Barriers to Accessing Locally Grown Food in Rural Communities and How to Fix Them

C. White
Capstone Project
Summer 2025

Abstract

This paper explores the persistent and systemic barriers that prevent rural communities in the United States from accessing locally grown food—despite these areas being centers of agricultural production. This paradox highlights a failure in food distribution and social policy rather than a scarcity of food. Rural food insecurity stems from intersecting factors, including geographic isolation, inadequate transportation infrastructure, persistent poverty, and exclusion from alternative food initiatives (AFIs) that often cater to urban, white, middle-class consumers.

Through a qualitative review of scholarly literature, government data, and real-world case studies, this study identifies five core obstacles to rural food access: structural disconnection from food supply chains, lack of local food infrastructure, income disparities, cultural mismatch in food systems, and weak policy frameworks. Key sources include works by Alkon and Mares (2012), Gundersen et al. (2011), and USDA Food Access Research.

These findings are illustrated through the example of the Appalachia Food Access Network (AFAN), a community-driven model that successfully reduced food insecurity by creating local food hubs and mobile distribution systems, as well as examples of successes demonstrated through utilization of the Double Up Food Bucks (DUFB) program facilitated by the Fair Food Network and difficulties of program implementation in rural states, concluding the case studies with a review of successful grant opportunities introduced by the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to support regional food systems and agrarian economies in underserved areas of the state.

The paper argues that food insecurity in rural areas must be addressed through justice-oriented frameworks that center community empowerment, culturally appropriate food access, and cross-sector partnerships. Recommendations include targeted infrastructure investment, integration of SNAP into AFIs, inclusive governance through rural food policy councils, and support for local economic initiatives tied to food distribution. Addressing these barriers is essential not only for nutrition equity but also for restoring dignity and agency to the communities that feed the nation.

This analysis is further grounded in the principles outlined by the International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems (2021), who argue that transforming food systems must go beyond market-based reforms and instead embrace democratic, justice-oriented governance that empowers marginalized communities.

Introduction

Rural communities across the United States face a deeply paradoxical reality: they are often hubs of food production, yet their residents suffer disproportionately from food insecurity. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (2022), more than 13% of rural households experience food insecurity—higher than the national average and significantly higher than in many urban areas. This contradiction is not simply the result of bad luck or mismanagement, but rather the outcome of deeply embedded structural inequities, policy neglect, and market dynamics that prioritize efficiency and profit over equity and community well-being.

Food insecurity in rural areas is shaped by a confluence of factors. These include geographic isolation from grocery stores and fresh food retailers, lack of reliable transportation, the decline

of small-town grocery infrastructure, and widespread poverty. Compounding these issues is the reality that many alternative food initiatives (AFIs), such as farmers markets and community-supported agriculture (CSA) programs, have failed to meaningfully include rural, low-income, or minority populations. As Alkon and Mares (2012) argue, these well-intentioned programs often replicate the same structural exclusions they aim to disrupt, privileging urban, white, and affluent consumers. Consequently, the very communities who grow America's food are often unable to access or afford the food they help produce.

This paper examines these barriers through an interdisciplinary lens, synthesizing research from rural sociology, public health, urban planning, and food systems studies. In doing so, it identifies five key areas of concern: (1) the structural disconnection between agricultural production and local food consumption; (2) geographic and transportation barriers; (3) economic insecurity and market failure; (4) cultural and institutional exclusion from AFIs; and (5) the lack of responsive and inclusive public policy. These themes are supported by empirical studies and brought to life through case studies such as the Appalachia Food Access Network.

By exploring these challenges and highlighting innovative, community-driven solutions, this paper aims to contribute to the growing conversation about food justice and rural equity. Ultimately, it calls for a paradigm shift: from food systems built around profit and production to food systems designed to foster dignity, justice, and access for all—especially for those living in America's rural heartland. This paper also builds on the "Just Food" framework proposed by IPES-Food (2021), which advocates for dismantling corporate concentration in food systems and fostering community-led governance structures as foundational to equitable food access.

Data and Results

A review of peer-reviewed literature, demographic data, and field research reveals that rural food insecurity is driven by five interlocking barriers: (1) structural disconnection between food production and local access, (2) geographic isolation and inadequate transportation, (3) persistent poverty and economic decline, (4) cultural exclusion from alternative food initiatives (AFIs), and (5) insufficient public policy and infrastructure investment.

Structural Disconnect Between Food Production and Local Access

Lobao and Meyer (2001) describe how industrial agriculture in the United States has evolved to serve global supply chains rather than local communities. In rural regions in the US, especially in the Midwest and South, large-scale commodity crops are grown primarily for export or processing. As a result, much of the food produced in rural counties is shipped elsewhere, while residents must rely on distant, understocked, or expensive retailers for their food. This disconnection is structural and economic: it is more profitable for corporations to centralize production and distribution than to maintain local food networks, benefitting on a financial scale but stands as detriment to rural economies and nutritional security.

Geographic and Transportation Barriers

Geographic isolation exacerbates this disconnect. Many rural households are located more than 10 miles from the nearest full-service grocery store (Sharkey & Horel, 2008). When public transportation is lacking and personal vehicles are expensive or unavailable, physical access to healthy food becomes a major hurdle. According to USDA's Food Access Research Atlas (2022), rural food deserts are concentrated in areas with low vehicle ownership and limited retail

infrastructure. This disproportionately affects older adults, disabled residents, and low-income families.

Persistent Poverty and Economic Decline

Weber et al. (2005) and Gundersen et al. (2011) highlight the link between poverty and food insecurity. Rural regions have higher poverty rates, lower educational attainment, and fewer economic opportunities than urban areas. These trends are often rooted in the decline of local industries, disinvestment in public services, and the centralization of food retail markets. When rural grocery stores close, residents are left without access to fresh produce, dairy, or protein. National chains are often unwilling to invest in rural communities due to perceived lack of profitability.

Cultural Exclusion from AFIs

Alternative food initiatives like farmers markets, co-ops, and CSA programs are frequently touted as solutions to food deserts. However, Alkon and Mares (2012) critique these programs for serving primarily urban, white, middle-class populations. Many rural residents find AFIs unwelcoming, unaffordable, or culturally irrelevant. CSA boxes may include foods unfamiliar to local traditions, and payment models often require upfront investment that low-income households cannot afford, while small farmers offering CSA options and selling through farmers market platforms typically require a higher price to cover input costs. This creates a gap between local consumers and edible food crops grown in their own communities as, economically, local farmers must sell at farmers markets in higher income areas in order to profit. Without intentional inclusivity, AFIs risk perpetuating the same disparities they aim to address.

Data in Figure 1 shows a clear distinction in the prevalence of farmers markets in urban areas in comparison to rural areas. This pattern is still anecdotally noticeable and likely would reflect similar results today.

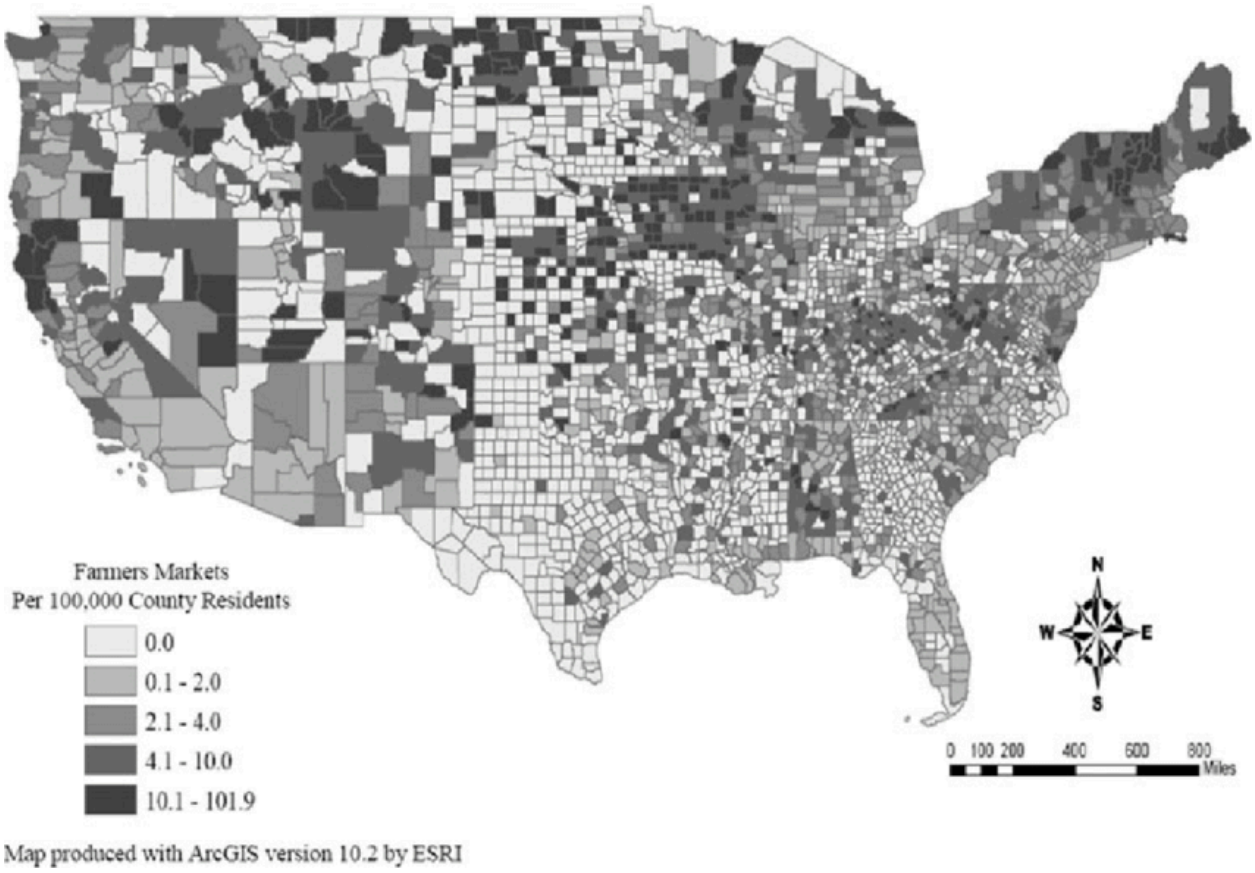

Fig. 1 - Farmers markets per 100,000 residents throughout US counties (Singleton, 2015)

Policy and Infrastructure Gaps

Government programs intended to address hunger—such as SNAP and WIC—often fall short in rural contexts. Many farmers markets and small grocers do not accept EBT cards, and mobile food programs are underfunded or inconsistently implemented. Moreover, rural regions often

lack representation in food policy development. As a result, investments in infrastructure like food hubs, regional processing centers, or rural transportation systems remain minimal.

The “Just Food” report outlines how global food policy has long prioritized efficiency and productivity at the expense of justice, especially in marginalized rural communities. The result is a system where small-scale producers and consumers alike are excluded from policy decisions that impact their access to food (IPES-Food, 2021). This reinforces the need for decentralized, place-based infrastructure that is co-designed by rural stakeholders.

Case Study: Appalachia Food Access Network (AFAN)

Central Appalachia represents a powerful example of the structural barriers rural communities face in accessing locally grown food, even in regions rich in agricultural heritage. This region encompasses parts of Kentucky, Ohio, Virginia, and West Virginia—areas marked by deep poverty, challenging geography, and declining infrastructure. With the collapse of extractive industries like coal, many Appalachian communities have faced long-term economic decline, leaving local economies with limited employment opportunities and strained public services. As a result, residents in many Appalachian counties must rely on gas stations, convenience stores, and dollar stores for daily groceries, leading to highly restricted access to fresh, healthy foods. Traditional supermarkets are often distant, and public transportation is virtually nonexistent across much of the region, making travel to better-stocked food retailers prohibitively difficult for households without reliable vehicles (Appalachian Center for Economic Networks [ACEnet], 2023).

In response to these compounding challenges, the Appalachia Accessible Food Network (AFAN) emerged as a regional initiative coordinated by ACEnet and other regional partners. Its goal was not simply to provide food but to transform the underlying structures that made healthy food inaccessible. Through a systems-based approach, AFAN sought to bridge the gap between small-scale farmers and underserved communities using a combination of food hubs, mobile markets, direct producer-consumer linkages, and policy advocacy. One of the network's key innovations was the creation of community-based food hubs, which aggregate, store, and distribute fresh produce from local farms. These hubs streamline logistics and enable small growers—many of whom lacked the infrastructure to distribute widely—to connect with new markets such as schools, hospitals, and food pantries.

Another significant strategy has been the deployment of mobile produce markets, or "Veggie Vans," which deliver fresh fruits and vegetables directly to isolated communities. These vehicles stop at community centers, libraries, schools, and senior living facilities—sites chosen for accessibility and community trust. Importantly, the mobile markets accept Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits and are often paired with nutrition education, cooking demonstrations, and culturally relevant food offerings. The initiative also incorporates SNAP incentive programs that match consumer spending on fresh produce, making healthy food more affordable for low-income residents (ACEnet, 2023).

The impact of AFAN has been substantial. According to reports from ACEnet, food insecurity in communities served by the network dropped by approximately 15% over a three-year period. This decline is attributed not just to food distribution, but to the program's holistic approach that includes workforce development, technical support for farmers, and a strong emphasis on

community-based ownership. For example, AFAN has created local jobs in food logistics, aggregation, and outreach—offering employment pathways in an otherwise contracting job market. Farmers also benefit through guaranteed markets, business coaching, and access to shared infrastructure such as refrigeration and transport vehicles (ACEnet, 2023).

Furthermore, the AFAN model challenges prevailing narratives that rural food insecurity is primarily about physical scarcity. Instead, the network highlights how limited infrastructure, economic disinvestment, policy neglect, and institutional fragmentation contribute to a multifaceted food access crisis. The success of AFAN demonstrates that improving rural food access requires more than charity or isolated interventions. It requires systemic transformation—integrating food access into regional planning, investing in rural logistics infrastructure, and supporting collaborative networks that build community capacity from the ground up.

By building bridges between small farmers and vulnerable consumers, AFAN not only feeds communities but also strengthens local food economies and fosters regional resilience. Its holistic model can serve as a blueprint for other rural regions across the United States facing similar barriers to food access.

Case Study: Double Up Food Bucks (DUFB) and Rural Communities

Double Up Food Bucks (DUFB), administered by the Fair Food Network, is a nutrition incentive program that doubles SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) benefits spent on fresh fruits and vegetables—up to $20 per day—effectively turning every SNAP dollar into two when used on produce. Available in more than 25 states across local farmers markets,

grocery stores, mobile markets, and farm stands, DUFB explicitly targets both food security and support for local agriculture.

Eligible SNAP recipients automatically qualify to receive the match when they use their EBT card at participating locations. For every dollar spent on eligible produce, users receive an equivalent amount in “Double Up” funds, redeemable only on fruits and vegetables—up to $20 in extra produce per day. For instance, in sites like Nebraska or Texas, participants redeem SNAP and then receive matching local produce dollars at farmers markets or independent grocers.

Rural communities face unique challenges: about 20 percent of rural U.S. residents live in food deserts, with limited access to supermarkets and long travel distances that reduce availability of fresh produce. Low population density and shrinking small rural grocers exacerbate these access issues, making nutritious food both physically and economically out of reach. (Rhone, 2025)

DUFB offers significant benefits to their communities, amplified in rural areas that experience higher levels of poverty and increased usage of federal food programs like SNAP. By effectively doubling purchasing power for fresh produce, DUFB lowers the price barrier and encourages healthier diets among rural SNAP households, increasing overall fruit and vegetable consumption. Economic benefits exist for both farmers and local businesses. Participating independent grocery stores, farm stands, mobile markets, and farmers markets see increased foot traffic and sales. Research by the Center for Rural Affairs (April 2024) found that 90 percent of producers participating in DUFB sold more produce, while 85 percent experienced increased revenue. This strengthens rural food infrastructure and reinforces the demand for fresh, local food.

While the Double Up Food Bucks (DUFB) program has grown considerably over the past decade, its reach remains uneven across the United States. Several rural-heavy states—including Virginia, Pennsylvania, Kentucky, and West Virginia—currently lack statewide DUFB programs, which limits the ability of low-income residents in those areas to benefit from the initiative (Fair Food Network, 2023). In these regions, food insecurity rates are often higher than the national average, and rural residents are more likely to experience limited access to affordable, nutritious food due to geographic isolation, poor infrastructure, and fewer food retail options. The absence of DUFB in such states exacerbates existing inequities, leaving many families without tools that could otherwise improve both their diets and purchasing power.

This gap in coverage is not due to a lack of interest or need but is often tied to logistical and administrative challenges. Establishing a DUFB program in a new state requires robust partnerships between nonprofits, state agencies, local grocers, and farmers market coalitions. Additionally, funding must be secured—typically through a combination of USDA GusNIP (Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program) grants, philanthropic support, and state or local contributions. In states where this infrastructure has not yet been developed, or where administrative capacity is limited, launching DUFB programs becomes more difficult. This creates a disparity where some SNAP recipients have access to nutrition incentives and others do not based purely on geography (Fair Food Network, 2023)

Moreover, while similar programs may exist in these underserved states, they often operate independently and at a smaller scale. These local initiatives may offer produce incentives, but without the brand recognition, federal partnerships, and scalable infrastructure that DUFB brings, their reach remains limited. This fragmentation of effort can lead to confusion among SNAP

users and missed opportunities for broader public health impacts. For example, in parts of Appalachia—where poverty and diet-related illness are prevalent—a fully integrated DUFB program could significantly improve nutrition security while also providing reliable markets for small farmers. Without DUFB's standardized model and national backing, however, these communities continue to face barriers to implementing large-scale solutions (Fair Food Network, 2023)

Efforts to address this challenge are ongoing. Organizations like the Fair Food Network—the national coordinator of DUFB—have signaled intentions to expand programming into new regions, prioritizing those with strong community support and high need (Fair Food Network, 2023). In Nebraska, for instance, the successful expansion of DUFB into over 25 rural markets and grocers was made possible through early partnership-building and support from both public and private sectors (Fair Food Network, 2023). This example offers a roadmap for other rural states, demonstrating that with the right coalition of partners, even geographically dispersed communities can support a thriving DUFB infrastructure.

Ultimately, resolving the uneven coverage of DUFB is a matter of equity. Without access to programs like Double Up Food Bucks, rural residents in non-participating states are denied both health benefits and economic opportunities that are increasingly available elsewhere. Expanding DUFB into these regions would not only improve food access but also create ripple effects—strengthening rural economies, bolstering small farms, and reinforcing community resilience in areas where it is most needed. (Fair Food Network, 2023)

Case Study: Michigan's Grant Program for Rural Food Security

In March 2025, the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD) awarded $3.8 million in targeted grants to 51 Michigan producers, processors, and community development organizations. This funding—drawn from Michigan's bipartisan state budget—was designed to support traditionally underserved businesses, encourage value-added agricultural processing, and bolster regional food systems to improve food access and local resilience.

The combined effort of these projects is expected to generate 146 full-time and 203 part-time jobs statewide. In Huron County's Ubly community, two projects stand out. Sheridan Acres received $70,000 to expand processing capabilities for edible beans and specialty grains, creating four part-time jobs. Steaks and Cupcakes LLC was granted $44,145 to launch a new frozen-delivery service, including advanced freezing technology, resulting in one full-time and one part-time job. (Farm News Media, 2025) These initiatives demonstrate how modest investments in processing and delivery infrastructure can strengthen supply chains while creating meaningful employment in rural areas.

Value-added processing facilities, like those enhanced at Sheridan Acres, reduce post-harvest waste, increase shelf life, and open new market opportunities for growers, helping farmers retain more value locally. Meanwhile, innovations in cold-chain delivery, such as the frozen-delivery service developed by Steaks and Cupcakes LLC, expand consumer access and ensure that rural residents can obtain fresh, healthy foods without long travel or spoilage.

Investing in food processing and supply infrastructure directly supports rural food security by enhancing local availability of nutritious food, empowering farmers with greater value capture,

and creating resilient supply chains less vulnerable to external disruptions. This program illustrates how strategic public funding can leverage existing community capacities to strengthen food systems from the ground up.

From this case, several insights emerge. Grants that address processing, delivery, and business capacity together yield stronger outcomes than single-focus interventions. Support for underserved producers bolsters equity in the food system by targeting communities that often face barriers to scaling. Local infrastructure investments have ripple effects, generating jobs, opening new revenue streams, and improving access for residents. Finally, sustainable models like value-added processing and refrigerated delivery provide a blueprint for replication in other rural regions seeking to improve food security.

Michigan's 2025 grants under the Underserved, Value-Added, and Regional Food Systems program demonstrate how targeted investment in rural food infrastructure can simultaneously boost local economies, create jobs, and enhance food access. By advancing value-added processing and cold-chain delivery in rural areas, the state has taken important steps toward building a more resilient, equitable, and secure food system. (Farm News Media, 2025)

Discussion

The findings in this paper highlight that rural food insecurity cannot be addressed through superficial interventions or short-term solutions. Increasing food production alone will not solve the problem if rural communities remain structurally excluded from the systems that deliver, price, and govern food. A justice-oriented approach to rural food access requires cross-sector collaboration, intentional inclusivity, infrastructure investment, and grassroots empowerment.

Reimagining Rural Food Systems as "Just Food" Systems

Alkon and Mares (2012) introduce the concept of "just food" systems—those which prioritize equity, community control, and cultural relevance over efficiency and profit. For rural areas, this means developing food systems that are not only physically accessible but also reflective of local values and lived experiences. Community input must be central to the design and governance of food access programs, and public investments should aim to rebuild the relationship between rural people and their local food economy.

IPES-Food (2021) calls for a fundamental reorientation of food policy toward justice, with an emphasis on agroecology, localized governance, and systemic redistribution of power in food chains. These priorities align with the Alkon and Mares (2012) call for equity-focused AFIs and underscore the necessity of involving rural communities in reimagining the systems that serve them.

Role of Infrastructure and Transportation

Transportation is one of the most critical barriers to rural food access. As shown in the USDA Food Atlas, indicated in the figure below, and confirmed by Sharkey and Horel (2008), distance to retailers is a defining feature of rural food deserts. Solutions must include public investment in rural transit options like grocery shuttles, mobile markets, and food delivery systems. Some communities have retrofitted school buses as mobile produce trucks or established community volunteer driving networks to help older residents shop for groceries. Policy support for such innovations is necessary for scale and sustainability. (Rhone, 2025)

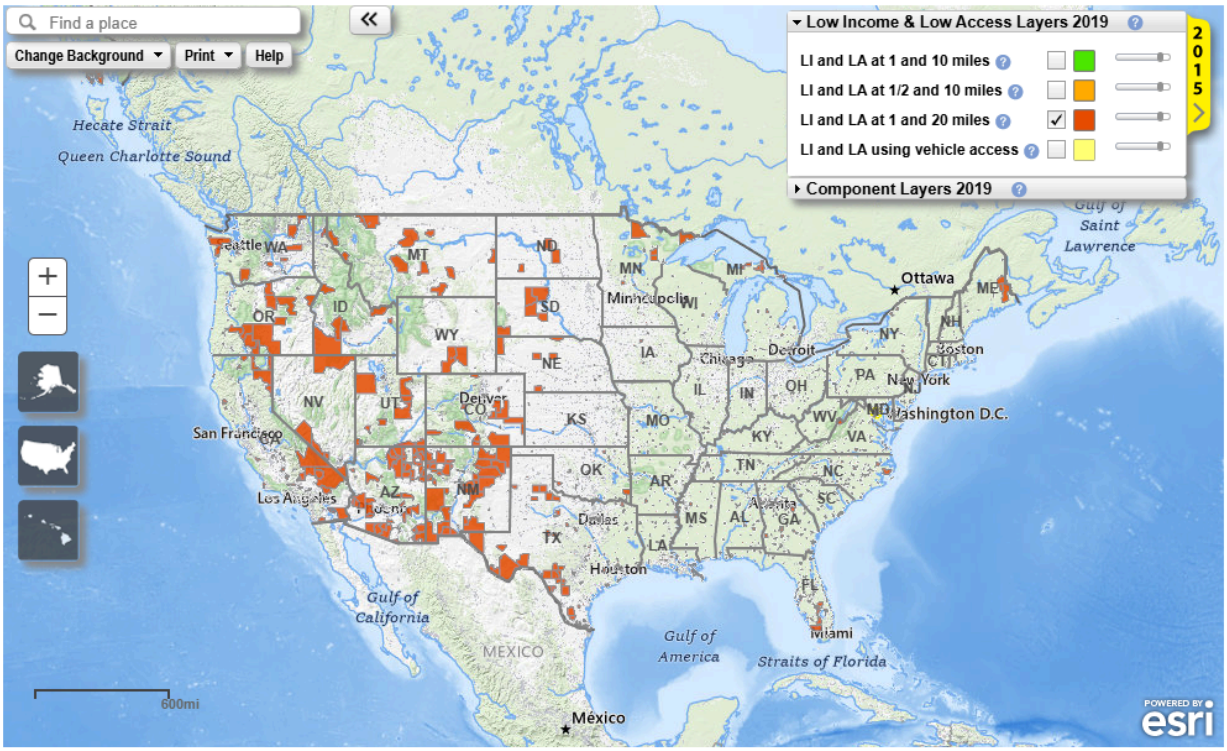

Fig. 2 - Food Access Research Atlas indicating US populations that fall under low income and low access status further than 20 miles of distance from the nearest grocery store. (Rhone, 2025)

Investing in regional food infrastructure—such as aggregation hubs, cold storage facilities, and small-scale processing centers—can also help local farmers connect with nearby consumers. These investments create local jobs and help diversify rural economies while improving food security.

Making Alternative Food Initiatives (AFIs) More Inclusive

AFIs have the potential to improve food access, but they must be adapted to rural needs. Farmers markets should accept SNAP and WIC benefits, and CSA programs can implement tiered pricing or pay-as-you-go models to accommodate low-income households. Additionally, educational

outreach should focus on demystifying AFIs for rural consumers and ensuring that the foods offered are culturally relevant.

Community organizations and local governments must also examine barriers to participation within these programs. Are marketing materials accessible? Do people feel welcome? Is there input from diverse voices in program design? How is cultural stigma and stereotyping against program participants preventing people from accessing the food they need? These questions are critical to ensuring AFIs do not replicate the exclusions of conventional retail. (Carlson, 2019)

The Economic Case for Local Food Investment

Supporting local food economies has both health and economic benefits. Rural grocery stores, food co-ops, and farm stands not only provide nourishment but also create jobs, keep dollars in the community, and foster economic resilience. Programs like the Healthy Food Financing Initiative (HFFI) provide a model for federal investment in underserved areas. Expanding such programs with a rural-specific focus can encourage the development of sustainable local food businesses.

In addition, procurement policies that prioritize local food for schools, hospitals, and correctional facilities can create reliable markets for small farmers while improving food quality for vulnerable populations.

Participatory Governance and Policy Design

Perhaps the most overlooked component of rural food insecurity is the lack of participatory governance. Rural voices are often absent from national food policy discussions, leading to

one-size-fits-all solutions that do not translate well to isolated communities. Local and regional food policy councils must include rural residents, farmers, public health professionals, and tribal leaders when relevant.

Overhauling the food system for rural communities through policies designed with rural voices at the table brings up the comorbidity of “brain drain” - referring to a decrease in education levels in adults in rural areas. Lack of college readiness in rural students restricts the pipeline of youth that continue on from rural schools to college. This creates a greater absence of rural students to pursue careers that require higher education required to access positions in policy development, law, etc. With rural food deserts comes rural education deserts, with longer distances to higher education correlates with a decrease of rural student enrollment. (Crawford, 2025)

Examples from regions like the Delta Fresh Foods Initiative and the Nebraska Food Council show that community-led coalitions can shape effective food access policies when empowered with funding and institutional support. IPES-Food’s framework emphasizes democratic participation in food system governance, particularly for historically marginalized voices. The report critiques the top-down nature of current food systems and encourages the formation of grassroots councils and cooperatives that have binding decision-making power (IPES-Food, 2021). Such participatory structures are essential for building trust and ensuring policy solutions reflect local realities.

Together, these approaches illustrate a pathway forward—one grounded not just in logistics and economics, but in equity, dignity, and community-driven change.

Conclusion

Rural food insecurity is not a failure of food production, but a failure of access, equity, and justice. The paradox that the people and places responsible for growing the nation's food are often least able to access it reveals deep flaws in how we organize, distribute, and govern our food systems. This capstone has identified five key, interrelated barriers—structural disconnection from local supply, geographic isolation, poverty, exclusion from alternative food systems, and lack of targeted policy—as central to understanding why rural communities continue to face persistent food insecurity.

Addressing these barriers requires a shift in both perspective and practice. First, we must move away from narrowly defined efficiency-based models of food delivery that prioritize global markets over local needs. Instead, food systems should be designed around principles of justice, community resilience, and participatory governance. Rural residents must not be passive recipients of aid or top-down interventions; they must be empowered as leaders, co-creators, and decision-makers in the systems that feed them.

Second, meaningful investment in infrastructure—from transportation to food hubs—is essential. Without it, rural areas will remain excluded from national solutions that assume a level of access and mobility they simply do not have. State-supported programs like Michigan's rural food infrastructure grants demonstrates how direct investment in rural communities has definitive results such as increased jobs and greater security in rural agricultural production systems beyond the field.

Third, cultural competence must be embedded into alternative food initiatives so that they serve—not alienate—low-income and diverse rural populations. Food justice cannot exist without cultural inclusion.

Fourth, we must expand and adapt federal nutrition programs like SNAP and WIC to meet the realities of rural life. This includes accepting benefits at more outlets, supporting mobile markets, and streamlining administrative barriers. Lastly, rural communities need a voice in food policy. Food policy councils, local planning boards, and public-private partnerships must reflect the demographic, economic, and geographic diversity of the rural U.S by addressing correlated rural deserts such as education.

The case study of the Appalachia Food Access Network demonstrates that locally led, collaborative, and culturally grounded solutions can have measurable impacts. When given the tools and autonomy, rural communities can reduce food insecurity while strengthening their economies and food cultures. Future research should examine how such models can be scaled and replicated across diverse rural contexts, as well as how technology (such as online markets and digital ordering systems) can be leveraged equitably in areas with limited connectivity. The IPES-Food (2021) report reminds us that justice in food systems is not a peripheral concern—it is the core around which sustainable and resilient systems must be built. Efforts to address rural food insecurity must therefore center the voices, needs, and leadership of rural communities themselves, resisting corporate consolidation and restoring democratic control. Reviewing the second case study addressing the Double Up Food Bucks program further emphasizes equity as a key factor in rural food access.

In the end, food justice in rural America is not only a matter of nutrition and economics—it is a matter of dignity. Ensuring that those who grow our food can also eat well is not just an ethical imperative; it is the foundation of a truly sustainable and equitable food system.

Works Cited

Alkon, A. H., & Mares, T. M. (2012). Food sovereignty in US food movements: Radical visions and neoliberal constraints. *Agriculture and Human Values, 29*(3), 347–359. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-012-9356-4

Appalachian Center for Economic Networks. (2023). *Appalachia Accessible Food Network*. https://acenetworks.org/appalachia-accessible-food-network/

Bennett, A. L., Probst, J. C., & Bellinger, J. D. (2020). From farms to food deserts: Food insecurity and older rural Americans. *The Gerontologist, 60*(1), 113–121. https://doi.org/10.1093/geront/gnz061

Carlson, K. J., Min, J., Lee, C., Manes, E. R., & Rebok, G. W. (2019). Stereotypes of older adults: Development and evaluation of an updated stereotype content and strength survey. *The Gerontologist, 60*(5), 906–916. https://doi.org/10.1093/geront/gnz061

Crawford, B., Partelow, L., & Saultz, A. (2025, June 25). Preparing rural students for college and beyond by improving access to coursework. Center for American Progress. https://www.americanprogress.org/article/preparing-rural-students-for-college-and-beyond-by-improving-access-to-coursework/

Farrell, C. (2020). *Enabling inclusive food systems: Food and water systems annual report*. CARE. http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep54912

Fair Food Network. (2023, September 18). *Get double the fruits and veggies*. Double Up Food Bucks. https://doubleupamerica.org/

Farm News Media. (2025). State awards $4M in food grants to 51 recipients. *Michigan Farm News*. https://www.michiganfarmnews.com/state-awards-4m-in-food-grants-to-51-recipients

Gundersen, C., Kreider, B., & Pepper, J. V. (2011). The economics of food insecurity in the United States. *Applied Economic Perspectives and Policy, 33*(3), 281–303. https://doi.org/10.1093/aepp/ppr022

IPES-Food. (2021). *Just food: Because it is never just food*. International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems. https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep54912

Lobao, L., & Meyer, K. (2001). When rural does not equal agricultural. *Rural Sociology, 66*(4), 547–569. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1549-0831.2001.tb00089.x

Morton, L. W., & Blanchard, T. C. (2005). Starved for access: Life in rural America's food deserts. *Choices, 20*(3), 45–50.

Rhone, A. (2025). *Food access research atlas*. United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service. https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-access-research-atlas/

Sage, J. L., McCracken, V. A., & Sage, R. A. (2013). Bridging the gap: Do farmers' markets help alleviate impacts of food deserts? *American Journal of Agricultural Economics, 95*(5), 1273–1279. http://www.jstor.org/stable/24476910

Sharkey, J. R., & Horel, S. (2008). Neighborhood socioeconomic deprivation and minority composition are associated with better potential spatial access to the ground-truthed food environment in a large rural area. *The Journal of Nutrition, 138*(3), 620–627. https://doi.org/10.1093/jn/138.3.620

Singleton, C. R., Sen, B., & Affuso, O. (2015). Disparities in the availability of farmers markets in the United States. *Environmental Justice*, *8*(4), 135–143. https://doi.org/10.1089/env.2015.0011

Weber, B., Jensen, L., Miller, K., Mosley, J., & Fisher, M. (2005). A critical review of rural poverty literature: Is there truly a rural underclass? *Rural Sociology, 70*(3), 356–385. https://doi.org/10.1526/0036011054831193