

# FOOD ACCESS IN SHAWNEE COUNTY



The food that is available in our environment, and the ways in which it is presented to consumers, exert strong influences on our consumer eating choices. No matter how well-intentioned and knowledgeable a person might be, maintaining healthy eating behaviors and supporting a local food systems can be difficult if healthy and local food options are not readily available, accessible, convenient or affordable in the community.

Traditionally, most families have purchased the majority of their food for home use at community grocery stores. That tradition is changing, however, as more large-scale 'big box' stores devote significant sections of their store floor space to grocery items, and smaller convenience and discount stores and pharmacies also expand their offerings of food items.

Food deserts are defined as parts areas without fresh fruit, vegetables, and other healthful whole foods. They are usually found in areas in which a substantial portion of residents who are low-income. This problem is magnified because while food deserts are often short on healthy foods, they usually have a wealth of inexpensive and unhealthy options at convenience or corner stores.

Individuals and families that have difficulty obtaining enough food because they do not have money to purchase it are often described as "food-insecure". The majority of food-insecure families are working, but not earning enough to pay for their basic needs.

**30,834** people reside in food deserts

**15 percent** of residents are food-insecure

**9,900** children live in households that are food-insecure

## Facts & Trends

- 53.9 percent of K-12 students enrolled for the 2015-2016 school term were eligible for either free or reduced-price school meals. In comparison, 48.6 percent of all Kansas K-12 students were eligible for free or reduced-price school meals during the same timeframe. This has increased in Shawnee County from 42.3 in 2007-2008.
- Additionally, 78.7 percent of USD 501 students were eligible for free or reduced-price school meals.
- The U.S. Department of Agriculture estimated that in 2013, the SNAP participation rate in Kansas was 71 percent, ranking Kansas 40<sup>th</sup> among the states.
- Approximately 24,100 Shawnee County residents received assistance through the SNAP program each month in 2015.
- Approximately 4,100 women and children participated in the WIC program each month during 2015.
- Currently, there are 18 grocery stores operating within Shawnee County.

## Strengths

- Farmers Markets and SNAP Double Up programs
- Harvesters' Mobile Food Distributions
- Community Gardens
- Community engagement
- Summer meals programs
- Choosing Healthy Appetizing Meal Plan Solutions for Seniors (CHAMPSS) Program

## Challenges

- Affordability of healthy food
- Food deserts
- Insufficient production of fruits and vegetables
- Seasonal shortages of local food at food pantries and Harvesters
- Shawnee County has lost at least three grocery stores in recent years
- Only 10% of children eligible for free or reduced price school meals access summer meals programs

## Policy Needs

- Establishment of a Food and Farm Council
- Establishment of healthy food guidelines in public places
- Zoning, tax, and incentives for food retail and processing, and reduction of "food swamps"
- Increased investment in Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program
- Food system waste plan development
- Improved transportation infrastructure to food access points (bus, bike, and sidewalks)
- Remove sales tax on food
- Investment in a Community Health Planner that leads food system planning

## Community Needs

- Increased investments in food deserts
- Increased agricultural production and increased number of farmers
- A local-minded approach to development
- A system-wide approach to healthy food
- More robust, safe, and convenient transportation options to food retail outlets and food pantries
- Investigation and research on pricing and availability of food in underserved areas