



# Confronting the Issues

## Urban Communities and Food Insecurity PFB Policy Development June 2021

### Issue

In 2019, more than 10 percent of all US households were food insecure at some point during the year.<sup>1</sup> In 2021, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, that number is expected to be around 12.7 percent.<sup>2</sup> Lack of urban food access is due to a few reasons including food availability, limited access to grocery stores, and high prices in areas with increased poverty rates.

### Questions

1. What can farmers do to aid urban communities with food access?
2. How can increased resources help to improve community access to food? How can Farm Bureau policy reflect the need for increased resources?
3. Would improved access to farmers' markets aid in reducing food insecurity? Does current policy sufficiently meet the needs regarding food insecurity in urban regions? If not, what policy is needed?

### Background

Food insecurity is the lack of access to a healthy and reliable food source. It is a nationwide issue and impacts those in both rural and urban areas. Food insecurity can be long-term or temporary. In children, hunger can impact the ability to learn and childhood development, leading to lifelong consequences<sup>3</sup>. Food insecurity affects one in six people across the U.S. Prior to COVID-19, food insecurity was at its lowest since 1990. Due to the pandemic, many more people are now facing the hardships of food insecurity.<sup>4</sup>

A study on the number of supermarkets per 10,000 residents in 20 metropolitan cities across the U.S. found that low income neighborhoods had, on average, 30 percent fewer retailers than those in high income neighborhoods.<sup>5</sup> These food deserts, as they are referred to, negatively affect the ability of community members to access an adequate and healthy food supply. Food deserts can occur in both rural and urban settings, as the number of grocery retailers per capita is lower compared to suburban neighborhoods. Many people residing in urban communities do not have access to cars and rely on walking or public transportation to reach grocery stores. Some neighborhoods may only have small convenience stores, which often have higher food prices, lower quality food, and less variety than a typical grocery store.<sup>6</sup>

USDA studies found that families who had easy access to farmers' markets consumed 1.4 more servings of vegetables and fruits per day than those without access.<sup>7</sup> These markets also serve as an economic boost to both the farmer and the urban communities, as many businesses saw increased sales when in close proximity to farmers' markets. In order to increase access to these markets, there has been a push for farmer's markets to accept benefits from government food assistance programs. Currently, there are 2,748 farmers' markets in the U.S. accepting Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, up 8.5 percent from this time last year.<sup>8</sup> The Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) is another example, as it allows eligible Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) recipients, as well as low income seniors (through the Seniors Farmers' Market Nutrition Program) to buy eligible foods from farmers, farmers' markets, or roadside stands. Eligible vendors must be approved by the state Department of Agriculture to accept coupons.

<sup>1</sup> See: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/pub-details/?pubid=99281>

<sup>2</sup> See: <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/food-insecurity>

<sup>3</sup> See: <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-blog/help-kids-facing-hunger-this>

<sup>4</sup> See: [https://www.feedingamerica.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/National%20Projections%20Brief\\_3.9.2021\\_0.pdf](https://www.feedingamerica.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/National%20Projections%20Brief_3.9.2021_0.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> See: [http://thefoodtrust.org/uploads/media\\_items/need-for-supermarkets-in-philadelphia.original.pdf](http://thefoodtrust.org/uploads/media_items/need-for-supermarkets-in-philadelphia.original.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/social-determinants-health/interventions-resources/food-insecurity>

<sup>7</sup> See: <https://www.usda.gov/media/blog/2013/08/05/farmers-markets-community-centerpieces>

<sup>8</sup> See: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/farmers-markets-accepting-snap-benefits>

Bringing farmers' markets to urban communities, especially within walking distance of areas considered food deserts, could provide low-income families the opportunity to have access to fresh produce. Continuing to expand federal aid in conjunction with farmers' markets would allow more individuals the option to shop for fresh, local food, while benefiting farmers and the overall agriculture industry as well.

## **Farm Bureau Policy**

*PFB, Farmers Markets and Restaurants, page 33*

We recommend:

1. Guidelines be established by representatives of the PA Farm Bureau, the PA Retail Farm Market Association, and the Penn State Ag Engineering department before implementation of any significant change in Department of Agriculture regulation, inspection, or certification of farm markets, rides and amusements. ('15)
2. The wording on the vouchers for Farmers Market Nutrition Program to be changed from "to be used to purchase produce eligible under Pennsylvania's FMNP program" to "to be used to purchase Pennsylvania grown produce only." ('15)
3. Restaurants and stores be required to name their source of "locally" produced products, which shall be defined as no greater than 150 air miles. ('19)

*AFBF, 111 / School and Government Food Purchasing Programs, page 8*

2. We support:

- 2.1. School meals being balanced to provide no less than one-third of the recommended daily dietary allowances;
- 2.3. Increased use of dairy products and increasing the selection of food products derived from U.S. agriculture.
- 2.7. The recent increase in all fruit and vegetable offerings;
- 2.8. Expanding the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program to all schools throughout the United States and its territories;
- 2.9. Incorporating all types and forms of fruits and vegetables domestically grown within the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program giving priority to fresh and locally grown when available;
- 2.11. Greater Flexibility with the National School Lunch and Breakfast programs to ensure local school districts are able to determine how to meet the nutritional needs of their students;
- 2.14. The use of U.S.-produced agricultural commodities and products in school food and nutritional programs and the P.L 480 export program
- 2.19. An increase in funding for the local farm-to-school programs;
- 2.20. Schools having the discretion of using unused food for programs such as after-school child care, snacks, backpack programs and food banks; and

*AFBF, 159 / Nutrition, page 37*

We support:

- 1.9. Allowing all participants in the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (SFRMNP) to purchase locally produced, USDA-certified frozen meat products sold at farmers' markets or certified roadside markets with SFRMNP vouchers;

*AFBF, 162 / Retail Agriculture, page 38*

We support:

- 1.3. The expansion of Electronic Benefit Transfer programs at farm markets and farmers' markets in federal nutrition programs;

*AFBF, 240 / Sustainable Agriculture, page 79*

3. We support scientific research and education that encourages all participants in the agricultural industry to produce, process and distribute safe food, feed, fiber and fuel.

*AFBF, 464 / Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), page 168*

4. We support:

- 4.11. The use of SNAP for U.S.- produced agricultural products when available;
- 4.16. SNAP exploring new ways to ensure fresh food access in food deserts;
- 4.17. Continued use of SNAP for seasonal farm markets, farm stands, CSAs, and other retail farm markets; and
- 4.18. Technical and monetary assistance being given to farmers to help facilitate online SNAP sales and streamline the requirements to be able to collect SNAP benefits.