

Hungry and Deserted:

Social Justice and the Winston-Salem Food Desert

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### Abstract

The world struggles with hunger, a country struggles with poverty, a city struggles with justice. One of the largest problems that plagues the world today is the lack of access to healthy food. When applied to the United States, a city or neighborhood that lacks the necessary resources for people earning all types of income to buy food at an affordable rate is known as a food desert. The city of Winston-Salem, North Carolina has a large number of these neighborhoods due to factors such as poverty levels, ownership of a vehicle, distance to public transportation, and the lack of public support and relief efforts. While some organizations such as Forsyth Futures are in place to help combat this growing issue, but hardly any focus or mention on Forsyth County in Winston-Salem as being a food desert. The word is completely left out of many of a majority of these studies. This paper will serve as a toolkit to identify a socially just plan of action the current players in this subject can continue their work and seek partnership with other organizations to keep Winston-Salem natives from feeling hungry and deserted.

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### **Hungry and Deserted: Social Justice and the Winston-Salem Food Desert**

#### Part I:

During a time of unrest, before the United States of America, before the superpower, and before the shot heard 'round the world, a group of people collectively said, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness" ("The Declaration of Independence: Full text," n.d.). Every living individual has a basic right to be heard regardless of who they are, how much they own, and how old they are. In order to define Social Justice, one must first understand the fundamental liberties people deserve and have had since their existence. Through crafting a Social Justice definition, one is forced to ask questions, search, read, struggle, disagree, construct, destroy, and forget many definitions once thought to be absolute. This paper will attempt to bind these thoughts and conversations into one working definition of Social Justice.

In order for a situation to be socially just, money cannot rule the situation. From a financial standpoint, people must come before profit. Greed inhibits social progress and pushes a destructive agenda upon those with less. Victor M Rios highlights this idea in his essays when he talks about how Mike, a youthful, energetic African American boy, was "aware of the risk when he stole the bag of chips...he wanted to prove a point to the clerk...he stole the chips to redeem himself for being shamed and feeling disrespected" (Rios, V. M. 2012). Rios writes to discuss the role of the police specifically, but his story also emphasizes the need for people to understand the motive behind Mike's action. Mike never intended to steal the bag of chips, but when he felt threatened and dishonored, he ruled out of the consequences and made a decision that would

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ultimately lead to his wish of respect granted. The store clerk criminalized the boys before they entered the store and called the police to handle the situation. The clerk failed to realize the oppressive situation the boys have grown up in and the system they are attempting to destroy. Mike was not right to steal the chips, but when it comes to the \$0.50 the store clerk would have been paid, the money does not make up for the clerks' actions further prohibiting the boys from feeling normalized in their impoverished neighborhood. These underlying implicit biases must be destroyed for any progress to be made.

In order for a situation to be socially just, implicit bias must be eliminated. To understand implicit bias in context, consider Patrick Radden Keefe's work regarding different ways the police force go about their job. Without seeing any actual need to pull the person over other than the color or their skin gives the officer no right to check and see if anything is alright. Keefe states in his work that in the 1990s in LA, police placed "'decoy' squad cars... to remind the local populace that the police were ever-present" (Keefe, P. R. 2015). In attempt to switch up methods of policing the population, trying new strategies is logical, but having a decoy car only to prove that the white-dominated police force is in control is not a legitimate reason. The implicit bias shown by the police cannot be tolerated and must be addressed from the top down. Keefe mentions "they are there to protect the community, rather than to control it" (Keefe, P. R. 2015). In order for a socially just environment to exist, the police must be completely non-bias force that look out for the community. The police should not look to falsely incriminate and criminalize individuals based on qualities such as race or gender.

In order for a situation to be socially just, everyone's story must be heard. While there are real life consequences associated with telling a story, these allow for a large barrier to be broken

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down. Individuals like Michael Arceneaux who willingly put their coming out story out in the open for all to read, love, critique, take problem with, are pivotal in constructing the tone of conversations in modern society revolving social issues. Arceneaux risked relationships, his credibility as a writer, and the social changes that would occur with coming out in a world so confused on the topic of homosexuality. These stories allow people to read from perspectives they have either not considered or never heard. While rules and legality seem like the answer, a personal story is worth much more and lasts far longer. Many socially just outcomes spur from a personal story being told, tweeted, or written in a story. Tarana Burke's success with the #MeToo Movement was due in large part to the vulnerability and brave steps millions of individuals across the nation and the world took when the hashtag went viral, trending across all forms of social media. In Ms. Burke's case, a hashtag and a personal anecdote allowed for millions of people to become instantly aware of the large-scale epidemic of sexual assault and harassment. Social just outcomes might not always start immediately after a story is told, but the story can be the first step, in a long journey towards equality and hope for all.

The term Social Justice can be defined as an impartial, non-bias value where equality means more than freedom, people are heard and accepted with equal opportunity, and money cannot prohibit progress. A measurable way to monitor the validity of this definition could be verifying with the police regarding reforms within divisions to ensure officer honesty and impartiality. Traffic stop monitoring to keep the police department accountable for who they are pulling over and whether these individuals are being ticketed or let off with a warning. Another way to measure social justice in this regard would be to analyze college acceptance based on ability to pay. With the prices of an education soaring, the way colleges accept students could

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vary based on ability to pay and many other factors that would imply some sort of bias towards the student for something other than academic qualifications.

Contrary to my specific, working definition, Brian Barry in his work, Why Social Justice Matters suggests that social justice is possible through such ventures like save money like euthanasia for dying patients. Barry argues that “about half the hospital budget goes on people in their last six months of life...make it possible to afford a health service...without limiting treatment” (BRIAN, B. 2017). This argument suggests using the money that would be saved due to the patients not living as long as they otherwise would, certain programs would be better funded, and the system would be able to provide more for a larger variety of people. This form of social justice consults morality questions of life and the practice of euthanasia. Barry also suggests that “if we want social justice, we have to reduce the importance of having paid employment” (BRIAN, B. 2017). Barry argues that this socially just ideology creates an environment where essential resources and opportunities are available to all without conditions.

In the bubble of a college campus, students rarely encounter hunger on a daily basis. With a multitude of resources, restaurants, dining halls, and vending machines, hunger is nearly non-existent within this safe haven. Outside the gates of small, liberal arts school Wake Forest University, the world of hunger surrounds the campus and most students will never be exposed to it. There are many neighborhoods that surround the Wake Forest campus known as Food Deserts, which the USDA defines as, “parts of the country vapid of fresh fruit, vegetables, and other healthful whole foods, usually found in impoverished areas,” (USDA Defines Food Deserts.n.d.). National and local research shows promise in their analysis of the local food epidemic of not having enough local produce, but hardly any of this research revolves around supplying enough

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food for those that live in these neighborhoods. Before focusing on local farmers supplying large grocery store chains, the focus should revolve on bringing food to people who don't have sufficient access to it in the first place.

This question reaches far beyond the realm of food, but also looks into poverty and the access people have to food based on their income and resources available. If someone does not own a car, they are at a significant disadvantage in relation to someone who does. If they do not own a car and do not have quick access to the bus, which already limits the amount of groceries one can purchase due to special limitations, then an individual is landlocked and hypothetically closed off from a food source. A basic human necessity, food, should not be this difficult to get for anyone, especially someone who lives in a smaller city such as Winston-Salem. Collectively, grocery stores, convenience stores, city leaders, and city planners need to develop a plan of action to combat this grave situation before a large population loses their life or loses years off their life due to an inadequate food source.

### **Tools to Combat Hunger in Winston-Salem and Beyond**

#### Part II:

Feeding the hungry will temporarily solve the problem of hunger, but the problem is not completely rooted in food. Behind hunger there are countless barriers prohibiting some from ever falling asleep with a full stomach. Personal story telling empowers those who lack resources, social power, and monetary funds with the chance to explain their story on a platform otherwise seen as impossible to reach.

Michael Arceneaux's memoir *I Can't Date Jesus* walks readers through the story of his life and his struggle with the Catholic Church and feeling accepted in a heterosexual dominated

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society. His passion, honesty, and vulnerability allowed readers to relate with his story no matter their sexual orientation. A verbal story leaves an indelible mark, but a written story lasts forever. Finding personal stories regarding the struggles of hunger and living in a food desert will help to educate cities, neighborhoods, and the nation about the difficulties and daily hardships people endure. Linked in Part III is a blog with the link to a video which interviews local Winston-Salem natives who live in areas with major food insecurities. A man is quoted saying “I don’t have a car so I rely on my neighbor who goes to the store every Monday...otherwise I have to take the bus...the bus already limits what I can carry... I don’t ever think about walking...it’s too far” (Farley, M. 2017). This man has to think about transportation to and from the grocery store, how much he can buy due to the price of food, and how much he can carry based on how he gets to the store. With grocery stores so out of reach the burden falls upon the residents of these impoverished neighborhood. These hardworking individuals already work long hours to provide for their families, adding increased stress to their lives is not only unfair, but socially unjust.

Through the broadcast of personal stories and memoirs, members of these food desert communities can work to find these solutions. These stories might not change anything immediately but will be incredible resources in the fight for more grocery stores, farmer cooperation to open stands and transport food to these areas, and local government action to provide transportation to and from grocery stores. When using this tool, it is important to work with the community to empower those who live there to promote change. An initiative to change an aspect of a community without community-led leadership could result in harmful, rather than helpful results. This tool is extremely important to use but could be harmful if the members of the community are skimmed over and forgotten.

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The media in a technologically savvy generation provides users with platforms to share their ideas, spark innovation, and ignite social reform. The work composed by a collection of authors from USC Annenberg, “Inequality in 1,100 Popular Films” addresses the importance of the media and the role it plays in forming individual thought. The Black Lives Matter movement, the #MeToo movement, and countless others have shown to be great mobilizing movements ignited by twitter, YouTube, and platforms unique to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. “Hollywood movies continue to present viewers with a status quo that skews from reality” (Smith, Choueiti, Pieper, Case, & Choi, 2018). With the large platform that blockbuster top 100 movies have, directors have the ability to create a picture of equal opportunity and allow all people from all places to see a movie and truly believe they could one day be a part of it.

Through utilizing the media, mass-educating individuals about hunger and where food deserts are will become possible and attainable. Hunger does not always start with lack of resources or food. Many areas designated as food deserts are majority African-American or Hispanic, low-income housing that have been looked over for years. As cities expand and grow into more commercial, tourist cities, the poor and less-advantaged are pushed out due to their inability to make purchases and their bad look for the city. These city planners think more about money and power than individuals and the harm they place upon these residents. The media has a unique ability to call out these political moves and force conversation over these topics. Similar to personal story and memoir, the media might not directly change a problem initially, but any media coverage could easily be the spark to a campaign and a national petition to end hunger.

The tool Civic Action and Volunteerism can fundamentally change the idea behind serving in all aspects of the fight against hunger. In looking at Keith Morton’s work, *The Irony of*

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*Service: Charity, Project and Social Change in Service-Learning* alongside Aimee Dars Ellis', *Engaging in Social Action at Work: Demographic Differences in Participation* together define service and social change and question the reason behind why people help others. Morton's study suggests people volunteer because they "want to help someone less fortunate than (themselves)" (Morton, K. 1995). Utilizing Ellis' study, we then understand there is a "social tie" to service and "being asked to take part" significantly increases one's willingness to serve (Ellis, A. D. 2013). Paired together, the two separate studies imply that people genuinely want to help others but might need coercing to do so. Combining with the other tools, if individuals in a community go outside of their comfort zones to personally ask others to help donate, help supply volunteers, and help to get the word out about food deserts, social media would start to hum with social change on the rise.

While taking on a large problem such as hunger is daunting by itself, attempting to find committed and passionate people about the subject can be difficult. A large problem associated with something on this level continues to be inner community action and organizations taking on a problem without consulting the community leaders and instead pushing their agenda upon a local population. This could prove to be a problem as local groups only provide food for areas when some areas could benefit more from job training, access to grocery stores, and an increased awareness of race and social class. A Forsyth Futures' study suggests "The benefits of distribution through food hubs include decreasing cost and increasing efficiencies for producers, a link between producers and buyers, food safety and good agricultural practices, and better access to local foods" (Futures, F. 2013). They make a valid point regarding the need to improve relationships between producers and buyers. If farmers committed to selling to buyers directly, in

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their communities, where individuals would not have to worry about finding a way to the supermarket, farmers could improve their relationships with communities while providing healthy, fresh produce and groceries for people in food desert areas.

Linking all three of these tools into a comprehensive study, creating a program that can be launched on a social network platform that empowers individuals to share their stories, allows successful cities, neighborhoods, and governments to offer advice to struggling areas, and collectively unites and educates the nation in an all-out attack on hunger could be extremely useful. Utilizing the power of virality, this program could jumpstart on twitter, snapchat, Instagram and link to a website where the previous tools could be accessed. This platform could allow users to find their area, locate all needed facts regarding the severity of hunger in their area, find where to buy food, and locate resources to help people in areas lacking transportation and grocery stores. Social Justice might not be present in every area this program can reach, but utilizing the media, personal story, and civic action and volunteerism will provide a pathway to a state where equality means more than freedom, people are heard and accepted with equal opportunity, and money cannot prohibit progress.

### **Resources, Graphs and Statistics, and Additional Sources to Consider**

Part III:

#### **Scholarly/Academic Books and Articles:**

1. Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class, and Sustainability Edited by Alison Hope Alkon and Julian Agyeman

This literature studies “institutional racism” and the Production of Unequal Access compared with food insecurities and hunger. Using a variety of case studies and statistics,

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this book serves to highlight why food deserts exist and how to prevent them through “sustainable agricultural” practices (Alkon & Agyeman, 2011).

2. Stuffed & Starved: The Hidden Battle for the World Food System by Raj Patel

Raj Patel’s research looks at the number of people obese and starving in the world and relates the two in a research study to find flaws in the global food structure. Patel explains how the food system is failing and throughout the book and highlighted in his conclusion outlines ten changes he views would drastically change the food system to allow for enough food, healthier food, and local food for all.

3. Good Food, Strong Communities: Promoting Social Justice through Local and Regional Food System Edited by Steve Ventura and Martin Bailkey

This study stands as a successful attempt to identify “community efforts to improve food security in large urban areas of the United States through community food systems” (Ventura & Bailkey, 2017). This work features chapters that focus on community planning and food policy, education and a reform to the food system, a case study working to eliminate racism and increase food justice in Detroit, and distribution of food to areas forgotten by large distributors.

4. The Evolving Sphere of Food Security Edited by Rosamond L. Naylor

A global perspective of hunger is extremely important to include in a study about hunger and the reality of the United States’ fight with something that damages the entire world. This book offers insight as to why food insecurity exists, challenges and possible solutions to accomplish the goal of solving food insecurity, while including personal narrative from individuals who live day-to-day in a sphere of hunger all over the world.

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### 5. How to Feed the World Edited by Jessica Eise and Ken Foster

This collection of writings attempts to shed light into the subject of hunger as they focus on the role of technology, governments, and the environment in the search for an answer to the question of how to end hunger in the world. This work asks viable questions such as “Thinking about the future, which of the following food and agriculture challenges are you most concerned about?” and provides insight to how an answer can be pursued or is currently in the works. This work illustrates and identifies concerns voiced by people who worry about “having affordable food for me and my family” on a daily basis” (Eise & Foster, 2018).

### **Digital/Web Based Resources:**

#### 1. <https://socialwork.tulane.edu/blog/food-deserts-in-america>

Tulane University’s School of Social Work takes a comprehensive, visual approach to bringing awareness to food deserts in America. This website provides vital, up-to-date statistics regarding food deserts, definitions of terminology used in conversations about hunger, and a look at the effect food deserts have economically on neighborhoods.

#### 2. <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/north-carolina>

Feeding America provides an online analysis of what hunger looks like in every US state, for the sake of this toolkit, the North Carolina statistic page is linked. Through this website, users have the ability to find local food banks, sign up to volunteer, or contact Congress to visit a food bank, or to stay informed regarding the hunger epidemic.

#### 3. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-access-research-atlas/go-to-the-atlas.aspx>

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The United States Dept. of Agriculture’s Economic Research Service provides an interactive map of the United States with a feature that highlights Vehicle Availability and Supermarket Access in Low Income and Low Access areas. This service provides users the ability to stay informed about the exact percentage of their county that live under this food desert category and the need for reform and help.

4. [http://www.cityofws.org/Portals/0/pdf/planning/publications/FoodAccess/Food\\_Access\\_Final\\_20161024.pdf](http://www.cityofws.org/Portals/0/pdf/planning/publications/FoodAccess/Food_Access_Final_20161024.pdf)

This City of Winston-Salem’s Food Access Report of 2016 describes to viewers cities and institutions outside and inside North Carolina succeeding in fighting food deserts and describes their methods. The Report also contains a variety of maps of Winston-Salem that highlight “USDA Identified Food Deserts, Grocery Stores”, “Food Access Sites in Forsyth County”, “Households Without Vehicle Access,” and “Local Government-Owned Undeveloped Property” that are helpful in further understanding specific issues in Winston-Salem (Norby, P. A. 2016).

5. <https://medium.com/@farlmr13/winston-salems-food-insecurity-dilemma-ee6a418021bc>

This blog post written by Melissa Farley highlights the food desert problem in Winston-Salem with a link to a film co-produced by students and faculty at Wake Forest University and local organizations in Winston-Salem which interviews locals, adding personal narrative to the national problem of hunger. This website also highlights the racial segregation seen in Winston-Salem, health implications, and how to help and reach out to local organizations.

### **Campus Organizations/Local Organizations who are fighting Hunger in Winston:**

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1. Campus Kitchen: Wake Forest University - <http://phi.wfu.edu/campuskitchen/>

Campus Kitchen is a national organization that is committed to fighting hunger across the United States through student leadership and community partnerships committed to the mission of feeding the hungry. With chapters at University's around the country, Campus Kitchen packs, serves, and prepares meals for food insecure and/or homeless individuals in need.



Source: <http://college.wfu.edu/biology/pro-humanitate-campus-kitchen/>

2. Second Harvest Food Bank of Northwest North Carolina – <https://www.hungernwnc.org/>

This Food Bank serves the Northwest section of North Carolina and is headquartered in Winston-Salem where they provide food for those in need, volunteer opportunities for those looking to help, and educational, employment options, and job skill training for those looking for a work in the food industry. A member of Feeding America, this food bank focuses on solving issues that are related to hunger due to their belief that feeding individuals does not completely eliminate the problem of hunger.

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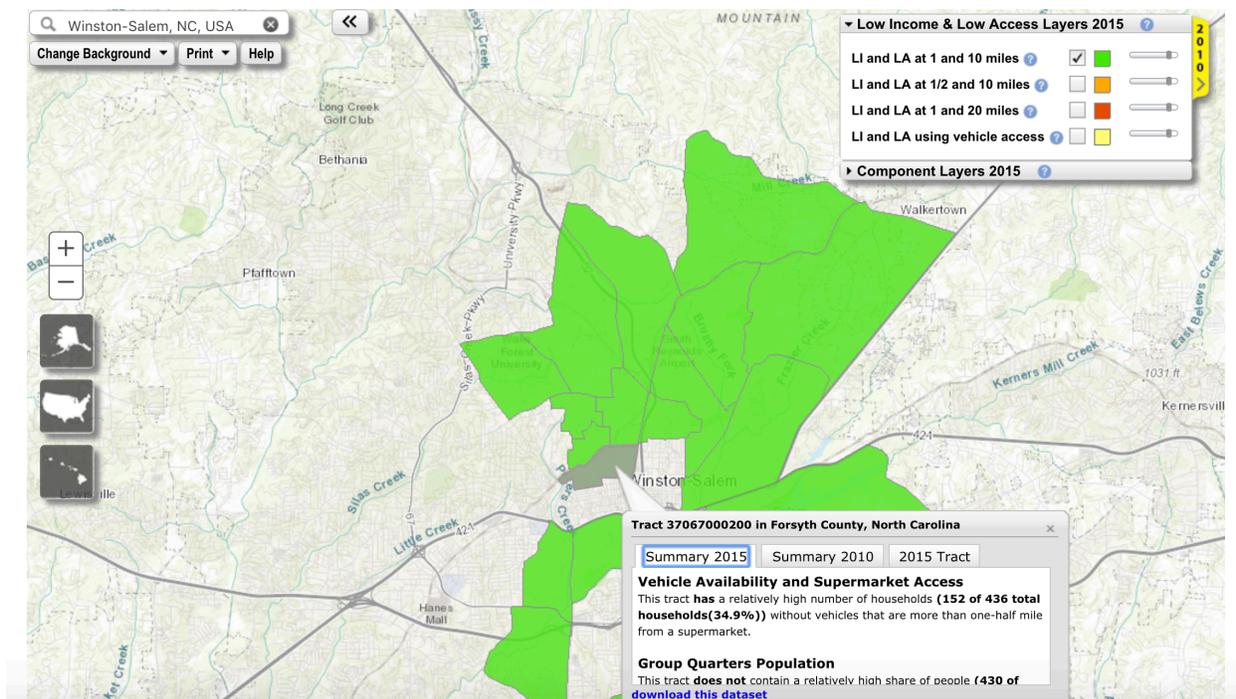


HUNGER ACTION MONTH | MEMBER OF FEEDINGS AMERICA

Source: <https://twitter.com/nwncfoodbank/status/1042939223672799233>

## Statistical Analysis and Graphs:

The Winston-Salem Food Desert:



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This Map, found on <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-access-research-atlas/go-to-the-atlas.aspx> highlights that 34.9% of all people living in Forsyth County lack access to a vehicle and supermarkets.

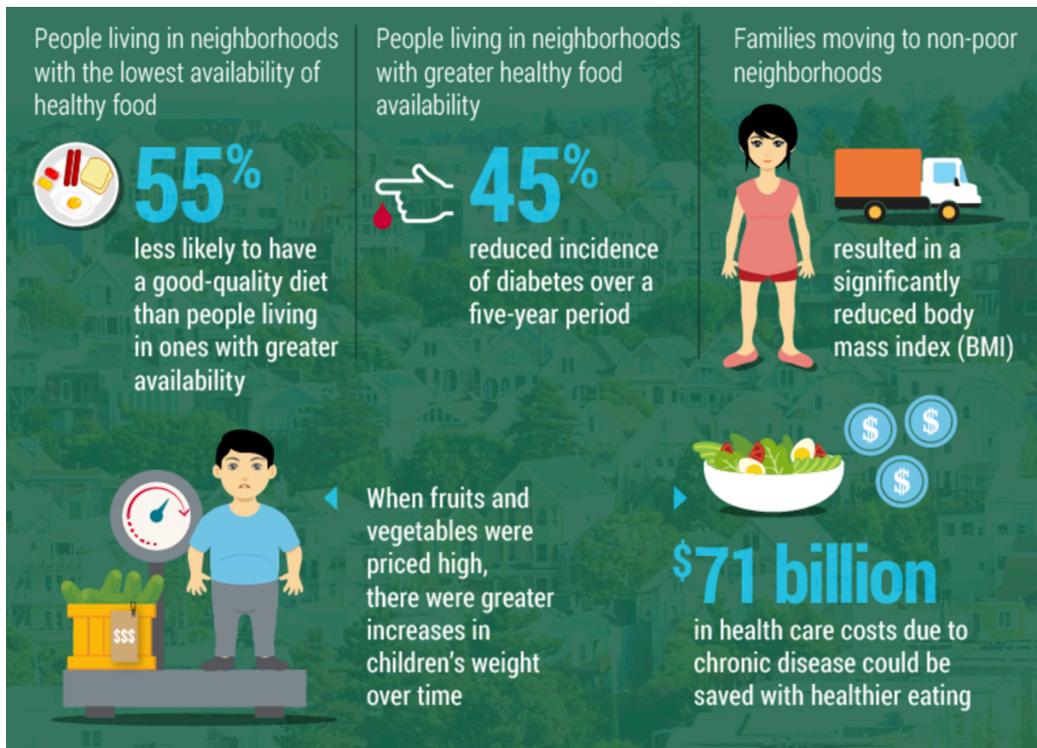
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT	Farmer Sustainability	With support from a community food system and an increase in the purchase of local foods, farmers are more likely to retain dollars spent on food. Direct-to-consumer sales provide the highest retention of food dollars by eliminating the “middleman.”
	Increased Entrepreneurship	A well-developed food system infrastructure provides the opportunity for growth of established businesses and the addition of new food businesses.
	Job Growth	As farm operations and food businesses expand, the need for labor also increases. This also includes the support infrastructure of community food systems, such as shared-use processing facilities and food hubs.
	A Local Multiplier Effect	An increase in producing, processing, and purchasing food locally leads to an increase in dollars that stay in the community. Each dollar spent locally has a greater multiplying impact than dollars spent outside of the system. <sup>7</sup>
HEALTH	Improved Nutrition	Along with consumer education on the benefits of eating fresh produce and how to prepare healthy meals with fresh fruits and vegetables, an increase in the availability of local foods will potentially encourage residents to maintain a nutrient rich diet.
	Decrease in Certain Chronic Diseases	As an indirect impact, a shift in dietary habits could lead to a reduction in chronic diseases related to obesity or poor nutrition.
FOOD SECURITY	Food Access	Access to healthy foods not only means an increase in production, but also a shift in distribution of local food and a consideration of affordability. A strong community food system contains various options for production, purchasing, and cost to provide all residents access to fresh, healthy foods. Community gardens are one element of a food system that offers the potential to reach a range of individuals.

Forsyth Futures conducted a study analyzing the “Impacts of a Strong Community Food System”

Source: Forsyth County’s Community Food System: A Foundation to Grow 2013

Graphics looking at the United States with regard to hunger and access:

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Source: <https://socialwork.tulane.edu/blog/food-deserts-in-america>



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