



SOUTH CAROLINA FAMILY AND COMMUNITY LEADERS

Affiliated with National Volunteer Outreach Network, Country Women's Council, U.S.A., Associated Country Women of the World and in partnership with Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service
SCFCL website: <http://www.scfcl.com>

Leader Training Guide

Food Deserts

What can we do about food insecurity/food deserts?

Objectives:

- Participants will be able to identify the terms food insecurity and food deserts.
- Participants can make healthier food choices within a food desert.
- Participants will understand how to be more food secure.

Lesson Overview/Introduction:

13.5 million Americans live in food deserts, including over a million in South Carolina. Many people in the United States do not have an issue purchasing groceries, including fresh food options that are convenient and affordable. However, the distance to buy groceries is much farther for some Americans, particularly in rural areas. Food deserts arose because homes were isolated from convenient, affordable, quality food.

Lesson:

What is a food desert?

The USDA defines a food desert "as a low-income tract where many residents do not have easy access to a supermarket or larger grocery store. Food deserts are created when a neighborhood or certain community becomes less profitable for businesses to thrive there. This leaves the people who live within these "deserts" without access to good, quality food. This became a trend when different-class families left the rural areas. When this started happening in minority urban communities, food deserts began to pop up in areas such as Columbia, Greenville, and Charleston. Food deserts tend to be found in more rural areas, with fewer people and fewer employment opportunities, which makes the area unattractive for profitable/sustainable businesses.

Many of these food deserts come about due to the costs of opening up a business, such as a grocery store, in areas without many resources or opportunities. These areas are not considered areas where a business could start and thrive. This leaves the residents of this community with a significant hole in the food system. Transportation can be another barrier for residents within a food desert. Many people who reside in food deserts do not have access to a reliable vehicle, and public transportation is not available. This also limits their ability to utilize any resources that may be available with no way to food banks or pantries.

What is food insecurity?

Food insecurity is when people do not have access to food that they need in order to be healthy. The USDA defines it as when people do not have enough to eat and have no idea where their next meal will come from. Over 44 million people in the United States, including 13 million children, experience food insecurity yearly (Hunger and Food Insecurity, 2024). Food insecurity has many causes, such as outrageously high living costs, outrageously priced housing, and low-paying jobs. People in poverty cannot afford to buy food regularly and may reside in food deserts and are unable to find affordable, nutritious options. Food insecurity, or the lack of access to nutritious foods, will severely affect people's health and quality of life. When one experiences food insecurity, they often experience malnutrition and chronic conditions like diabetes and heart disease.

One resource is Feeding America, which works hard to help people experiencing food insecurity get food and resources by increasing access to food in those communities. Their motto is a thriving economy that solves hunger. Many people are careful with their money, but with the cost of living today, they cannot afford to live in areas where there are affordable, healthy options.

How to make healthier food options within a food desert and be more food secure:

- There has been an active concern for rural areas and the availability of supermarkets and grocery stores. People who live in these rural areas become isolated from low-cost, quality food options. The options in these areas tend to be small convenience stores, gas stations, and restaurants, which have limited options for things included in a quality diet. There is still a way to pick better options when only close to a dollar or gas food store. For example, dollar stores still have canned and frozen options for fruit and vegetables. It is essential to notice salt content in canned options and buy low salt, or no salt added when available. Also, pay attention to the sugars in canned and frozen fruits. Buy fresh produce in season. Prepare it yourself; sliced, chopped, and shredded fresh fruits and vegetables cost more.

Planning will allow you to save money by doing the following:

- Make a grocery shopping list
 - Write down all foods needed for meals and snacks for the week.
 - Write down the amount required next to each food.
 - Check the refrigerator, freezer and cupboards. Cross off items you have on hand.
 - Take the grocery list, a pen and coupons to the store
 - Don't shop while hungry. It's easier to stick to your list.

How to save money at the grocery store:

- Use weekly grocery store flyers
- Buying in bulk and freezing until ready to use
- Save coupons and use them as appropriate
- While at the store, compare prices between the store brand and the National brand

- Calculate the unit price of two different items (Store and National brand)
Here is how you can calculate: Take the total cost of the item and divide it by the total size of the item:
Example: For a National brand, a Total cost of \$1.49 for a 15-ounce can is .09 or 9 cents per ounce (Divide 1.49 by 15)
For a store brand, a total cost of \$0.79 for a 15-ounce can is .05 or 5 cents per ounce.

You can visit the [food desert map for South Carolina](#) to learn more about accessibility in more rural areas. This map helps to identify agencies and partners in underserved areas and offers strategies to increase access to healthy food options.

Other options within a food desert consist of farmers markets (if available within the community) that may take SNAP/EBT. More markets are being developed in rural areas to help eliminate these barriers in many communities. Mobile food markets or hubs also bring fresh, affordable food choices into the rural area. Thankfully, this topic has been visited repeatedly as we partner with community resources to offer more nutritious options.

Lesson Summary:

The lesson defines the Food desert and Food insecurity and how families can be food-secured and make healthy choices by managing the resources. Being familiar with resources and opportunities available when residing in a food desert will enhance accessibility and affordability for affordable, nutritious food.

Suggested Activities:

Activity 1: Visit a local food hub or mobile supermarket. This is an excellent opportunity to see if SNAP/EBT is taken and what healthy options (that may even be grown locally) are available.

Activity 2: Have two types of canned food (one store and one national brand and ask participants to calculate the price of two different brands of the items.)

Activity 3: Ask participants to answer these questions

One thing I will do this week to plan meals and snacks is:

One thing I will do this week when I shop for food is:

One thing I will do to save money on groceries this week is:

Suggested Materials:

Canned Foods (Store and National brand) for participants to compare the price
Handouts with questions to answer, pen or pencil

Food desert map of South Carolina:

<https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/d22032e5879d42a08f0d8061e1029891/>

Lesson Prepared by: Shana Madden, MPA, Regional Coordinator, EFNEP Associate, smadden@clemson.edu

Lesson Review by: Dr. Tarana Khan, Program Team Director, EFNEP, Clemson Extension Service.

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Eating Smart Being Active: EFNEP adult curriculum: <https://eatingsmartbeingactive.colostate.edu/>