



Betsy Chapman

Oxford Community Market

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Interviewer: Sarah I. Rodriguez

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Sarah Rodriguez: Okay. This is Sarah Rodriguez with the Southern Foodways Alliance. It is July 26th, 2023. I'm here in Oxford, Mississippi. Can you introduce yourself for the recorder?

Betsy Chapman: Betsy Chapman.

Sarah Rodriguez: Perfect. And what do you do?

Betsy Chapman: I am the Director of Oxford Community Market.

Sarah Rodriguez: Awesome. And would you mind sharing your birthdate for the record?

Betsy Chapman: September 16th, 1977.

Sarah Rodriguez: Cool. And so where were you born? Where'd you grow up?

Betsy Chapman: Where I was born is easy. Where I grew up is a hard question. So I was born in Columbus, Mississippi. My dad was finishing up at Mississippi State. So my parents lived in Starkville while he was working his way through college, the first in his family to graduate with a bachelor's degree. And so I spent my first year or so there.

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And then we moved to Saudi Arabia, to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, when I was almost three, and so I spent my first few years there. So my very first memories of life really are in another country, far away from Mississippi where both my parents grew up. And then there were bunches of moves after that. So I had lived several places in Mississippi. I have lived in Oklahoma. I lived in South Texas, right on the border. I've lived in Arizona, and always felt drawn back to Mississippi as

my home state. So this has always been the home of my heart where my grandparents and extended family have been.

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Sarah Rodriguez: And so your extended family and grandparents and everyone is from here?

Betsy Chapman: Yes. So my parents grew up in the Delta, my grandparents were always in Mississippi, and then numerous aunts and uncles, cousins. So this was always where I felt at home.

Sarah Rodriguez: And who was in your immediate family? Who were you moving around with?

Betsy Chapman: My parents and my sister. I have one sister. She's six years younger than me. And then when my parents divorced, my mom moved back to Mississippi, and that's when I came back too, and then left again, and then came back again several times before settling in Oxford.

Sarah Rodriguez: And what did your parents do for work as you were growing up?

Betsy Chapman: So my dad worked—he worked for like heavy machinery like Caterpillar.

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That's what took him overseas, so the big tractor type sales. He grew up in a family of like doing construction. So I don't know how he ended up doing that. And then he tried to start his own business, and then he didn't—and that didn't work out. And then he finally settled in south

Texas, and ran an asphalt products plant that makes a component that goes in electric or fluorescent light bulbs. So very obscure.

Sarah Rodriguez: [Laughter] Very specific.

Betsy Chapman: Yeah, very specific.

Sarah Rodriguez: And does your mom work?

Betsy Chapman: So my mom really wanted to be a homemaker, stay-at-home mom, and that's what she did,

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while my parents were married, for the most part. She did have like a day care in the house. She loved kids. And then when my parents divorced, she really had to pick herself up and figure out what to do. And so she did a lot of stuff. She at one time worked three jobs to make ends meet. She worked at a bank. She worked at a law office. She worked at an accountant's office. She worked at one of the like famous Mississippi Delta restaurants, Lusco's. She just did what she had to do, and then she settled into a very good job at Staple Cotton, which is like a cotton brokerage in Greenwood, Mississippi. So I'm really proud of her because she was not prepared for what she had to take on, and she figured out how to do it, and how to be independent.

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Sarah Rodriguez: Totally. And what was food like for you and your family growing up?

Betsy Chapman: Very important. My earliest memories are of foods. One of my very first memories is getting a shawarma on the streets of Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Most of my early

memories are connected to food. I'm sure that's pretty common. But, in addition to that, my grandfather had—there were eight brothers and sisters. They lived—they grew up in a farmhouse in Carroll County, Mississippi, and on eighty acres of land, they were kind of like subsistence farmers.

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And that house is still in the family today, owned collectively by the remaining descendants. But that house, like, when my mom was growing up, every Sunday, the whole family gathered to eat there. When I was growing up, even though I was not in Mississippi the whole time, returning to that home, filled with great aunts and uncles and cousins who lived very different lives than me, but like that experience of gathering there with these huge amounts of foods, and competing chicken and dressings between different aunts, like, it was very lively and really, really special. It was something that I wanted to have, but because I moved around so much, I didn't have that kind of like close-knit continuity of interactions with people or community.

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So gathering at that house is very important. And then when I was about ten, I really developed an interest in cooking, and my family was very supportive of like buying the ingredients, letting me just make a mess, telling me things that were not good, were good. And I would go to the library and get cookbooks. So like the first Indian food I ever made, I made at home with like not access to the right ingredients. But I really loved just looking at recipes from other places, and giving it a shot. And then another important food thing is my dad was, like, whenever things would be bad, like, he had started a business that was just completely going under, and he'd be like, "Get dressed. We're going out to eat."

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It was a way of restoring some dignity, and just being, like, having a moment of feeling good and normal and special.

Sarah Rodriguez: That makes a lot of sense, for sure. And so tell me about—did you know what you wanted to be when you were growing up? What were your ideas on that?

Betsy Chapman: No, I didn't, and I just sort of found my way by accident into what I do now, really, based on a real interest in food, and how it brings people together, and a real concern about who has access to good food, because we know there's like plenty of food. It's a matter of who can get ahold of it. And I really just had a stirring in my soul to, like, I want to do something around these topics, and also a realization, like, I don't know how to do anything.

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I don't know how to grow anything. And I just was like, "I'm going to work on a farm." And that's what led me here.

Sarah Rodriguez: Back to Oxford?

Betsy Chapman: Or, well, to the market.

Sarah Rodriguez: For sure. How did you end up coming back to Mississippi? Why Oxford?

Betsy Chapman: Well, I wanted to be close to my family, my mom, and my grandparents, and I wanted my daughter to grow up in one place, so she—I wanted her to have a different kind of growing-up experience than I had. And even though I think there are lots of benefits with

having to be shuffled around, you have to be resourceful and scrappy, and figure out how to fit in and deal with change.

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But my goal was to have us settled somewhere that I felt like would be a very nice place to grow up by the time she was starting kindergarten. And I had always liked Oxford. I had a friend who went to school here in the '90s, and I used to come and visit her. And I loved Oxford so much. I thought it was cool enough to, you know, especially for—[whispering] no, I don't want to say that. I thought it was a cool little town, and there would be access to resources that like a lot of small towns didn't have, because we have got the university here, and I felt like we would fit in, and so we just moved here.

Sarah Rodriguez: Do you remember when that was?

Betsy Chapman: It was in August of 2005.

Sarah Rodriguez: And where were you living before?

Betsy Chapman: We were in Arizona. I had moved—I had gotten a job as a features editor at a newspaper in a small, well, kind of a medium-sized resort town called Lake Havasu City, which is famous because this guy built a city in the middle of the desert, and then he brought the London Bridge over piece-by-piece to create a tourist attraction.

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So it was just like this kind of odd little town—

Sarah Rodriguez: Interesting.

Betsy Chapman: —with a huge lake that was formed by damming the Colorado River. But then I got homesick, and I really, really, like, I'm not—I just wanna say the food was not as good as the food back home, except for there was a lot of really good Mexican food.

Sarah Rodriguez: True.

Betsy Chapman: But I really just was very, very homesick from Mississippi, and I just wanted to get back.

Sarah Rodriguez: And what were you doing kind of in those early years in Oxford as you were getting readjusted?

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Betsy Chapman: Trying to figure out what I wanted to do, you know, trying to—that's what those years were. And a hobby of gardening turned into a really strong desire to learn and to experience the physical labor of producing food. So that's what led me to work at Yokna Bottoms Farm. I was out there for a few years, and then the position of the market manager director opened up, and so I felt like I had some skills from other, like, lots of different work experience that would make me kind of suited for that job.

Sarah Rodriguez: And what were those years like, getting to know kind of farming, and getting into it? What were some of the challenges, the successes?

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Betsy Chapman: Well, I learned so much. I mean, the most important, like, I mean, I learned a lot of like skill stuff. But also, it was very healthy for me to realize how strong I was, that I could lift, and I can make it through a long work day, and I can do a lot of different things.

I could adapt to different situations. And so I really crammed, like, I got a lot of learning experience in that because I was working in the field. I was not over like the production science-side as much. But I was actively in the field for planting, and weeding, and harvesting, and processing, and packaging, and transporting, and managing CSA program, and building restaurant sales, and doing the social media and marketing.

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So I got a lot. I got to do a lot of stuff, which I like. I can't stand to do the same thing every day or to be seated all day long. So really a valuable learning experience.

Sarah Rodriguez: For sure. And how did you first hear about—'cause that was when they were working on the Oxford City Market, correct—

Betsy Chapman: Yes.

Sarah Rodriguez: —when that first got started?

Betsy Chapman: Yeah, it was Oxford City Market, and I was at that very first Oxford City Market as a staff member of the farm.

Sarah Rodriguez: Of Yokna Bottoms?

Betsy Chapman: Of Yokna Bottoms Farm. So I've pretty much been at every market—

Sarah Rodriguez: Wow.

Betsy Chapman: —I mean, minus a few here and there over the years, but kind of there from the beginning.

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I think, I don't know exactly, maybe ten vendors. It wasn't huge. It was a handful of vendors. And then that position became available maybe like a year and a half after it started. So I was hired on, and at that time by the city, November 2014.

Sarah Rodriguez: And then what was that time like, you adjusting to not just participating in the market but being in charge of it? What were some of the things you were focused on?

Betsy Chapman: Well, it wasn't too long after I was hired that I learned that we were going to need to transition into an independently run organization no longer under the city.

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So that was a big focus is pulling together some stakeholders who could help navigate that, 'cause that's a pretty big task, and wasn't exactly what I thought would be my first challenge. But fortunately, a whole lot of people cared about making sure that the market continued, and jumped in to help make that happen. So that took, that process took about two years, and then we became the Oxford Community Market.

Sarah Rodriguez: And I'm curious, had you been to farmers markets before kind of getting involved with the one here in Oxford?

Betsy Chapman: I had just as a shopper. And then I'd been volunteering out at Yokna Bottoms. They did a work exchange CSA, so that's how I kind of got to know them out there.

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Sarah Rodriguez: And so kind of explain to me what—y'all became the Oxford Community Market. Can you explain maybe how it's kind of evolved over time? You're in a different location, right?

Betsy Chapman: Yes. We started out over on West Oxford Loop. It's now a lot of office buildings kind of across from where the barn is. And at that time, it was just empty lots, and the owner was very generous, and allowed us to use the space. And we had a really big tent that just stayed up during market season. At that time, the market was only maybe 32 weeks. The season, market season was only 32 weeks long, I think; maybe 36.

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So that's one of the things that has grown is not just the market, the customers, the number of vendors but also extending the market season to better reflect our growing season. So we were on the other side of town. We moved over to what was the—you know, the Old Armory was converted into a pavilion. In November 2015, it was the very last market day of the season, and that was our first opportunity to move in. And I was just like, "Well, let's just move. We're not gonna wait till April. Let's go ahead and just be here." Because it had taken a while to get things sorted so that we could use the pavilion.

Sarah Rodriguez: Do you remember that day, like, what that was like being in a new space?

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Betsy Chapman: I was excited because it had, like I said, had taken a while to arrange to rent the pavilion, and get all the permissions and everything. So I was just like, "Let's just move. This is gonna be a good fall market. People are shopping like for Thanksgiving. We need them to know we're moving. Let's use this as a marketing opportunity, and just go ahead and jump on over there." And I don't remember feeling too stressed out about it, 'cause we had—I don't

know. It's just like, we're just moving, and we just slipped in, and have been there every Tuesday pretty much ever since.

Sarah Rodriguez: Wow. And when did y'all switch to a full-year market, and what was around that decision?

Betsy Chapman: Well, I'll tell you what it was, is one of our longtime vendors said to me, he was like, "Betsy, the hens don't stop layin. I gotta sell eggs."

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And we were looking for opportunities for, like, could we be somewhere year round if there was just like a couple of vendors who wanted to set up? So that's what kind of inspired—it was like most of the things that we try to do is usually like vendor-led or very farmer-focused. We want our decisions to be like we're following the needs of the people who are the key stakeholders. So we kind of made a plan. It was sort of a three-year plan to expand the market season, and add additional programming. I had already—I think we started at 32 weeks, and I had an additional 4 weeks.

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So we used to end the Tuesday before Thanksgiving. And then one year, there was just like so much fall produce, I was like, "Why don't we just have—why don't we just keep going?" And everyone was like, "Okay." So we went to the Tuesday before Christmas, and it was great because these are key food-centric holidays. And then, Mr. [Stark] Aldridge kind of pushing me to figure out how to help him keep selling his eggs got me thinking like, well, if the farmers have

a place to sell, and they have time to scale-up production, and to prepare for season extension practices that would allow them to produce further into the year, I think we can do this.

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And so in January 2020, we had our first winter market season. We had produce January, February up until like the second week of March it dipped. But then strawberries came in end of March, early April. So we started that first winter market season maybe five to seven vendors. And the most important thing was that we wanted to make sure we had produce along with like eggs, meat, bread, the other stuff too. And then this past winter market season, it was looking like 16, 18, sometimes 20 vendors.

Sarah Rodriguez:

Betsy Chapman: They don't come out of the, you know, just purely out of the goodness of their hearts. Like, they have to make a living doing this. So it's something that if people are showing up and selling, they're not doing it as a favor.

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So I'm pleased that it's grown.

Sarah Rodriguez: And it's become so successful?

Betsy Chapman: Yeah.

Sarah Rodriguez: What has that been like, expanding vendors? Was expanding vendors kind of an idea of yours? How have you connected with different vendors? What has that process been like?

Betsy Chapman: Well, it's been different along the way. In the early days, it was like, "Please come. Just give this market a try. Please. Anybody." And then at some point, especially this year, I've been overwhelmed by the request to join the market. And I feel like our best recruitment tool for new vendors are our current vendors, because they do well, they know each other, they know their fellow farmers and food producers, and most of the vendors do other markets too.

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So if somebody goes to another market and says, "Hey, you should come to this market. It's nice," and then that's how—that's really how we get the most new vendors, is just word of mouth, and vendor-to-vendor communication.

Sarah Rodriguez: And when did y'all start doing—'cause you have the market, but then you also have outreach programs. Could you tell me about the outreach programs, and how those got started?

Betsy Chapman: Okay. So that was kind of like part of the vision from the beginning, is that this market would play a role in addressing food insecurity. And the very first way was to just set up a market-wide EBT system that allowed people to use their SNAP dollars.

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And just because I say this all the time, SNAP is, you know, sometimes people refer to SNAP as food stamps. It's a supplemental nutrition program that's based on income. And there were not a lot of opportunities for people who receive SNAP benefits to participate in the local food economy. When food stamps were issued in paper form, it was easy to u...they were easy to use

at markets. When there was a transition to the electronic system and plastic cards, most markets lacked that technology, and most farmers certainly didn't have it. So people kind of got cut out. So we looked at examples of markets that implemented programs that we could learn from and implement here. The second step was to match the SNAP dollars up to a certain amount.

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So first we matched up to \$10. Now we match up to \$20.

Sarah Rodriguez: Awesome.

Betsy Chapman: Another like early outreach program was to serve as a redemption site for the Senior and WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Voucher Program. And that's an extremely beneficial program to both people who need better access to food and to the farmers, 'cause these are just dollars being spent at our market while people who deserve better access to healthy food are getting it. So those are two early examples. And then over the years, we've added on. We started, in the early years, we would collect left—like ask farmers like, "If you have anything left, you can donate it, and we'll take it to the food pantry."

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Well, then I started thinking, why are we asking these people to give away this food when we might find a way for them to benefit and we could, at a reduced rate, at least purchase food that's left so that we are having an economic impact on our farmers, we're reducing food waste, and we are getting food to people in need? So we started a project to do that. We also invited customers, "While you're doing your shopping, if you wanna pick up an extra couple of tomatoes, you can put it in this bin. We'll carry it over to the food pantry." So the food pantry

has been a longtime important partner because we just—they have a distribution system, they have some storage, and they do their distributions on Wednesday morning. So we were able to bring fresh food from the Tuesday market over there for them to hand out.

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Because it's very important to us that that if we are—that any food that we distribute be of the highest quality possible. So it worked out very well. And then that has evolved now into regular neighborhood distributions in three neighborhoods of high need. We have been throughout the years carrying food to different income-based housing neighborhoods as we could get our hands on it. But what I wanted us to do was I wanted the neighbors to be able to rely on us and expect us, so they would know, well, this week, they're coming, so they maybe don't have to spend as much at the grocery store. And since March, we just added it up today, we have distributed around 4,400 pounds of local food, most of that purchased from the farmers, some donated by customers, and then we also partnered with the Oxford Community Garden to distribute what they grow for the food pantry in their community harvest plots, because the food pantry is currently closed for rent for renovations.

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So our hope is when the pantry reopens that we will continue taking to the pantry and also to the neighborhoods as well.

Sarah Rodriguez: And the garden is separate from the market?

Betsy Chapman: Yes. Everyone thinks that either the market runs the garden or the garden runs the market but—

Sarah Rodriguez: It's 'cause they're right next to each other.

Betsy Chapman: It's 'cause we're right next to each other. We're very good friends.

Actually, when we moved to the pavilion, we didn't have a place for a storage shed. And the community garden graciously has allowed us to keep our storage shed on their property since for years, which has made—we have to move a lot, like, hundreds and hundreds of pounds of equipment and supplies to put on this market every week.

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And it would be just so much harder if we had to, like, move that stuff across town then rather than across a parking lot.

Sarah Rodriguez: For sure.

Betsy Chapman: Anyhow, so we're good friends with the garden. They're very supportive of us.

Sarah Rodriguez: Nice. That's awesome.

Betsy Chapman: And then just other programs have evolved or just developed over the years. During COVID, like 2020, a lot of our outreach was kind of halted, like everyone. And we wanted to have some—maintain some neighborhood connections. So we decided to do an outdoor activity, and build a neighborhood garden at the CB Webb Townhouses, which is—I think it's like the largest Oxford Housing Authority neighborhood.

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And that little garden plot evolved into—I didn't know it was gonna turn into what it has turned into. So we built this small garden. Student and community volunteers came out. It was actually not my idea. I have to give full credit to a dear friend, Lydia Koltai, who had a vision of helping people build gardens. She was an herbalist, or she is an herbalist and homesteader type person, and she wanted to share that, those skills and knowledge. And so she reached out to me and said, "Would y'all want to do this?" And I was like, "Yes, we do." And we decided to call it the Neighborhood Resilience Garden Project. And so the idea was to build a garden that would belong to the community.

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But we couldn't really do the proper community building because we couldn't like gather people in the neighborhood together to be—to talk, like, "This is your garden. Do you want a garden? Do you want us—you're in char..." you know, we—'cause it was COVID, we just built the garden. And then even though we kind of flip-flopped it, we built the community around the garden, and it's resulted in some really wonderful connections and friendships, true friendships with the neighbors, and neighborhood leaders who serve as our community connections, coordinators. So if we're doing a food distribution, we just call Ms. Verna [sp] and say, "Tell your friends," and these ladies spread the word like wildfire. I mean, when we were giving out the senior vouchers the other day, I literally called three ladies, and I had three neighborhoods informed completely that we were coming to distribute vouchers.

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So we built a garden, and then we started partnering with the Greek houses to pick up their remaining food, and deliver meals there every Friday afternoon with a help of a whole crew of

student volunteers. And then especially during 2020 and 2021, we were bringing a lot of household supplies and non-perishables that customers would just bring us because they knew that we were going into neighborhoods where people might appreciate having some extra support. So this was really beyond the scope of our purpose, original purpose. But during a global pandemic, it felt appropriate to bring cleaning supplies and school supplies and all kinds of non-perishables and clothes.

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Whatever customers brought to the market on market day, we just took right on into the neighborhood. And then from that, developed kids' programming around the garden. And all of this is continuing still today, three years later.

Sarah Rodriguez: Wow.

Betsy Chapman: So it's a teaching garden. It's a gathering place. It's a place for us to connect with the neighbors so they know about the market, and they in turn are, you know, they're partners in this neighborhood-based project to inform their neighbors about the programs and services we offer.

Sarah Rodriguez: Nice. Wow.

Betsy Chapman: And then we started doing some cooking demos at the market. And the very first cooking demo, like, I did it.

Sarah Rodriguez: Oh, did you?

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Betsy Chapman: Right, because I didn't really know how to implement a cooking demonstration program. I was like, "Well, I can cook. I'll do it." Well, now we have chefs come in. We have had very talented home cooks. We've had our own vendors who are very skilled. And we have an actual cooking demonstration program at the market. And then that led to us doing a series of classes at the library called Farmers Market 101, because I was just like looking around at all the farmers, and the other vendors, the bakers, and I was like, these people know so much stuff, and they have such great personalities, and they love to be in front of people. That's why they're at the market. It's a big part of why they're there. I was like, they're like stars, and they should, like, we need to create a series of classes that showcase them, all the products available that are produced locally.

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And we have had so much fun doing those classes. We've made egg rolls in the public library. We have made jelly. We did Nigerian food. What else? We baked bread. We did a gardening class, and a beekeeping class, and a chicken-keeping class. And tomorrow we're doing a traditional southern cuisine with Ms. Rose [Hawkins], who sells fried pies at the market every week. And it's been great. The classes are free. That's something that's very important to us is access to resources, and enrichment opportunities, and educational opportunities. So the library is a perfect partner for that, and they sponsor the programs, and the vendors get a stipend for teaching the class. And we source all the ingredients for the class from the market, so the students get to make something and then sample.

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Usually, we have several ingredients for every class with—we identify the farm that they came from. So it's a great outreach and educational and marketing opportunity.

Sarah Rodriguez: Sure. And maybe this is, maybe on purpose this is a challenging question. Since you said that you don't like doing the same thing all the time, what is a typical day like for you?

Betsy Chapman: It's different every single day. I mean, it is, like, I'll tell you—well, today was food distribution day, so we had to get almost 400 pounds of food from one place to the other. And we set up a distribution table that we make it look like a pretty farmers market stand. 'cause we want it to look good, and we want it to look nice and be like a very happy experience.

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And I feel like making things look nice, and presenting them to our community is like a way of providing resources with dignity, and giving people choice in what they take home instead of just handing them a bag of food. So today was, you know, get up. I have to do social media first thing in the morning. That's usually how I start, to make sure our posts are kind of on a schedule. And then get the supplies from the shed. Get the tables. Get the stuff. Get the tablecloths. I do not believe in an uncovered table, so I like to use tablecloths at everything that we do. And set up the food. Text our community connections coordinators we're here, and the neighbors start coming out. Tomorrow we will be doing the Southern cooking class in the library.

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And just every day is different based on what we have going on. Every week, of course, we do the market on Tuesdays, and then we are usually doing one, two, or three other events or

activities throughout the week. Last week, we did a resource fair with Communicare, which is the local mental health organization, and we distributed 512 pounds of produce at that, which they sponsored, and was great. I would much rather give out fresh produce than like plastic stuff with our logo on it. It just makes more sense. And it was a very big and diverse crowd, so lots of great exposure for the market, and good food for the people.

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But every day is different. We do lots of work with students, student organizations, classes. Last semester, I worked with a social work class. I worked with a Southern studies class, a food place in Power [sp]. I think that was the semester before. I usually work with a marketing intern or a marketing class. I've worked with a social entrepreneurship class. So there's lots of discipline... and then nutrition students, of course, lots of disciplines where students can get real world experience, because like the market is just like so many different things. But every day is different. Every week is different. Sometimes we are just hustling to meet deadlines, and get grants applications turned in, or we're organizing an activity, or we're working on a long-term project kind of all at the same time but with a lot of different people and groups.

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I feel like that's been the most wonderful thing about the market is just like a magnet for good people, community-minded people, people who want something to do, one way to contribute on, and there's so many opportunities for people to participate.

Sarah Rodriguez: For sure.

Betsy Chapman: But, yeah, every day is different. I mean, like crazy things have happened. I went home last week after we did a cooking class, realized a couple hours later I had a stick of butter in my purse that was used during the class, that was for use during the class. But like every market day I come home, I've got like bungee cords in my pockets, or like a sweet potato has fallen into my computer bag.

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Sarah Rodriguez: [Laughter]

Betsy Chapman: So it's a lot of fun, and it's something different every day.

Sarah Rodriguez: So you've talked about the kind of community outreach programs, and some of the people you've worked with. What has it been like, 'cause you're seeing a big chunk of Oxford week-to-week, not just at the markets but through distribution and all that stuff? What has it been like kind of interacting with all kinds of different people in the surrounding area, through vendors, through patrons, etc.?

Betsy Chapman: Well, personally, it's really incredible to get to know that many people, like, just across all sectors of the community. That's not something I've had before, and I think I've mentioned early on the moving around all the time. I longed for that sense of community that the market has given me.

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And a lot of times, you're just kind of, like, we're in our bubbles. But the market is like a really big bubble, so it's got—like, I've said this to people, and they've said it to me, like, we wouldn't know each other if not for the market. We met here. People meet here and become friends. They

meet here and become business partners. It's just remarkable to have to know so many people through this just one thing, and it's really just a testament to what happens when you make a space for that in your community, and you really invite everybody in. And there's not that—it's a very unique thing, you know?

Sarah Rodriguez: For sure. And what—you kind of talked about how you developed an interest in kind of food and accessibility as an important kind of purpose to work behind.

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What do you think it is about—could you speak maybe more specifically to what you think it is about food that is that kind of connector? That's a very large question.

Betsy Chapman: It is.

Sarah Rodriguez: So [inaudible 0:44:20] to answer.

Betsy Chapman: Food just does bring people together. I mean, it brings a family around the table or friends sitting together and sharing a meal. That's just what we do. And then it builds community in a larger sense. If you think about church gatherings or family reunions or like fish fries out in the country, like, that's just what happens.

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When you sit down to eat together, you just connect on a different level, and there's not too much to argue about when you're sharing a meal. It's something that we all have in common, and it tells, really, food is telling the story of who we are, how we got here, how this food got here. It's kind of some of the first ways we learn about culture and history are through the foods

that we eat. So, I mean, I don't know why food brings people together but it clearly does, and the market is just so wildly diverse. I mean, it's just across all spectrums of folks.

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It's really cool to see students interacting with farmers who are in their 70s or 80s, and have been, you know, their farming land that's been in their family for a couple hundred years. It just provides this really unique opportunity for, like, just everyone is intersecting.

Sarah Rodriguez: Definitely. And what do you think, are there any kind of maybe favorite moments or favorite memories that you have off the top of your head from the market? The stick of butter, that's a good one. [Laughter]

Betsy Chapman: That was the first. There are so many, I mean, so many, it's hard to narrow down. I could give a recent one.

Sarah Rodriguez: Sure.

Betsy Chapman: My grandmother passed away recently. She was 93.

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She was a really special person, a very strong woman, a very healthy woman, to the end. And on her 93rd birthday, she visited the market, and the whole market sang *Happy Birthday* to her, which is not uncommon. We do sing *Happy Birthday* to people all the time. It's really hard to get a whole market to sing together on key. But we have one of our vendors who kind of herds and leads the singing. So that's a recent special memory. There's just, I mean, like every week is something different. It's just the quality of interactions that happen there, I don't have anything

to compare it to. It's kind of like—and I've heard people say this. It's kind of like a weekly family reunion where people can also make a living and have fun.

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And it's one of the few places you go where everyone's just very excited to be there, from the customers rushing in at 2:00, even though we don't open until 3:00, to the vendors, to the people who are volunteering, or the musicians who are playing, or the people who are hosting the hospitality tent. It's just really lively and special. And where else are you gonna like say hello to 700 people in a three-hour span of time, and have those special interactions just kind of crammed into one little market day?

Sarah Rodriguez: For sure, it's definitely—I think that's a good way of putting it. What do you see for the future of the market right now?

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Betsy Chapman: I think, you know, this is kind of vague, but like holding onto that quality that makes it special, and makes people love it, is really important. You don't want to lose what's working while you grow. And I think the thing the market needs the most is a permanent location. There are so many good examples of markets that are thriving where they have space to operate, to do their programs, and to grow. So that is my biggest wish for the market is that we would find a space that we could, you know, so we could have just that security, so that we can preserve this pretty special thing that we have got going on.

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Sarah Rodriguez: So that's kind of the big focus?

Betsy Chapman: Yes.

Sarah Rodriguez: Nice.

Betsy Chapman: Yeah, while continuing to like, of course, we want to attract more customers, of course we want our customer base and our vendors to reflect our entire community, and we wanna keep working on that so that the message is loud and clear that farmers markets are for everyone. This is not about just pretty Instagram pictures. The local food movement is bigger and deeper and more important than that. And we have to work really hard to make sure that everyone is at the table. So that's a big focus for me, well, not me but for the market.

Sarah Rodriguez: Sure. And that's pretty much my last question. Is there anything I didn't ask about that you wanna talk about? Any memories that popped up? Anything at all?

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Betsy Chapman: No, I think you asked a lot of good questions.

Sarah Rodriguez: Good.

Betsy Chapman: I mean, there's so many things I could talk about. Like once—I'll just tell this real quick.

Sarah Rodriguez: Sure.

Betsy Chapman: We've gotten more organized around our holiday activities. But in the early days, we didn't have a lot of money to spend. We wanted to make the holidays special. So I asked one of our vendors would they bring their goat to the market. And they put like a jingle

bell on the goat, and the goat got loose at the market, and was eating like bags of bread off of people's tables, and it wasn't the quaint holiday experience that we hoped it would be.

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But that's just another example of how you never know what to expect from the market or at the market, and that's one of the things that makes it especially fun for me.

Sarah Rodriguez: Definitely. I'm sad I missed that. [Laughter]

Betsy Chapman: We've gotten better.

Sarah Rodriguez: [Laughter]

Betsy Chapman: We've gotten a lot more—a little more refined.

Sarah Rodriguez: The goat stayed [inaudible 0:52:19]? [Laughter]

Betsy Chapman: But it's still very much a DIY group project kind of vibe to pull something like this off every week.

Sarah Rodriguez: Sure, which I'm sure makes it a lot of fun.

Betsy Chapman: It does. And it gives people like a way, like, everyone wants to contribute something in their life or their community, and there's so many ways that people get to do that, whether it's bringing a goat, or cooking up something for one of our market potlucks, which are—they were kind of supposed to be for the vendors, but then the customers just started getting in line. So that's something that we do.

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Well, that's kind of a market tradition is throughout the year, we'll have several potluck meals, and kind of just include everybody.

Sarah Rodriguez: Awesome. Well, thank you so much.

Betsy Chapman: Yeah, thank you.

Sarah Rodriguez: I appreciate it.

[End]