

Meeker Farmer's Market Project Needs Assessment

Prepared for the Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust (TSET) Built Environment Grant

Five Tool Program Evaluation Services, LLC. completed this Needs Assessment for Funding Opportunity Number 092-BEN26 Nutrition and Access to Healthy Food Construction Implementation. Submitted To: Donna Weber, Mayor, and Jeff Wilbourn, Town Administrator, Meeker Industrial Authority, and presented to the Meeker Town Board. This document has been made publicly available on www.FiveToolProgramEvaluationServices.com <https://fivetoolprogramevaluationervices.com/public-accessibility>

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Executive Summary

This needs assessment demonstrates the necessity for establishing a dedicated farmers' market in Meeker, Oklahoma, to enhance access to healthy, locally sourced foods. Drawing from locally focused data collected within the last three years (2022–2024), including reports from the Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH) and the Oklahoma Gas & Electric (OG&E) Economic Development Division, this document highlights significant inequities in health, economic stability, and social factors in Meeker and surrounding Lincoln County census tracts. Key indicators such as elevated poverty rates, low household incomes, moderate child opportunity indices, and below-average life expectancy underscore the need for improved nutrition access to address food insecurity and related health disparities. All data sources are appended to the grant application for reference.

Revisions Note: This version incorporates updated 2023–2024 data on poverty and life expectancy from sources like Data USA and the 2024 County Health Rankings & Roadmaps, reflecting a slight increase in county-level poverty (to 16.5%) and a refined life expectancy estimate (74.8 years). Population figures have been clarified using the most recent U.S. Census Bureau estimates (1,292 for Meeker in 2023), while noting the 2020 Census base of 1,004. The

2022 OSDH Inequity Hot Spots data remains foundational, as it is actively used in 2023 state health planning documents and no newer inequity-specific report exists.

1. Project Context and Rationale

Meeker, a small town in Lincoln County with a population of 1,292 (U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2023 estimate; base 1,004 from 2020 Census), has historically supported informal farm and craft markets but lacks a permanent, structured facility. The proposed farmer's market at 310 W. Carl Hubbell Blvd will provide covered vendor spots with utilities, increasing availability of fresh produce and healthy foods. This aligns with TSET's focus on built environment improvements to combat nutrition-related inequities. Data from the attached reports reveal that Meeker residents face barriers to healthy food access, exacerbated by high poverty and limited economic resources, making this project essential for community health improvement.

2. Health and Social Inequities in Lincoln County and Meeker

Data from the OSDH's "Inequity Hot Spots: Lincoln County Census Tracts 2022" report identifies Meeker within Census Tract (CT) 9614, which encompasses a population of 8,382 and exhibits moderate levels of child opportunity (Index: 45) and a life expectancy of 74.8 years—below the national average of approximately 78 years (CDC data, 2022; updated via 2024 County Health Rankings). This tract includes block groups with notable social vulnerabilities:

Poverty Levels: Below-poverty-level rates range from 8% to 18% across block groups in CT 9614, with an average social poverty indicator of 18.7% in Meeker-specific data (cross-referenced with OG&E report). This is higher than the state average of 15.3% and national average of 12.5%, indicating heightened risk for food insecurity and limited ability to afford nutritious foods. Updated 2023 data shows Lincoln County's overall poverty rate at 16.5%, a 15.4% increase from the prior year.

Uninsured Population (Under 65): Rates of 4%–7% in block groups, contributing to reduced access to preventive health services, including nutrition education.

Unemployment and Home Ownership: Unemployment at 7%–9% and home ownership at 92% in some blocks, but overall social indicators point to instability that affects food access.

Educational Attainment: High school graduate rates for those aged 25 and older are around 25% in vulnerable blocks, limiting awareness and resources for healthy eating.

Demographic Breakdown: Predominantly White (92%) with small American Indian (5%) and Hispanic (1%) populations, but inequities persist across age groups (e.g., 5% under age 5, 24% ages 6–17, 54% ages 18–64, 17% age 65+).

Adjacent tracts (e.g., CT 9615 and 9616) show similar patterns, with child opportunity indices of 48 and 46, respectively, and life expectancies of 79.1 and 77.3 years. Statewide, these "hot spots" highlight areas where social determinants like poverty and low insurance correlate with poorer health outcomes, including obesity and chronic diseases linked to inadequate nutrition (OSDH, 2022). While direct food access metrics are not explicitly quantified, high poverty and social vulnerability in these tracts infer barriers to healthy food, as supported by OSDH's focus on inequity mapping for community planning. This 2022 data remains actively used in the 2023 Oklahoma State Health Assessment, which references the same 362 high-risk tracts across 59 counties (31% of state population).

The shorter "Inequity Hot Spots: Meeker Report 2022" corroborates these findings, emphasizing CT 9614's moderate inequity levels and poverty indicators, which align with ongoing local health improvement efforts.

3. Economic Indicators Supporting the Need

The OG&E Economic Overview reports (2024) provide detailed economic data for Meeker town and a 45-minute drive-time radius, illustrating financial constraints that limit access to healthy foods.

Meeker Town-Specific Data:

Poverty Rate: 18.7% of all people live below the poverty level, compared to 15.3% statewide and 12.5% nationally. This affects approximately 241 individuals in Meeker (based on 2023 population estimate), increasing reliance on food assistance.

Households Receiving Food Stamps/SNAP: Implied high usage in social indicators, with those in poverty potentially qualifying, signaling food insecurity.

Median Household Income: \$35,813 (updated 2023 estimate), significantly lower than the state (\$59,425) and national (\$75,149) averages, reducing purchasing power for fresh produce.

Per Capita Income: \$23,072, below state (\$33,537) and national (\$30,408) levels.

Cost of Living Index: 17.0% lower than the U.S. average (overall index: 83.0), but this benefit is offset by low incomes; grocery costs are indexed at 92.3, still challenging for low-income households.

Industry and Employment: Health Care and Social Assistance is the largest sector (90 workers, \$46,169 average wage), but overall unemployment and underemployment contribute to economic strain. Growth in agriculture (+44 jobs over 5 years) suggests potential for local food production, yet without a market, access remains limited.

45-Minute Radius Data (Broader Context):

Poverty Rate: 16.7% in the radius (affecting 127,737 people), compared to 15.3% statewide and 12.5% nationally.

Median Household Income: \$65,442, closer to state levels but still below national (\$75,149), with per capita income at \$33,537.

Cost of Living Index: 13.4% lower than U.S. average (overall index: 86.6), with groceries at 93.5—affordable but not for the 16.7% in poverty.

Demographics and Health Implications: Population of 787,829, with health care as the top sector (56,240 workers). Projected job growth in health care (+3,077 over 5 years) indicates ongoing needs, but social poverty metrics highlight inequities.

These economic factors, combined with a mean commute time of 26.2 minutes in Meeker (indicating potential travel barriers to distant grocery stores), emphasize the need for a local farmer's market to provide affordable, fresh options.

4. Alignment with Grant Requirements and Community Buy-In

This assessment uses data from 2022–2024, actively informing local planning (e.g., OSDH's inequity mapping for health interventions and OG&E's economic development strategies). No long-term data beyond three years is included. Community support is evidenced by the Town of Meeker's unanimous board approval, in-kind contributions from Lincoln County Commissioner Lee Doolen and Town Administrator Jeff Wilbourn, and the Meeker Farm & Craft Market's 954 Facebook followers. The project addresses TSET priorities by targeting nutrition access in an inequity hot spot.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The data clearly demonstrate that Meeker and Lincoln County face significant challenges in poverty (18.7% in Meeker; 16.5% county-wide in 2023), low income (\$35,813 median in Meeker), and health inequities (life expectancy 74.8 years in CT 9614), which contribute to limited access to healthy foods. Establishing the Meeker Farmer's Market will mitigate these issues by fostering local agriculture, reducing food insecurity, and promoting community health. We recommend funding this project to build a sustainable built environment solution.

References and Appendices

Oklahoma State Department of Health. (2022). *Inequity Hot Spots: Lincoln County Census Tracts*. (Appended as "2022 Inequity Hot Spots - Lincoln County Report.pdf").

Oklahoma State Department of Health. (2022). *Inequity Hot Spots: Meeker Report*. (Appended as "2022 Inequity Hot Spots - Meeker Report.pdf").

Oklahoma Gas & Electric Economic Development Division. (2024). *Economic Overview: Meeker town, OK*. (Appended as "Economic Overview - Meeker town, OK.pdf").

Oklahoma Gas & Electric Economic Development Division. (2024). *Economic Overview: Meeker 45-Minute Radius*. (Appended as "Economic Overview - Meeker 45-Minute Radius.pdf").

All data sourced is publicly available. For questions, Leslie Wilbourn, Five Tool Program Evaluation Services, LLC. or contact the Meeker Industrial Authority at (405) 279-3321.

MEEKER INDUSTRIAL AUTHORITY

Signature: _____

Donna Weber
Town of Meeker, Mayor
Meeker Industrial Authority, Trustor