



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 Insecurity and Food Deserts (Part 1)

Objectives:

Upon completion of the lesson, participants will be able to:

- Define food insecurity and food deserts.
- Analyze and identify food deserts in local communities.
- Identify the cause and effect of food insecurity and food deserts.

Lesson Overview/Introduction:

Although the United States has been called the “land of plenty”, more than 12.8% (17.0 million) of U.S. households in 2022 experienced food insecurity at times during the year, and 44.2 million people lived in food-insecure households, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service. Food insecurity and food deserts are a large and complex problem. This lesson will discuss food insecurities and deserts and where they may appear in our communities.

Lesson:

Food security can be measured at the household, community, and national levels. Community food security deals with features of a community that might affect people's ability to get enough healthy food.

Activity 1: Have participants brainstorm what some of these features might be.

Examples:

- Supermarket and farmer's market locations
- Number of local food locations
- Transportation Resources
- Affordability of healthy food
- Availability of healthy food

Despite the efforts of nonprofits and government agencies through the years, the issue of food insecurity remains a critical concern in 2024. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic

Research Service reported that through their research through 2020-2022, about an average of 37.8 million people in America face food insecurity.

Food insecurity is when individuals lack reliable access to sufficient, affordable, and nutritious foods for an everyday, active life. It's not just about the absence of food but the absence of nutritious food. This challenge transcends geographic and socioeconomic boundaries, affecting urban and rural communities. Food-insecure households struggle to provide sufficient nutritious foods, leading to health and social issues.

The term "food desert" describes a community with low access to healthy food.

Ask: What images does the term "food desert" make your picture? What criteria might we use to determine whether a community is a food desert?

Areas with limited access to healthy food are often defined using these four criteria:

- Household income
- Distance from a supermarket
- Vehicle ownership
- Availability of healthy food in local stores

Food deserts are geographic areas where residents' access to affordable, healthy food options (especially fresh fruits and vegetables) is restricted or nonexistent due to the absence of grocery stores within convenient traveling distance.

Activity 2: Have participants analyze maps demonstrating food availability throughout your county.

Have a Community Food Availability Map for your participants highlighting food resources and stores in your area. Discuss the following questions:

- What is the name of this community?
- From what type of store(s) do you think most residents in this community get the majority of their food? How might this differ among residents with vehicle access versus those without access?
- Does this store(s) generally offer various healthy options at affordable prices, such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and beans?
- Based on this information, how would you describe how difficult it is for community residents to get enough healthy food? Would you consider this community a food desert? Why or Why not?
- What additional information might help you better measure how difficult it is for residents of this community to get enough healthy food?

Activity 3: Have the group list causes of food insecurity and potential effects. If the group needs assistance, provide ideas from the following lists:

List the causes of food insecurity:

- Poverty (i.e., lack of money to buy healthy food)
- Lack of grocery stores offering healthy options
- Lack of access to a supermarket within a mile of their home.
- Lack of transportation to grocery stores
- low-income areas have more convenience stores or corner stores, which tend to lack healthy items.

List potential effects:

- People experiencing hunger and food insecurity are likely to choose foods with the most calories per dollar, which are often not the healthiest options (e.g., fast food)
- Low fruit and vegetable intake
- Obesity
- Diabetes
- Nutrient deficiencies
- Other health issues
- Children may be more likely to experience anxiety, depression, poorer academic performance, absences from school, and other physical and behavioral issues.

Accessing healthy food is challenging for many Americans—particularly those in low-income neighborhoods and rural areas. Without access to healthy food, people living in food deserts may be at higher risk of diet-related conditions, such as obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and micro-nutrient deficiencies.

Lesson Summary:

Food insecurity is when individuals lack reliable access to sufficient, affordable, and nutritious foods for an everyday, active life. Food deserts are geographic areas where residents' access to affordable, healthy food options (especially fresh fruits and vegetables) is restricted or nonexistent due to the absence of grocery stores within convenient traveling distance. Experts say that individuals and families living with food insecurities and in food deserts may be at a higher risk of obesity, diabetes, and other health issues in addition to mental, physical and behavioral problems.

Suggested Activities:

Warm Up Activity:

Ask the group what they think the terms food insecurity and food desert mean. Have them write a brief definition. Have volunteers share and compare their definitions

Lesson Activities:

Activities 1-3 are highlighted in yellow throughout the lesson.

Suggested Materials:

- Access to the Internet or prepared information
- Map of supermarkets throughout your area/county

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Sources/References:

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<https://convoyofhope.org/articles/food-for-people/>

Food Empowerment Project. (n.d.) *Food Deserts*.
<https://foodispower.org/access-health/food-deserts/>

Johns Hopkins University. Foodspan. (2023) *The Hunger Gap*
<https://foodspan.org/site/default/files/2023-06/lesson14-hunger-lessonplan.pdf>

United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service. (2023) *Food Security in the U.S.* <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-u-s/key-statistics-graphics/>

Additional Resources:

- The Grocery Gap: Who Has Access to Healthy Food and Why It Matters: Report from Policy Link and the Food Trust.
- United States Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service: The site includes a Food Desert Locator (Maps and provides data about food deserts in the United States) and a Food Environment Atlas (Provides an overview of a community's ability to access healthy food).
- Feeding America: Food Insecurity Map: The site includes a map of food insecurity in the United States.