



*Community
Engagement
Through Cooperative
Development*



National Rural Grocery Summit 2024

IN OUR GRIT, OUR GLORY™

What do we mean
when we say
“cooperative”?

According to the Oxford
Dictionary: Working or
acting together for a
common purpose or benefit.





A Cooperative business is a user-owned and user-controlled business formed to benefit its member owners.

One Member, One Vote





piggly wiggly



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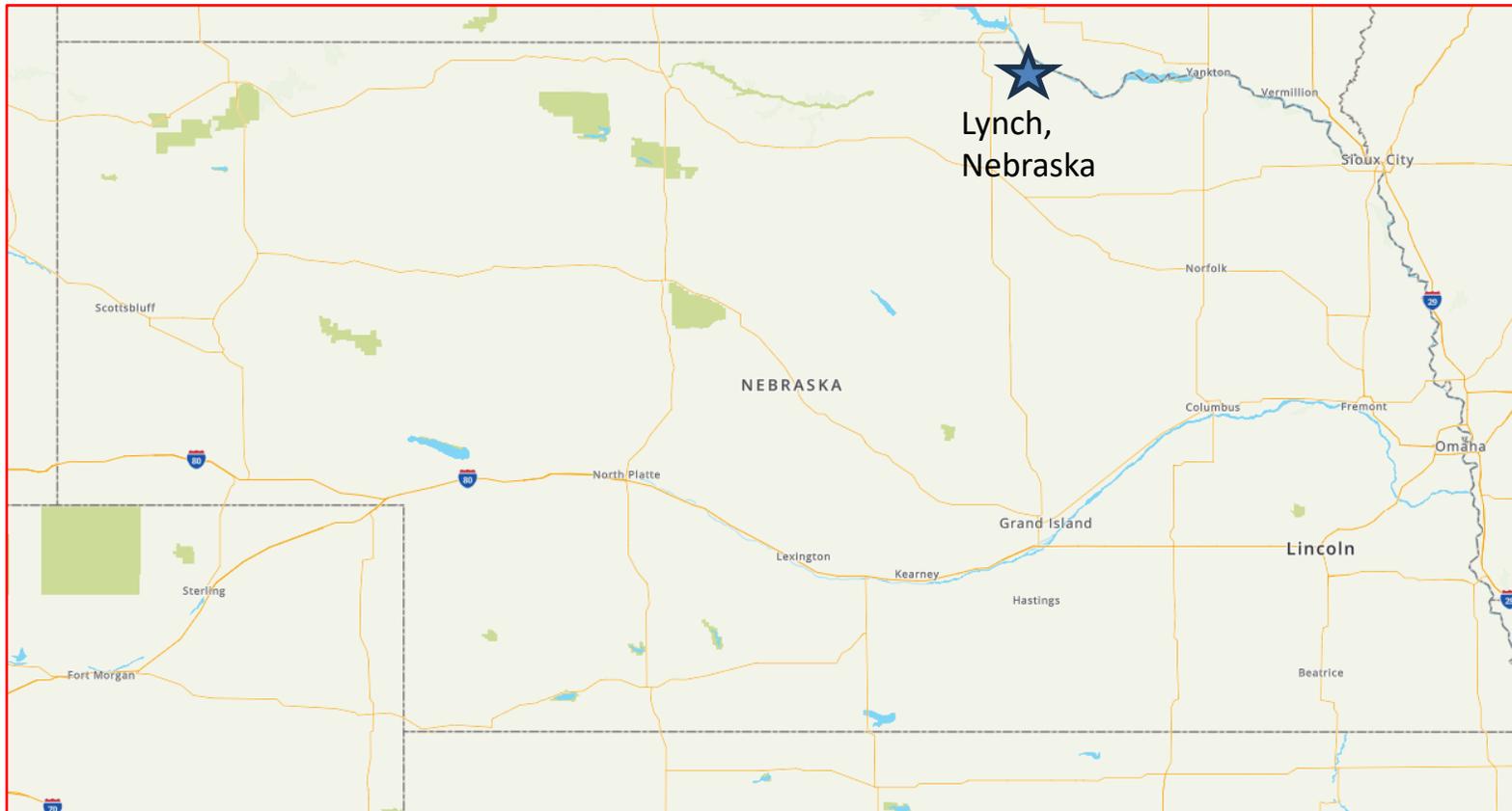


Lynch Nebraska

Located in North Central Nebraska near the South Dakota border.

Population 220.

Lost their grocery store in early 2020.





Melanie Stetson Freeman/Staff

Barricades warn motorists that the bridge over the Niobrara River is out on US route 281, on April 1, 2019 near Lynch, Nebraska. Many bridges were taken out by flooding and ice flows, making travel difficult in the area.

Credit: <https://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Society/2019/0405/When-dam-burst-here-s-how-one-Nebraska-town-met-the-epic-floods>



NEBRASKA COOPERATIVE
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Melanie Stetson Freeman/Staff

Volunteer Garland Gehlsen stands inside Lynch Community Hall, which is filled with donations to help flood victims recover. Volunteers and donations flowed in from around the state.

Credit: <https://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Society/2019/0405/When-dam-burst-here-s-how-one-Nebraska-town-met-the-epic-floods>





Lincoln, Neb., March 23, 2022—According to the USDA, a “food desert” is any rural community more than 10 miles from its nearest food retailer. In early 2020, Lynch became a food desert when its only grocery store closed. In a community where the closest stoplight is 45 miles away, locals didn’t want grocery shopping to become a road trip. So they decided to make some changes.

Article by Russell Shaffer, Rural Prosperity Nebraska

<https://ruralprosperityne.unl.edu/community-cooperation-lynch-opens-cooperative-grocery-store>



NE Nebraska village of Lynch working to reopen grocery

BY AUSTIN SVEHLA

Updated 12:01 AM CDT, September 18, 2021

Share 

LYNCH, Neb. (AP) — A Boyd County village is launching a plan to eliminate its status as a “food desert” after its only grocery store closed in March 2020.

Valley Foods Cooperative, a grocery store capitalization fund headed by Paul Fisher, is actively selling shares and accepting donations in hopes of bringing a grocery store back to Lynch later this year.

Lynch, Nebraska's Remote Community Opens A New Grocery Store Together

By Melissa Rosales, Reporter/Producer Nebraska Public Media | March 28, 2022, 8 a.m. · 2 min read

A community of cooperation: Lynch opens cooperative grocery store



Valley Foods Cooperative is helping Lynch thrive five years after historic floods



Lynch grocery

Tiny Nebraska town gets boost from food co-op

Bennet Goldstein World-Herald Staff Writer Apr 11, 2022 Updated May 24, 2023 0



It's important to have a grocery store in the community to attract more residents, Lynch's Valley Foods Cooperative President Paul Fisher said. (Photo Courtesy of Russell Shaffer, Rural Prosperity Nebraska)

Willingness to Work Together

- Are you willing to make decisions together?
- Are there a group of people interested and willing to invest the time and energy?
- Are you willing to reach out to the community to be members of a potential community supported/cooperative?
- Will you listen to the community members and represent the community in the process?
- Is all of the community represented?



Community Engagement in Lynch



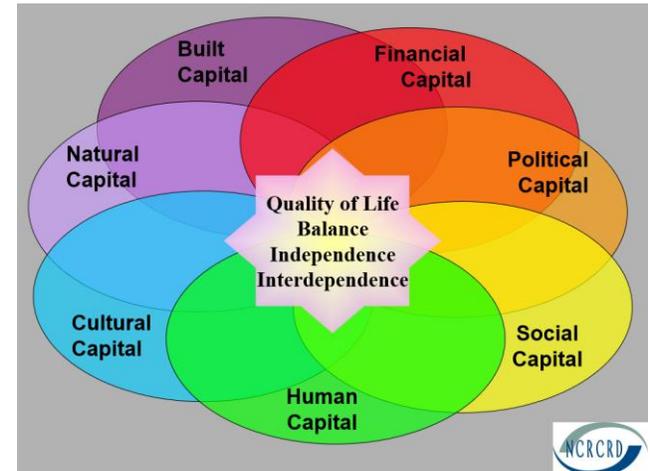
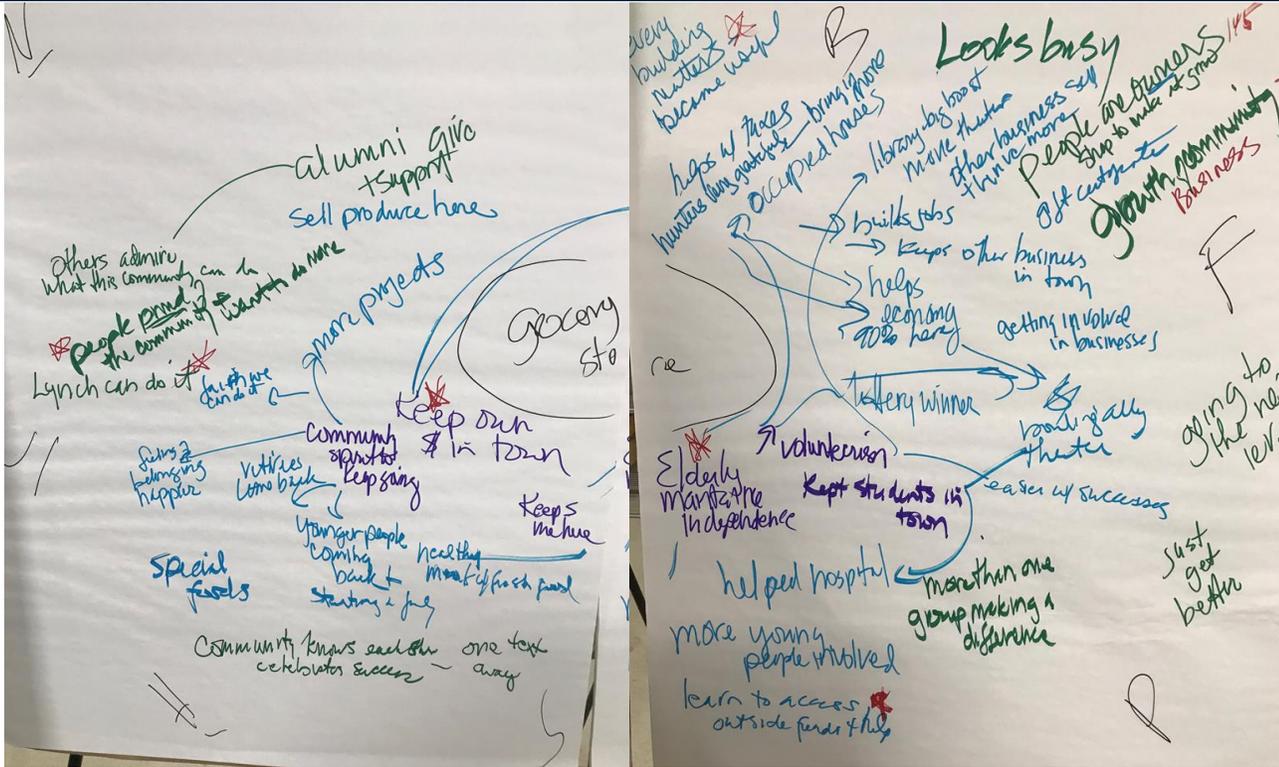
- **Inform** – Weekly updates were shared on process throughout community and in the county newspaper on major decisions.
- **Consult** – Community grocery survey conducted – 88.9% indicated moderately, very or extremely important to have store. 70% indicated interest in investing. *Input was considered, used and shared with community.* Additional one-on-one conversations were held. To ensure everyone received, information was mailed.
- **Involve** – Once incorporated, the community meetings were held to allow community members to ask questions and to start investment. Community identified processes.
- **Collaborate** – Community members collaborated and part of solution in building remodel, etc. Worked with local/regional business owners.
- **Empower** – Steering team empowered to make decisions. Raised \$140,000; 144 members!

Steering Team/Board of Directors met weekly.



Ripple Mapping

Think about when the grocery store closed...and then think about the idea of the community coming together.



Lynch can do it. --- more willing to work on the project because this store and want to do more. Lynch Ripple Mapping Participant/Community Member





Valley Foods Cooperative

A grocery store is the heart that keeps small, rural communities like ours alive. Research of small, rural towns like ours show that without a grocery store, it is difficult to attract new residents. This leaves the fate of the community questionable.



Benefits of a Cooperatively Owned Business

- Preserves a town's local character.
- Local ownership enables those who feel the impact of a decision to make the decisions affecting the business.
- Through operating the enterprise, neighbors understand the economics of operating rural grocery store.
- Community-owned stores support local economies.
- Complement other local businesses.
- Access to food in community.





**NEBRASKA COOPERATIVE
DEVELOPMENT CENTER**

*Dedicated to assisting people prosper in rural
Nebraska through all stages of cooperative business
development*

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