

# Where's The Food

A Report on Food Insecurity and  
Food Access in Passaic County.



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# Overview



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- Project Background
- Methodology
- Findings
  - By geographic region
  - By at-risk group
- Food for Thought

# Four Key Areas of Inquiry



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- **Who** experiences food insecurity in Passaic County?
- **How severe** is food insecurity among these populations?
- **Where** are geographic areas of food insecurity within Passaic County?
- **What factors** contribute to food insecurity within Passaic County?

# Assessment Components



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1. **Review of existing Data:** Applied the most recent USDA food insecurity research statistics to 2010 Passaic County census data; gathered additional data
2. **Surveys**
  - **At-Risk/Community Survey:** 911 respondents; distributed at 27 locations in 13 municipalities through community agencies and food retail outlets; offered in Spanish and Arabic
  - **Key Informant Online Survey:** Conducted via Zoomerang to individuals living or working in Passaic County who work in food system or with at-risk populations; 51 completed
3. **Mapping:** Contracted with PolicyMap, an online mapping service. Created 22 maps based on geographic area and at-risk group

# Assessment Components



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## 4. Focus Group Meetings

### Key Informants

Location	Region	Date	Attendance
Our Lady Queen of Peace, W. Milford, NJ	Up County	July 13, 2011	15
Oasis, Paterson, NJ	Down County	July 26, 2011	12
Public Safety Academy, Wayne, NJ	Down County	August 11, 2011	9
<b>TOTAL ATTENDANCE</b>			<b>36</b>

### At Risk Populations

Location	Region	Date	Attendance
Senior Center, Totowa, NJ	Down County	July 28, 2011	13
EFNEP/WorkFirst NJ, Paterson NJ	Down County	August 12, 2011	11
Wanaque Feeds the Hungry, Wanaque NJ	Up County	August 17, 2011	14
Children's Day Nursery/Family Center	Down County	October 28, 2011	9
<b>TOTAL ATTENDANCE</b>			<b>47</b>



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# PASSAIC COUNTY FOOD INSECURITY PROFILE





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# What is food security and insecurity?

**Food security** for a household means access by all members at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life.

At minimum:

- The ready availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods.
- Assured ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways (without resorting to emergency food supplies, scavenging, stealing, or other coping strategies.)

**Food insecurity** is limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways.



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## Methods of Estimation Used:

1. Applying USDA food insecurity statistics to Passaic County 2010 census data;
2. Finding the percent of individuals in these groups who reported using two or more food insecurity coping mechanisms on the At-Risk Survey and applying that percentage to the population, and
3. Noting which groups are reported likely to experience food insecurity according to the Key Informant survey.



## Coping Strategies

Bought cheaper food because there wasn't enough money to buy usual food

Used credit or savings to buy food because there wasn't enough money to do so

Skipped or delayed paying bills in order to buy food

Got help from relatives or friends to get food

Went to community agency or religious organization for food

Got food assistance from government agency

Ate smaller meals because there wasn't money to buy enough food

Skipped meals because there wasn't money to buy enough food



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## According to USDA statistics:

4.4% of all Passaic County households – 7,335 households – are estimated to have low food security

2.1% of all Passaic County households – 3500 households – are estimated to have very low food security

As measured by use of two or more coping mechanisms, however, **the number could actually be more than twice that amount.**



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# OVERALL COUNTY FINDINGS

## Groups with greatest food insecurity by use of coping mechanisms:

1. Native Americans (62%)
2. Unemployed/low wage workers and Disabled (tie, 47% each)
3. Recent immigrants and/or Language not English (42%)
4. Single parents with children and African Americans (tie, 40% each)

## Top factors contributing to food insecurity:

1. Affordability
  - Lack of income
  - High cost of living (housing, transportation, medical)
  - High food costs
2. Accessibility
  - Transportation issues
  - Difficulty obtaining benefits
  - Disability making access to food difficult

Group	USDA statistical food insecurity estimate		Number of individuals est. food insecure using at-risk survey %		Key informant survey respondents who consider this group likely to experience food insecurity	
	#	%	#	% of resps.	# of resps.	% of resps.
Single parents with children (households)	3,302	17%	7,769	40%	40	82%
Adults living alone	2,639	7%	10,935	29%	29	58%
Elderly (over age 65)	n/a	n/a	11,462	19%	41	82%
Disabled	n/a	n/a	23,088	47%	37	74%
Unemployed/underemployed (low wage and part time)	n/a	n/a	13,116	47%	42	86%
Recent immigrants and/or language not English	n/a	n/a	20,604	42%	23	46%
African-Americans	7,715	12%	25,718	40%	27	55%
Hispanic/Latinos	27,852	15%	63,130	34%	24	49%
Native American	n/a	n/a	2,076	62%	7	15%



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## People facing special food security challenges:

- People with dietary restrictions (medical or religious)
- People with disabilities (including addictions)
- Older people raising grandchildren, or whose adult children have moved back home
- Undocumented immigrants
- People who work seasonally (such as construction workers) or not all months of the year (such as school workers)
- People with high medical expenses due to chronic conditions
- Ex-offenders

# Severity of food insecurity among at-risk/ community survey respondents



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52% of survey respondents used 1 - 3 coping mechanisms (less severe food insecurity)

15% used 4 – 6 coping mechanisms (more severe food insecurity)

13% reported skipping meals because there wasn't enough food (more severe food insecurity)

35% indicated that it is harder to get enough food this year compared to a year ago.

# Important differences up-county and down-county



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## Up-County

- Much higher % of at-risk groups use coping mechanisms
- Rates of more severe food insecurity more than double that of county as a whole
- Accessibility is a major problem, especially for the elderly, disabled, adults living alone, and those without access to a car
- Food insecurity tends to concentrate in scattered areas of financial disparity surrounded by relative wealth

## Down-County

- Over half of residents live on incomes at or below 200% of federal poverty level, and/or below living wage
- More people are food insecure due to larger population
- Food insecurity is less severe down-county, possibly due to greater density of food sources and support services
- Affordability is biggest problem due to low incomes, high living costs, and transportation costs
- Quality of food in smaller bodegas is suspect, and prices are hiked at key times of month



## Legend

Year

2011

Variable

Type

Insufficient Data

LSA

NOT LSA

Shaded by: Block Group

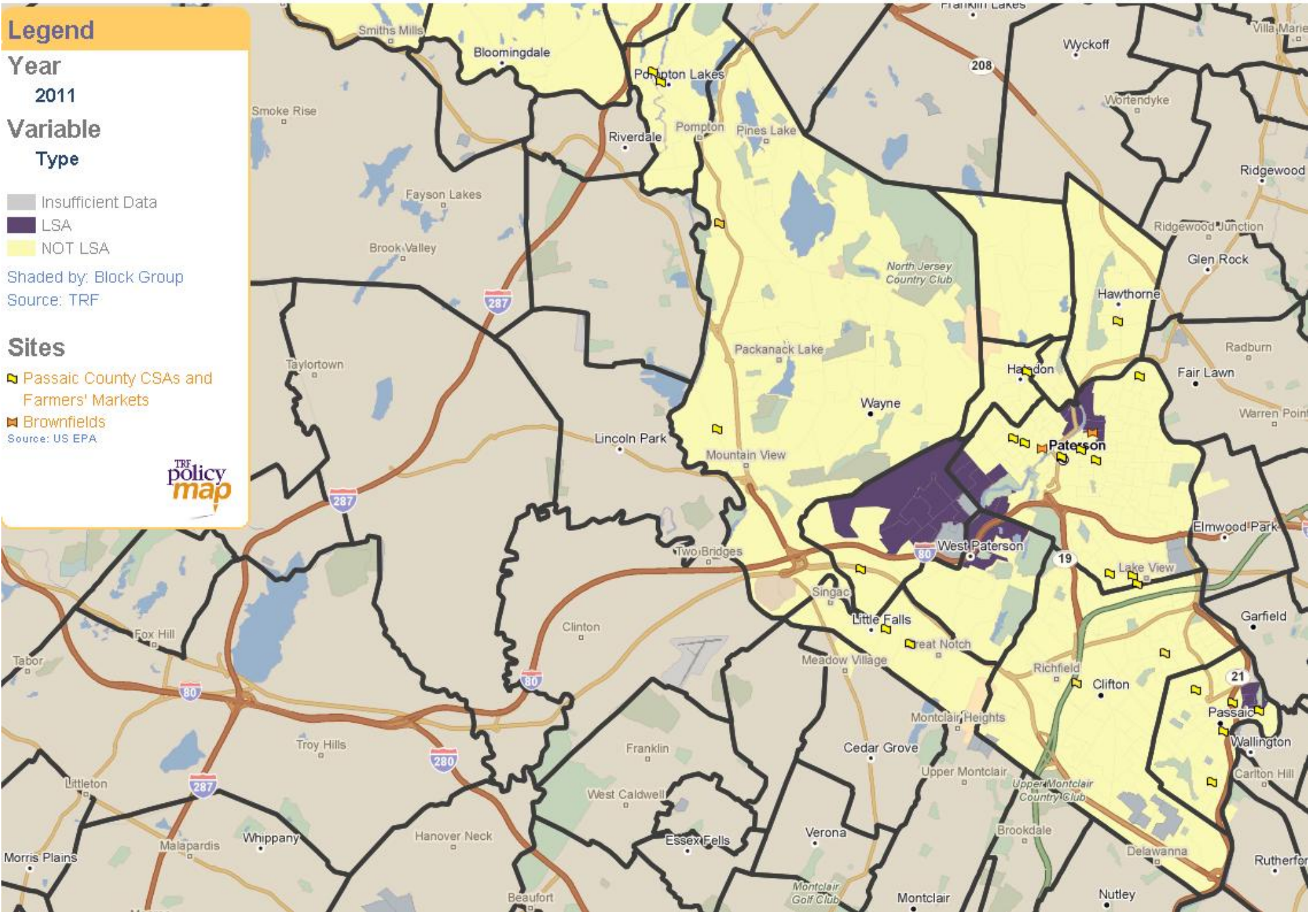
Source: TRF

## Sites

Passaic County CSAs and  
Farmers' Markets

Brownfields

Source: US EPA





## Legend

### Year

2009

### Variable

%

- Insufficient Data
- 20% or less
- 21% - 40%
- 41% - 60%
- 61% - 80%
- 81% or more

Shaded by: Census Tract

Source: Census

### Sites

- Full Service Supermarkets (2011)

Source: Trade Dimensions

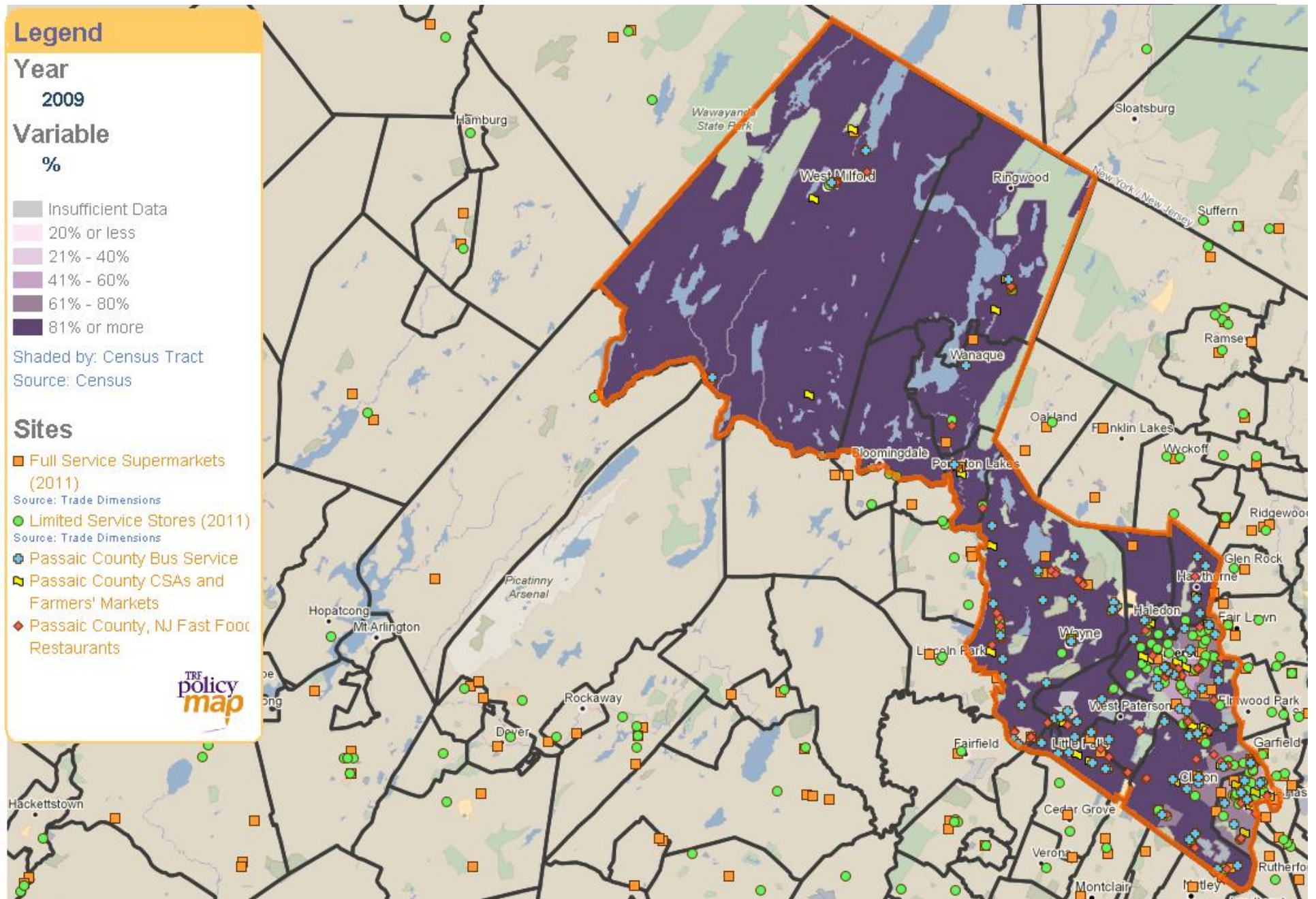
- Limited Service Stores (2011)

Source: Trade Dimensions

- Passaic County Bus Service

- Passaic County CSAs and Farmers' Markets

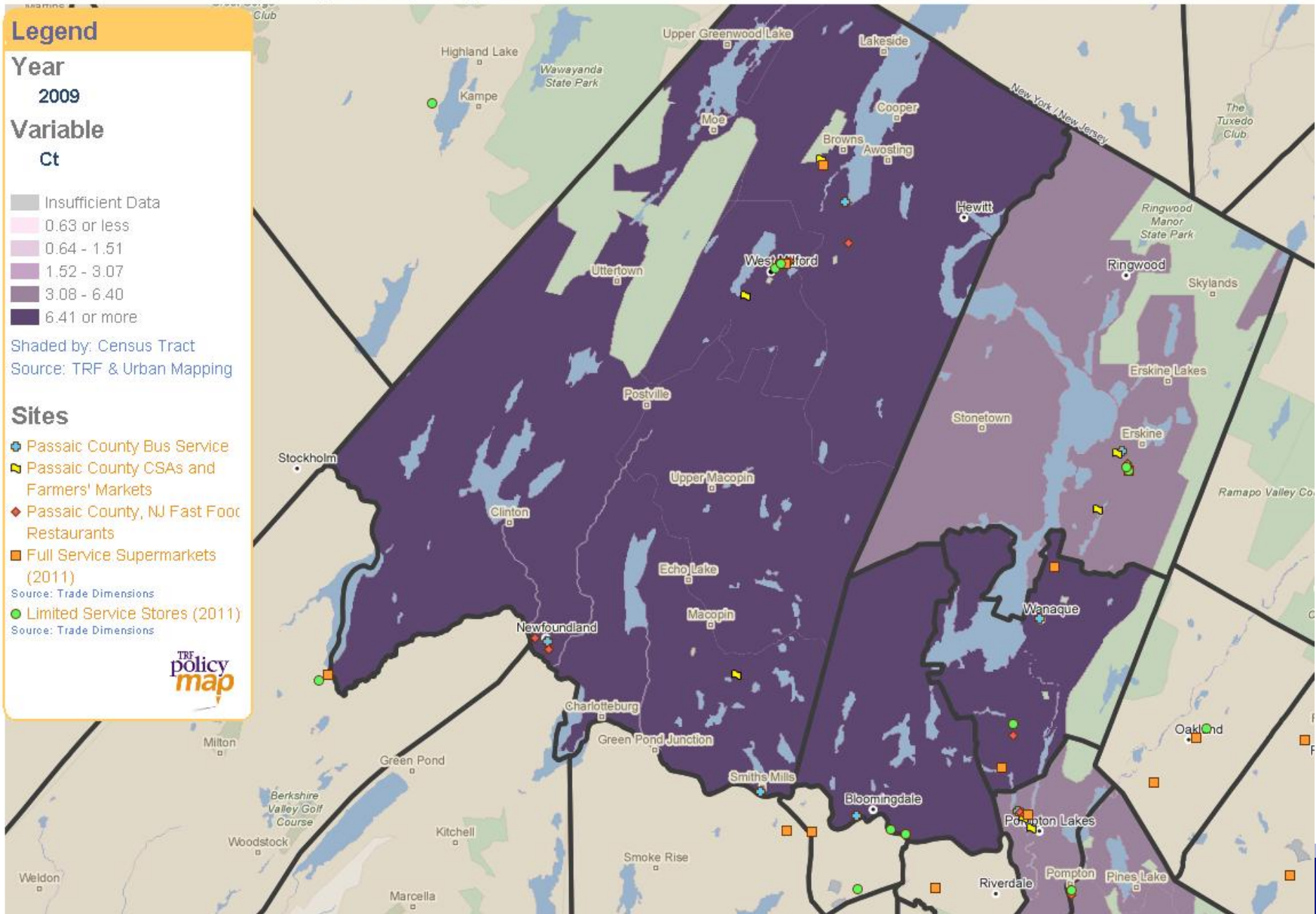
- ◆ Passaic County, NJ Fast Food Restaurants





## Distance to closest public transit rail stop in miles, as of 2009.

Distance to closest public transit rail stop in miles, as of 2009. Distance was calculated from the center point of the Census Tract. Public transit rail For more information about the geographic coverage of Urban Mapping data, see the Data Directory. Grey areas of the map are labeled as having indicating no coverage for a given area.





## Legend

### Year

2011

### Variable

#### Type

Insufficient Data

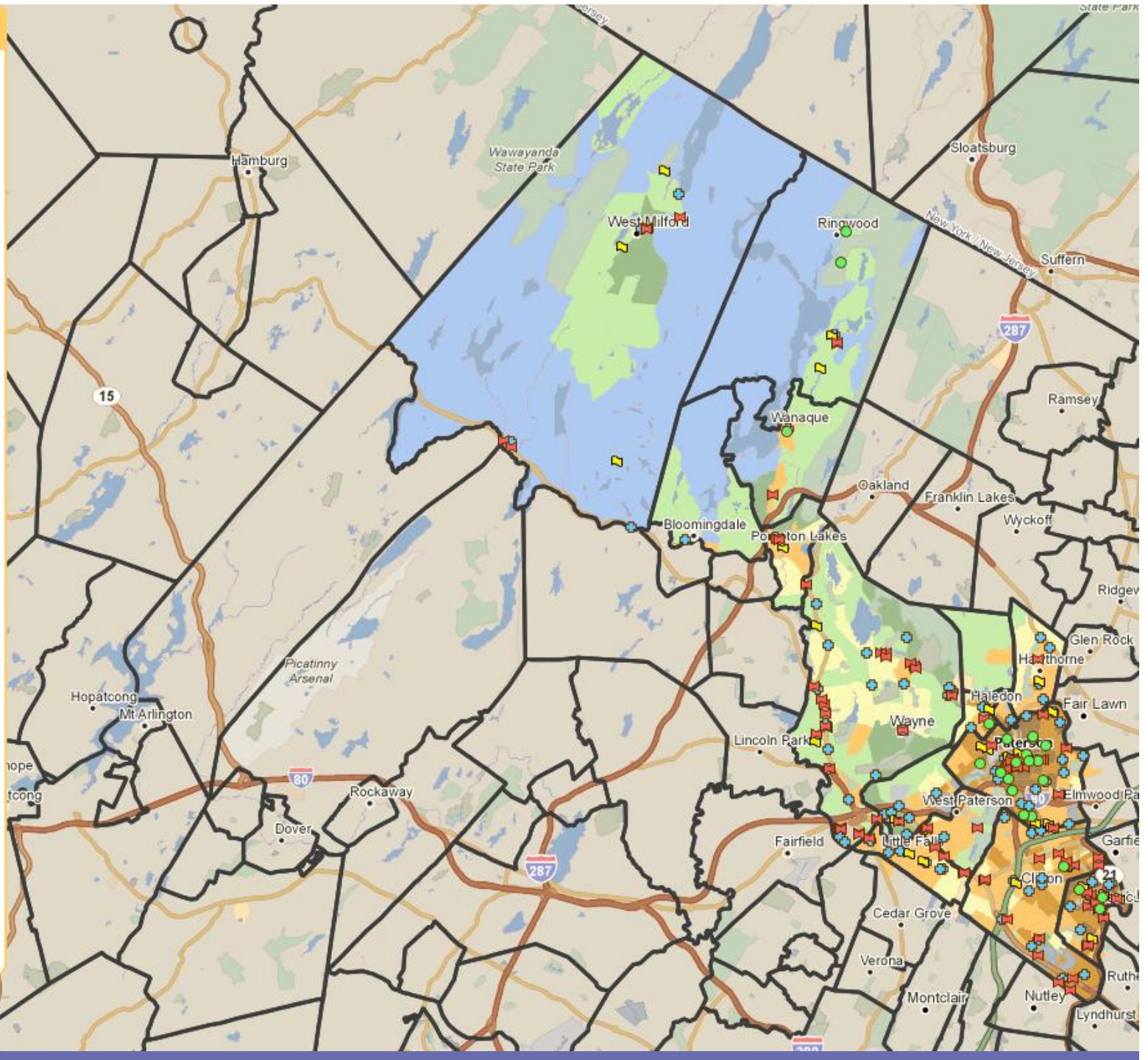
- 1H
- 2H
- 3H
- 4H
- 5HC
- 5MC
- 6HC
- 6MC
- 7VHC
- 7HC
- 7MC
- 7LC
- 8H

Shaded by: Block Group

Source: TRF

### Sites

- Passaic County Transit Service
- Passaic County Food Pantries/Charities
- Passaic County CSAs and Farmers' Markets
- Passaic County, NJ Fast Food Restaurants





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# A FOCUS ON SELECTED AT-RISK GROUPS



# At-Risk Groups Evaluated



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- **Unemployed & underemployed**
- **Disabled**
- **Recent immigrants/LEP**
- **Single parents with children**
- **Adults living alone**
- **Elderly**

## Members of minority groups:

- **African-Americans**
- **Hispanics**
- **Native Americans**
- **Arab-Americans**



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# Unemployed and Underemployed

74% showed some degree of food insecurity compared to 66% of all respondents

Rates of more severe food insecurity are about 6% higher in this group than all respondents:

- 21% used 4 – 6 coping mechanisms
- 20% reported skipping meals because there wasn't enough food.

37% find it harder to get enough food this year compared to a year ago.

Numbers have increased over past few years

They are more likely to get food from community and government programs, but supply has not kept up with demand

Many are turning to those programs for the first time

Those on unemployment often do not qualify for SNAP. Programs like WIC are helpful for parents of small children, but not other families or individuals.



# Disabled Individuals



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Estimated 23,088 disabled individuals in Passaic County have some degree of food insecurity

73% disabled respondents showed some degree of food insecurity compared to 66% of all respondents

Rates of more severe food insecurity are 5 - 8% higher in this group than all respondents:

- 23% used 4-6 food insecurity coping mechanisms
- 21% reported skipping meals

40% find it harder to get enough food this year compared to a year ago.

Accessibility is a major barrier to food security. Fewer of the disabled use a private vehicle to get their food.

Diabetics and those with food allergies cannot use Meals on Wheels and need special foods which may be more expensive and less available.

Cost of healthcare is a major barrier to food security for the disabled, but incomes are often too high for SNAP

Persons with mental illness or addictions often have food security issues, which in turn can exacerbate their conditions.

# Recent Immigrants and/or Primary Language Not English



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Estimated 20,604 recent immigrants have some degree of food insecurity

66% of survey respondents showed some degree of food insecurity

16% used 4-6 food insecurity coping mechanisms

17% reported skipping meals

37% find it harder to get enough food this year compared to a year ago.

Language barriers and religious dietary restrictions make finding adequate food more difficult

More get food from more expensive upscale, health food, or specialty food stores. May be looking for familiar foods or those that fulfill religious requirements.

Fewer use a car to get food

Often lack knowledge of food assistance or of how to get it

Undocumented often don't apply for assistance for which they could qualify for fear of deportation



# Single Parents of Children Under 18



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Estimated 3,302 - 7,769 single parent households have some degree of food insecurity

65% of single parent respondents showed some degree of food insecurity

Rates of more severe food insecurity 3% higher in this group than all respondents:

- 18% used 4-6 food insecurity coping mechanisms
- 16% reported skipping meals

29% find it harder to get enough food this year compared to a year ago.

High cost of safe, reliable childcare a major barrier to food security

More likely to get food from government or community programs, but necessities such as diapers are not usually covered

Access to food is difficult for parents with no car and small children in tow, especially in bad weather

Lack of time and money encourages reliance on cheap convenience foods

WIC works well, but only for those with young children. SNAP income limits are a barrier; counts child support against eligibility, even if it often goes unpaid.

# Adults Living Alone



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Estimated 2,639 -10,935 adults living alone have some degree of food insecurity

64% demonstrated some degree of food insecurity

May have less severe food insecurity; % using 4 – 6 coping mechanisms about half that of other groups. However, % skipping meals is about the same.

Factors other than living alone (such as age or disability) appear to have a greater impact

More likely to get food from government or community programs, or from small local stores

Further research suggested

# Elderly Individuals



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Lowest levels of food insecurity of all at-risk groups studied. Still, about 11,462 have some degree of food insecurity.

Have less severe food insecurity; % using 4 – 6 coping mechanisms or skipping meals about half that of other groups.

Elderly in City of Passaic and up-county have food insecurity at twice the rate of elderly in other parts of the county

Some protection from affordability issues due to Social Security and Medicare, and services such as Meals on Wheels.

Accessibility of food appears to be the primary challenge faced

Issues appear to be more related to infirmity or isolation than age itself



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# A FOCUS ON MINORITY GROUPS



# African-American Community



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Estimated 7,715 - 25,718  
Passaic County African-  
Americans have some  
degree of food insecurity

69% showed some degree of  
food insecurity compared to  
66% of all respondents

More severe food insecurity  
about 4% higher than all  
respondents

Affordability – particularly  
unemployment – is primary food  
security issue. SNAP income  
requirements are a barrier

More likely to get food from  
community or government  
programs than respondents as a  
whole

Less likely to use a car to access  
food, or to grow their own  
produce

# Hispanic/Latino Community



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Estimated 27,852 - 63,130 have some degree of food insecurity, not counting undocumented

Actual numbers may be up to 40% higher if undocumented included

64.2% have some degree of food insecurity

Experiences more severe food insecurity at rates about 3 – 6% lower than other groups

Low income is primary reason for food insecurity, especially among seasonal and outdoor workers

Food safety and nutrition is more of a concern for this community than other groups.

Much more likely to walk or ride a bicycle to get food, and to get food from local small groceries or bodegas, which often sell expired or low-quality items.

Have little knowledge of alternative sources of fresh food and rarely grow own food.

# Native-American Community



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Appear to be experiencing food insecurity at a higher rate than respondents in general, and food insecurity appears to be much more severe

76% of Native American residents demonstrated some degree of food insecurity

48% cited use of 4-6 coping mechanisms (more severe food insecurity) vs. 13% of all respondents.

62% consider it harder for them to get enough food this year than last year, vs. 35% of all respondents

Many more Native Americans grow food than other groups, but much is contaminated by toxic chemical pollutants in the soil and water

Most live up-county, where it is difficult for those without personal transportation to access food or employment

The area's status as a protected watershed prevents the development of local jobs

Pride, shame, and a distrust of outside systems and institutions prevents some from asking for help

# Muslim-American Community



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Islamic Center (ICPC) AR survey respondents have lower rate of food insecurity than all respondents, and much lower rates of severity

61% of Islamic Center respondents demonstrated some degree of food insecurity by use of coping mechanisms as compared to 66% of all respondents.

22% noted that food is harder to get this year than last vs. 35% all respondents

Many have difficulty finding halal (or kosher) food, especially from community or government programs. If they cannot access the food to which their religion restricts them, many do not eat.

Much more likely to seek food from upscale, health food, or specialty stores in search of halal food, which increases cost

Benefit from home-grown produce at nearly four times the rate of other survey respondents





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# FOOD FOR THOUGHT – THOUGHTS FROM FOCUS GROUPS



# THOUGHTS ON UNDERLYING FACTORS



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## Lack of income

- Loss of employment
- Loss of a spouse through death or divorce
- Health crisis or chronic health conditions

Families “doubling up;” older people struggling to feed not only themselves, but adult children and grandchildren

People without utilities can’t cook most food from a food pantry

## High costs

- Health care – even when medically insured
- Housing
- Transportation
- Childcare and other costs of raising children

## Lack of knowledge

- Unaware of assistance programs or do not know how to access
- Don’t know how to grow, store, prepare healthy meals





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# THOUGHTS ON UNDERLYING FACTORS

## Market forces:

- Closing of many large grocery stores
- Safety, parking and security at food stores
- Increase in one-stop shopping complexes accessible only by car
- Over-abundance of fast food outlets and liquor stores
  - Business policies favor SBA loans for minority-owned fast food franchises
  - Aggressive marketing of fast food
  - Food deserts

## Food waste:

- 40% of food produced not consumed.
- Many supermarkets ship leftover food to central food banks; much never returns to the community.
- Other stores say they can't give the food away so it goes to landfill.

# THOUGHTS ON UNDERLYING FACTORS



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## Public Policy

- Local contract law forces government to purchase food with the lowest bid
- School purchasing regulations
- Food assistance enrollment outreach
- Regulations limiting fencing, bee-keeping, chicken rearing, farming in certain areas
- ‘Right to Farm legislation’
- Development pressures
- Supermarket standards (i.e., refrigeration, quality of food) differ depending on size of supermarket

# THOUGHTS ON ALTERNATIVE FOOD SOURCES



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Farmer's markets seem to be the most available and utilized, but they are not always convenient to people without vehicles

Few at-risk focus group participants had heard of Community Supported Agriculture or food co-ops; none had utilized them

A few participants grow some food at home or receive home-grown produce from family or friends. Several seniors want to garden but lack the physical capacity.

No participants participated in community gardening, though some liked the idea. Safety and soil toxicity are concerns.

# THOUGHTS ON COPING MECHANISMS



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## Most increase reliance on cheaper foods

- If they can cook and get ingredients, may cook healthier foods such as beans and rice or eggs
- If they lack knowledge, utility access, or time, will use unhealthier options such as fast food, or stretching infant formula with creamer

## They try to increase food supplies

- Usually turn to family and friends before accessing programs.
- Use government assistance, food pantries, or congregate meals.
- A few grow food
- Others steal, beg, sell possessions, or sell drugs to get money for food.

# THOUGHTS ON COPING MECHANISMS



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Some hoard food in a positive way – buy extra when money available and save for when money is scarce. Others hoard negatively, going from pantry to pantry for extra assistance.

They reduce the number of people to feed by having household members fed elsewhere; children often through school lunch programs

They ration food, reducing meal sizes or skipping meals. Parents feed children before themselves. (One at-risk survey respondent who reported skipping meals on the survey felt compelled to write in, “but never my kids.”)

# FOCUS GROUP BRAINSTORMS



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## Provide Education:

- Culturally sensitive education about nutrition, exercise, and time and resource management
- Cultural sensitivity/customer service training to social service workers
- Teach teenagers media literacy and the power of social marketing of healthy food and habits
- Work to change people's tastes re: healthy food and social values.

## Increase Food Supply:

- Provide jobs to teenagers and children producing food on vacant lots
- Develop community gardens and greenhouses
- Increase food support during winter months
- Provide meals for children when school is not in session
- Improve the food system so less is wasted, more gets to those in need



# FOCUS GROUP BRAINSTORMS



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## Reduce Food and Other Costs:

- Create subsidized grocery stores; cover part of cost from other sources
- Provide more free or affordable after-school care and day care.
- Provide support to purchase essential non-food consumables such as diapers, toilet tissue, and personal hygiene items.
- Increase the amount of affordable housing available, including more shelter for the homeless and more apartments for senior citizens.
- Provide a pharmacy bank and have medicines delivered to homebound

## Improve Access:

- Provide mobile food stores on wheels
- Remove health code barriers to providing congregate meals
- Improve transportation systems in underserved areas

# FOCUS GROUP BRAINSTORMS



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## Increase family income:

- Bring in industry to provide more jobs
- Help more kids go to college so they can get good jobs

## Protect the Vulnerable:

- Make sure residents of nursing homes are being fed and cared for properly
- Provide extra support for the formerly incarcerated returning to the community, and to victims of domestic violence

