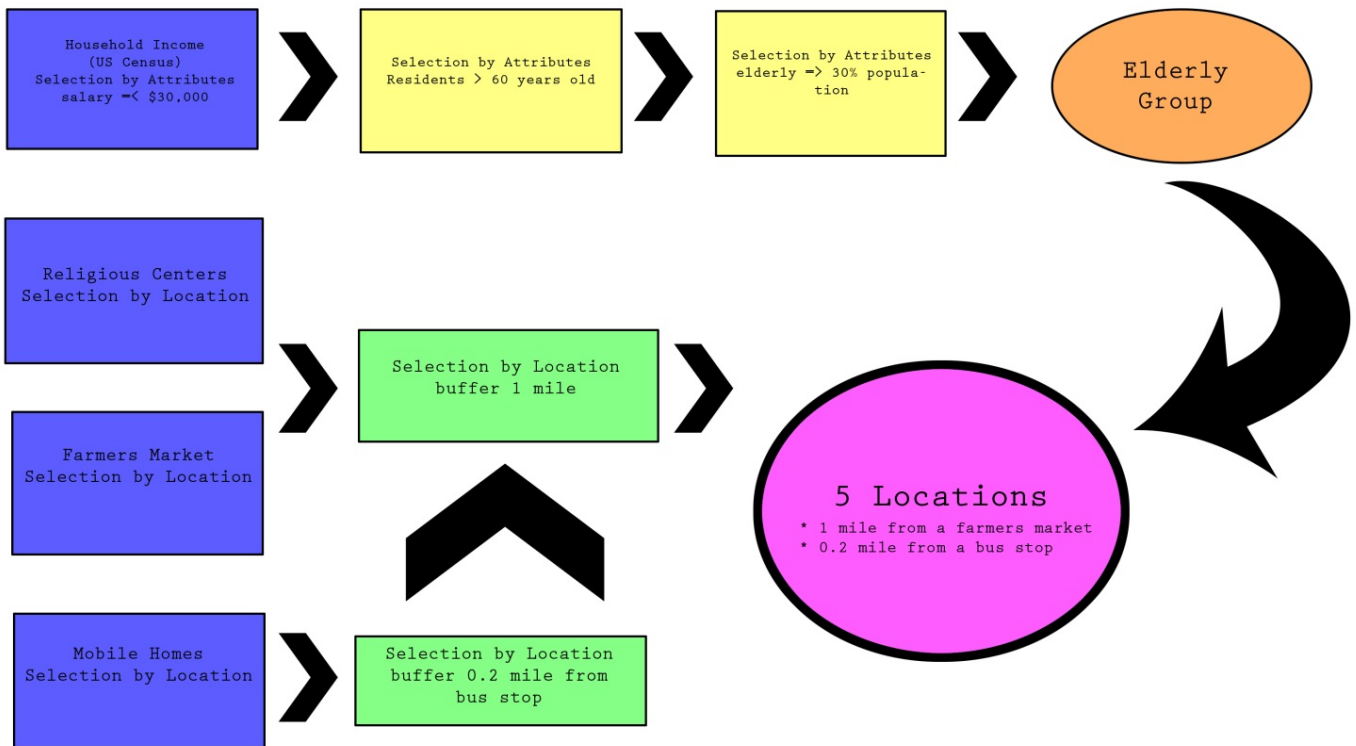
farmers markets was finding a central location where both SNAP users and farmers markets could meet.

The locations we found best fit were religious centers, which are generally very safe and welcoming locations where SNAP recipients can purchase the healthy foods from the farmers markets. There were many religious centers in Alachua County however we wanted to limit these locations down to a select few that were equally accessible for farmers markets as well as SNAP recipients.

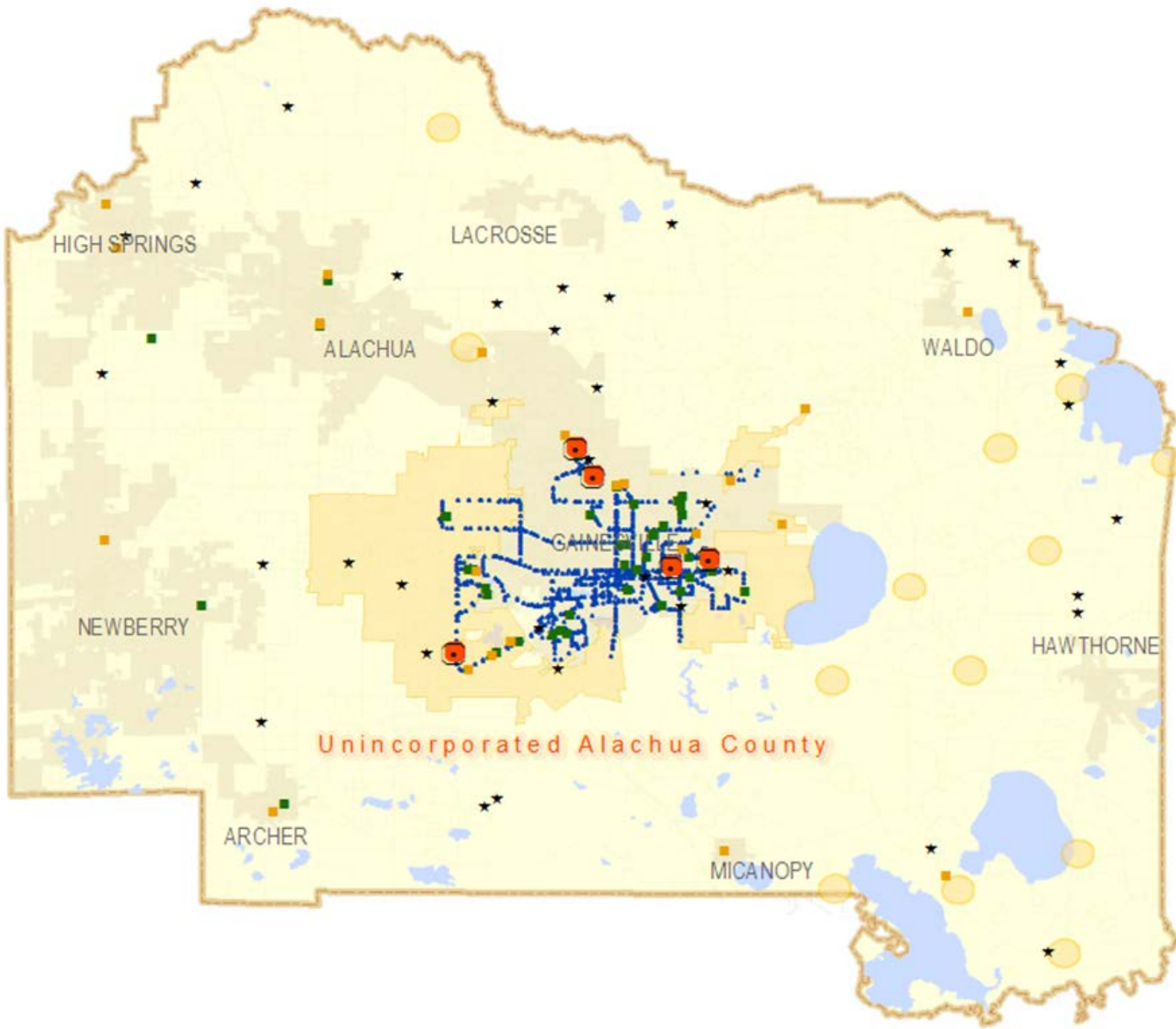
First we selected all of the religious centers that were within one mile of a farmers market. This left us with a variety of locations some near and some far from our target population which was elderly recipients. To make the religious centers accessible to the elderly we then wanted to make sure the distances of the bus stops and most populated areas of the elderly were close to the centers. We selected the locations that were within 0.2 miles of a bus stop because this is a very short distance that a person of elderly age will not have trouble traveling. We further reduced our locations by doing a selection by location where we found religious centers that were within a mile of assisted living and mobile home parks.

This gave us a total of five locations that met all of our stipulations. These religious centers varied in faith giving equal opportunity for each church to spread its religion to the SNAP recipients. Our Churches include Jehovah's Witness, Full Gospel, Church of God in Christ and Baptist. The variety of our churches will accommodate to a diverse population and may make more people feel comfortable when visiting these new SNAP retailers.

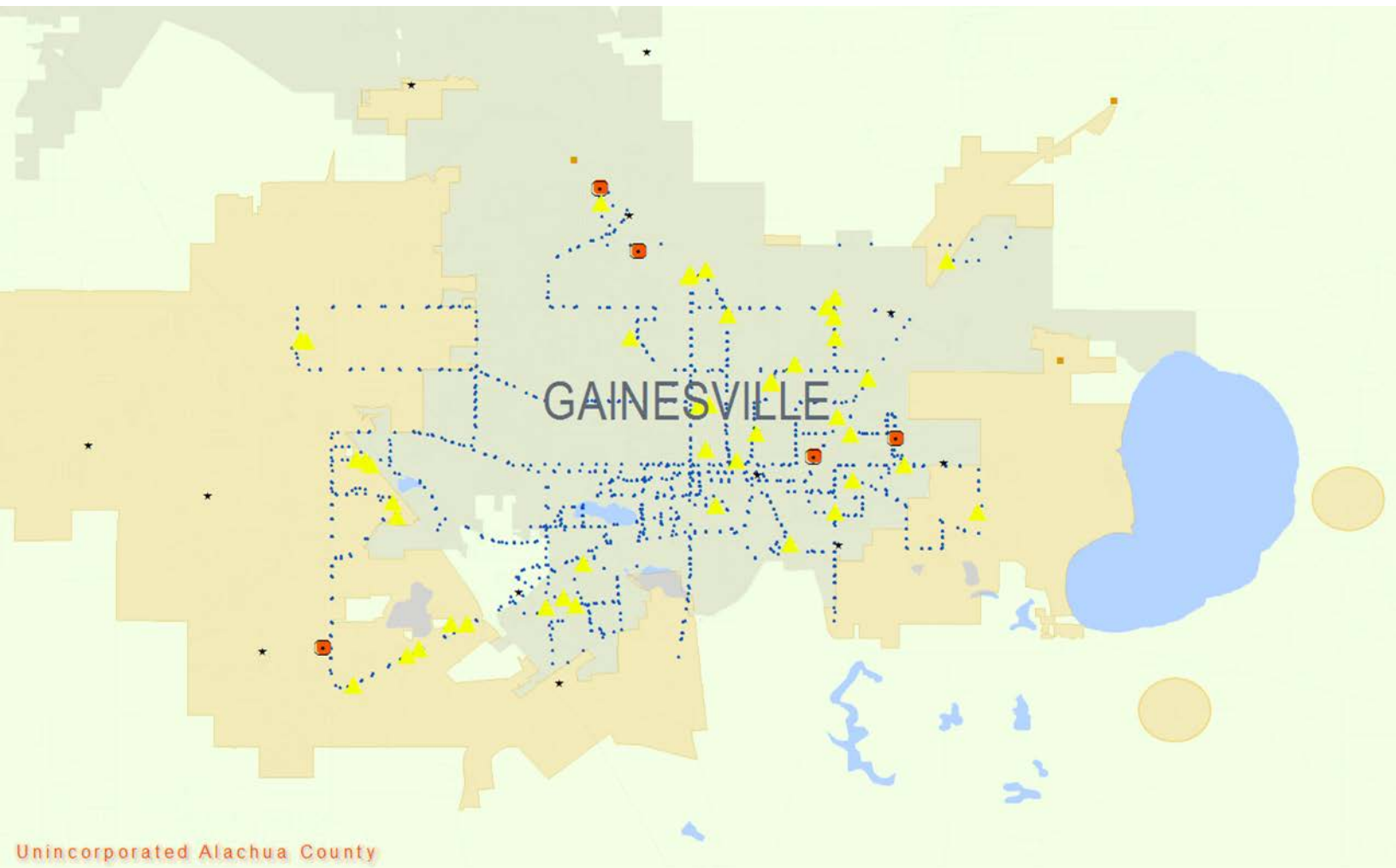
One further selection we made was the mobile home parks and assisted living centers that were within .5 miles of a bus stop. As a result 70% of all mobile home parks and assisted living centers were within this selection further proving that our religious centers were in optimal locations. After performing research we found that over 40% of mobile homes are owned by elderly individuals with an average income of about \$12,000 per year, certainly not enough to live on, meaning many of these individuals will be eligible for SNAP aid.



From our research, the targeted group of residents is located mostly south of University drive within Gainesville city limits. These residents all have access to at least one out of the five religious centers that we picked as a meeting point. Each of the religious centers has at least one farmers market within one mile, making this a feasible solution to the problem. Not only are the elderly going to benefit by having an easier access to markets products but the community itself would benefit in having such activities around religious centers. Looking at the availability of the proposed centers, the proximity of public transportation and the location of the mobile homes, the results become feasible for the targeted group. This solution would improve the wellbeing of our elderly community providing them with a greater availability, affordable prices and fresh products from locally grown markets. In addition the local economy would be benefited from the increases on the local consumption and the SNAP program would help to incentive the consumption of fresh locally produced foods.



- We used selection by location to define religious centers that were within 1 mile of mobile home parks as that is where many elderly people live. These selected features are represented by the red circles.



- Mobile home parks and assisted housing within .5 miles of a bus stop. Over 69% of all the mobile home parks and assisted living housing in Alachua County. The selections are represented by yellow triangles.

Bibliography

- *Elder Farmers Market Nutrition Program*. (2011). Retrieved April 14,2012, from Department of Elder Affairs: http://elderaffairs.state.fl.us/doea/farmers_market.php