

CUMBERLAND COUNTY FOOD ASSESSMENT



Dickinson

Department of Environmental Studies
Food Studies Certificate Program

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Cumberland County

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PEOPLE AND FOOD INSECURITY IN CUMBERLAND COUNTY

FOOD INSECURITY

“a household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food. Hunger is an individual-level physiological condition that may result from food insecurity.”

(U.S. Department of Agriculture 2006)

A community food assessment involves the collection and dissemination of community data on demographics, food access and agricultural resources. Assessments may allow a community to understand and assess food insecurity vulnerabilities and challenges. This Dickinson College student researched and written assessment aims to inform and enhance community food planning in Cumberland County. The effort seeks to promote community food security and sustainability of our shared food system.

Completed from January to April 2018, the assessment involved compiling existing data on demographics, food insecurity, poverty and agriculture. Students interviewed individuals working in the food, economic and employment sectors in the county.

At the request of a food pantry based in the county, Project SHARE, the class conducted focus groups with pantry clients. Project SHARE operates two facilities in the town of Carlisle. The food pantry is available for food benefit recipients. All may select food from their Farmstand, regardless of their income or food benefit status. The intent of the focus groups was to learn about food access and health considerations from food pantry and farmstand clients.

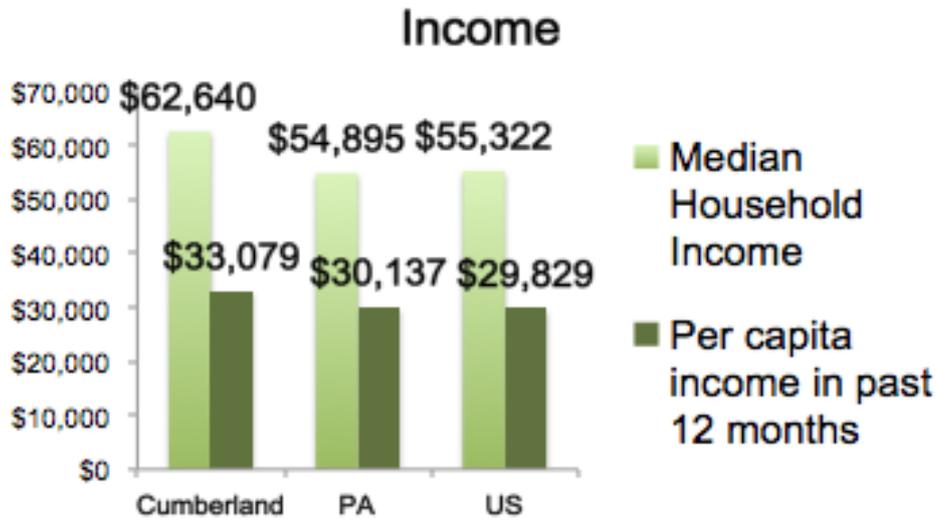
COMMUNITY FOOD SECURITY

“all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that also maximizes community self-reliance and social justice”

(Pothukuchi 2004)

INCOME

A vital part of food insecurity is poverty. People living in rural or urban areas who are low-income, children and elderly are the most vulnerable demographics when discussing food insecurity in America. When someone lacks the spending power to access healthier foods, they are more likely to face food insecurity. Income shortfalls may reduce access to transportation and healthy foods (Adams 2010). Moreover, low-income areas are more likely to be in food deserts than wealthier areas.



(U.S. Census 2016)



DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

	Cumberland	Pennsylvania
Total population	235,406	12,702,379
Race/ethnicity		
White	89%	82%
Black	4%	12%
Asian	4%	3%
Hispanic (of any race)	4%	7%
Unemployment	3%	5%
Median Income	\$62,640	\$54,895
Poverty Rate		
All residents	9%	13%
Households with Children	12%	18%
Female-headed single parent	22%	14%
Seniors (age 65 or older)	5%	17%
Food Security		
Food insecure	11%	14%
Child Food Insecurity	16%	19%

(Feeding America 2015; U.S. Census 2016; Bureau of Labor Statistics 2018; Talk Poverty 2017)

(Feeding America 2015)

FOOD INSECURITY

10.7%

As of 2015 the number of people in Cumberland County who are food insecure is 24,890

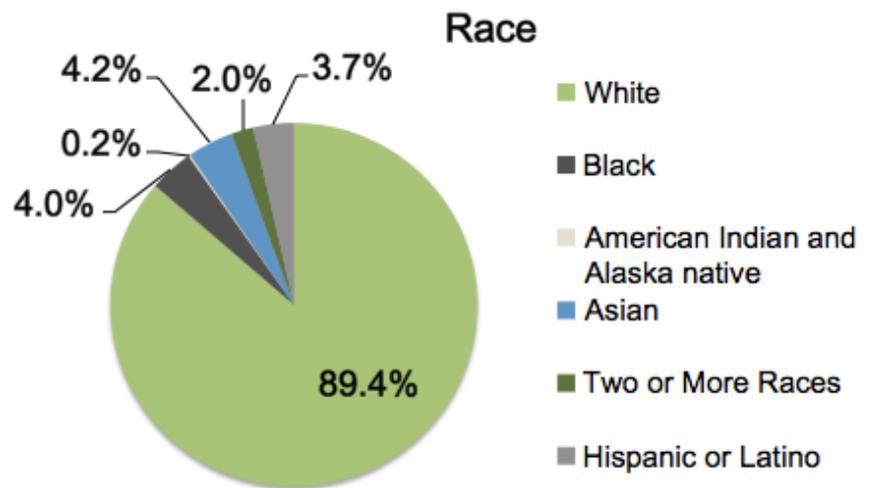
“Because, I feel that whoever donates to us is almost like, it’s like okay, like we’re second handed people and we’re just

as good as the people out there, which I don’t think is right for us.”

Project SHARE Client 2/20/18

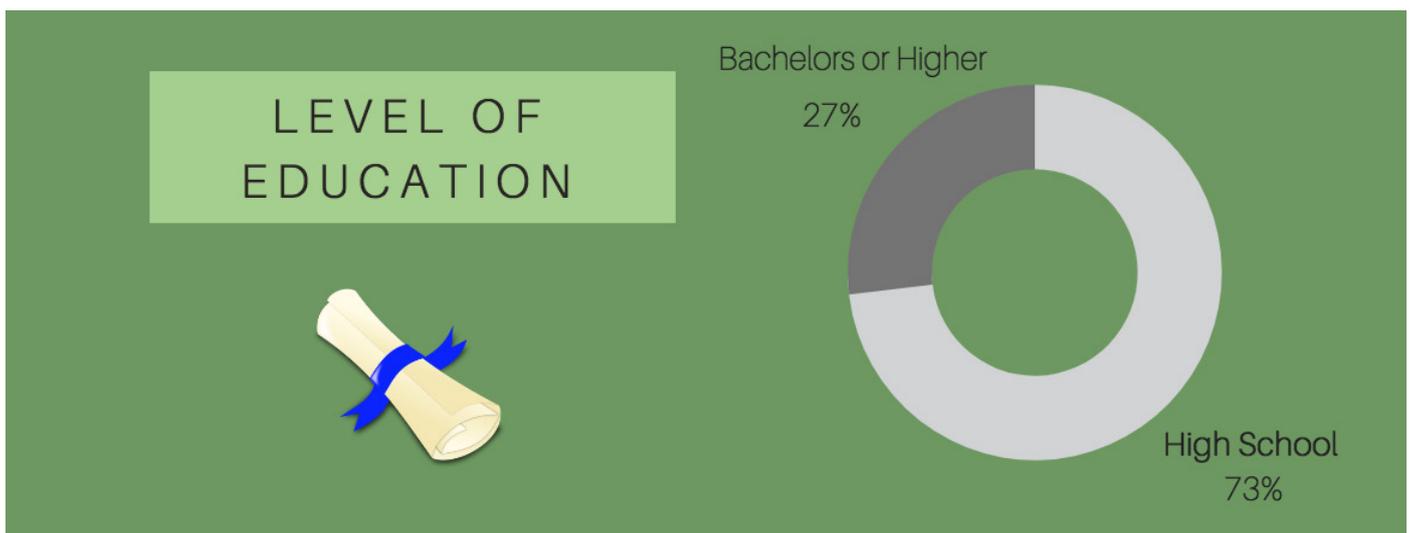
RACE AND ETHNICITY

Race is an important demographic to consider when talking about food insecurity because people of color (along with other marginalized groups) tend to disproportionately face obstacles, making them vulnerable to food insecurity (Agyeman 2003). The county is a predominantly white region, with limited racial diversity.



(U.S. Census 2016)

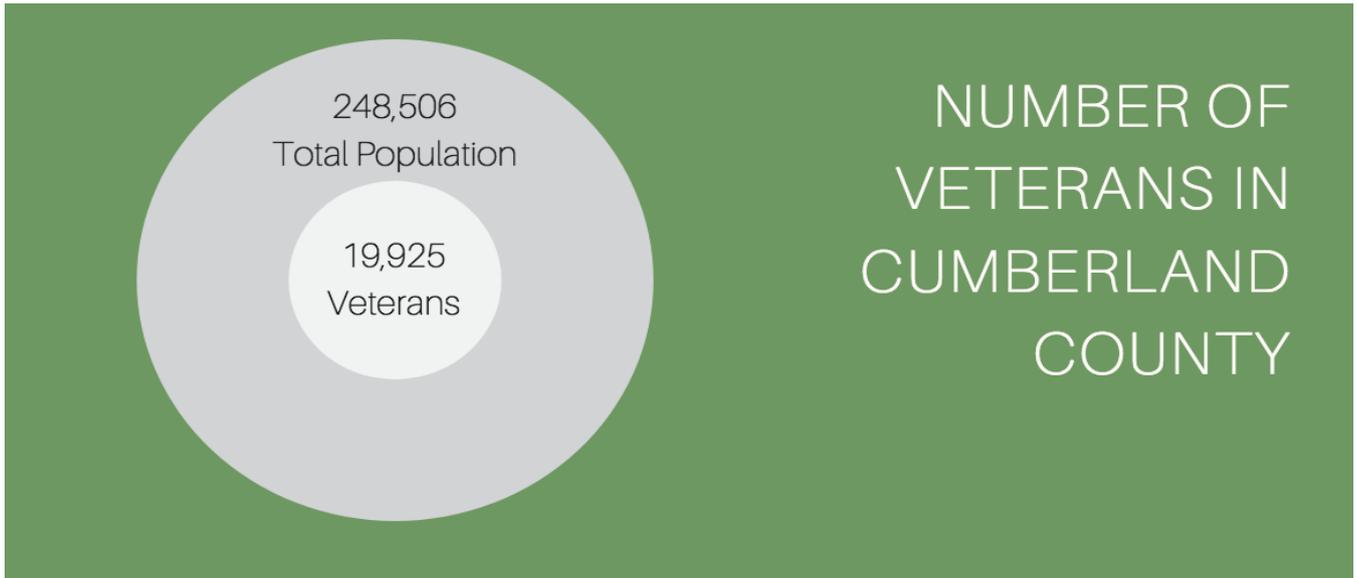
EDUCATION



(U.S. Census 2016)



VETERANS

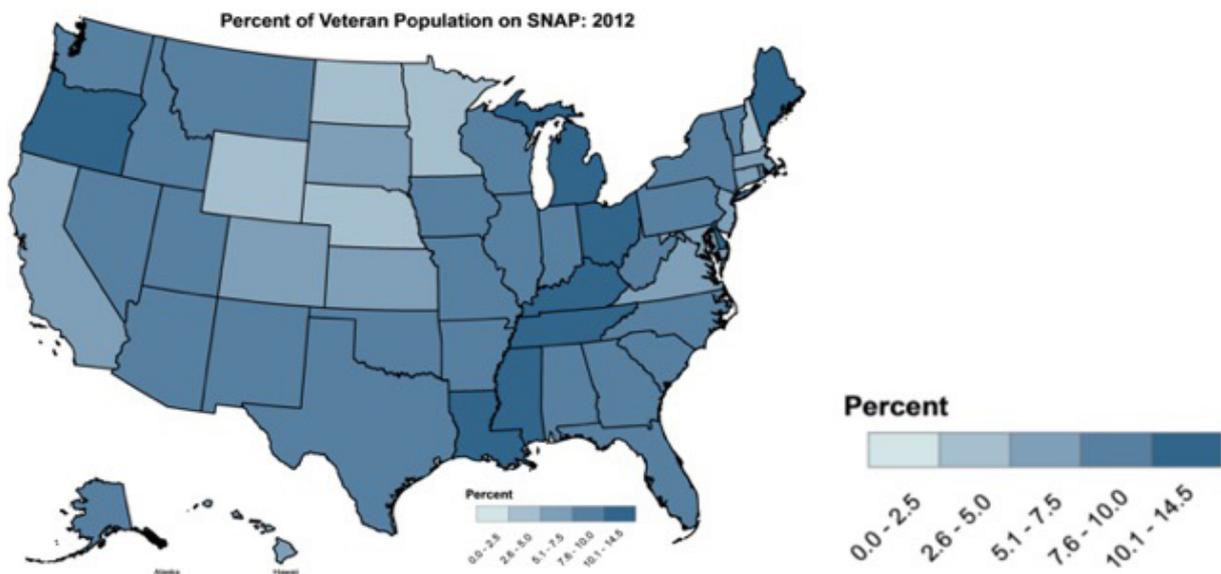


(American Community Survey 2016)

The county has a large population of veterans, making it a group to examine further as it pertains to food and poverty. In addition to veterans being a large margin of residents (9.5%), they are a vulnerable group because they are not guaranteed employment or residency after serving in the military (Loughran 2014).

“One-quarter of veterans experienced food insecurity in the past 30 days, among a multisite study of veterans receiving medical care from the Veterans Affairs health-care system.”

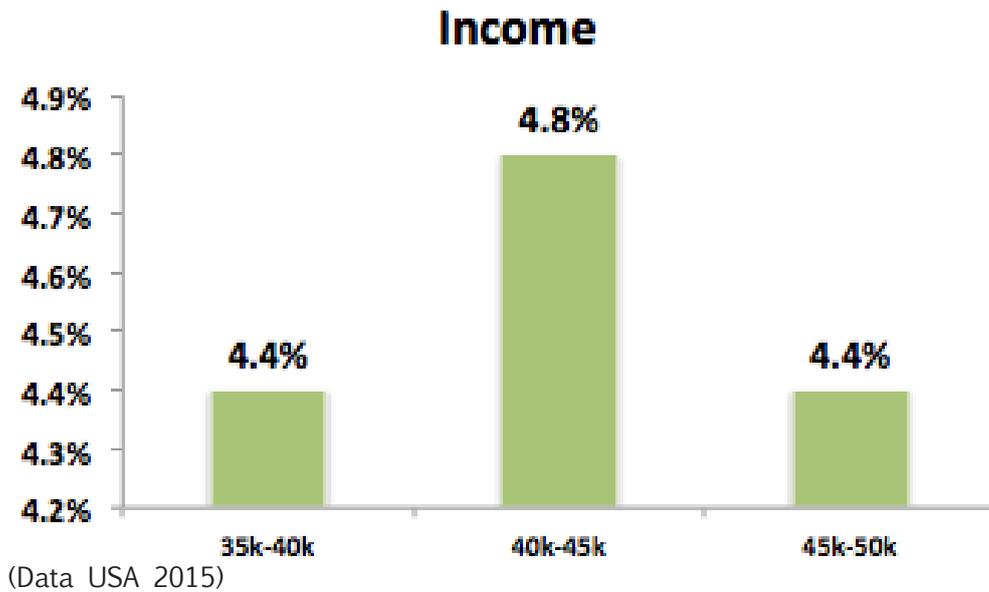
(Nord et al. 2008)



(U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs 2012)

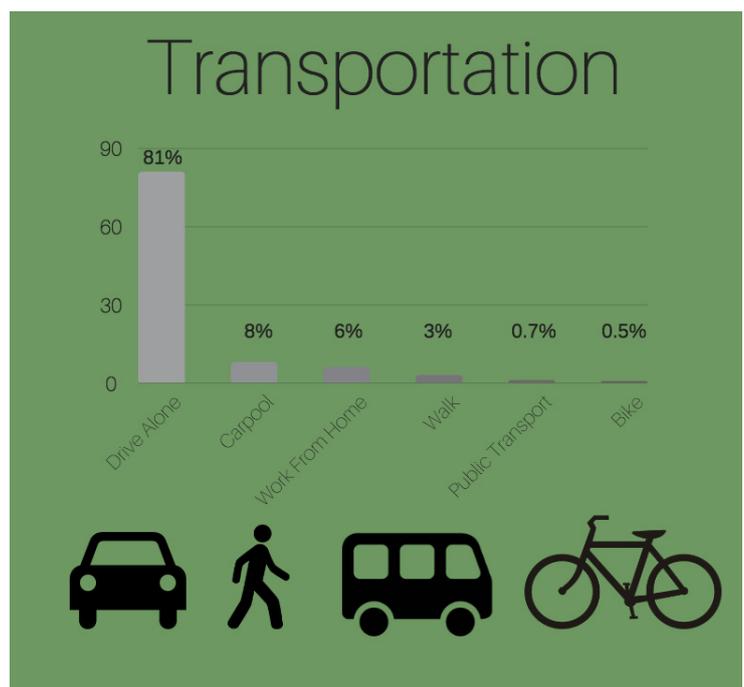
BENEFITS GAP

In addition to looking at residents under the poverty line as an indication of food insecurity, a crucially vulnerable group are families of four who have an income between \$36,000- \$50,000. People that fall under this range do not qualify for federal or state benefits, however they still face economic challenges to live comfortably in the county. This population can have greater barriers since this income is not enough to make ends meet, while it might be too high to receive aid. 13.4% of the county falls in this category.



TRANSPORTATION

A strong indicator of food insecurity is lack of transportation (Walker et al. 2018). The majority of people in the county rely on personal cars. Most importantly, less than 1% of residents take public transit to work (Data USA 2016). This suggests that there is little public transportation available in the county. In the past few years, the government removed public transportation programs such as the Capital Area Transit (CAT) bus from many cities in the county as a result of minimal community use.



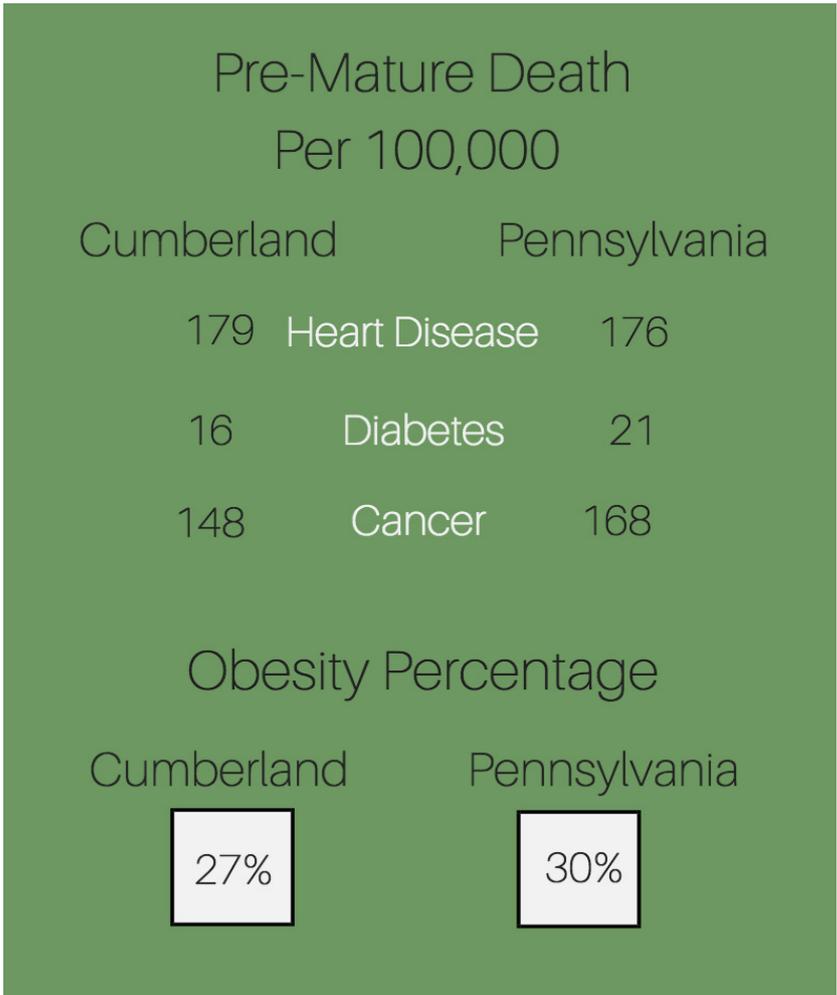
(Data USA 2015)

HEALTH

Health complications are associated with food insecurity (Kilpatrick et al. 2010). A recent global study on food prices “found that it costs \$1.50 more per day – or about \$550 a year per person – to eat a healthier diet than a less healthy diet” (Bown et al. 2014). However, fresh produce and healthier food options tend to be more expensive, and when someone is on a tight budget, it becomes harder to buy healthier food options. Unhealthy diets contribute to some of the leading causes of death and increases the risk of numerous diseases, including: heart disease, diabetes, obesity, high blood pressure, stroke, osteoporosis and cancers (McFadden, Dawn and Low 2012). For this reason, a variety of health problems are outlined below.

Food insecurity is one of the leading causes of diabetes and heart disease due to the low nutrient value of food that is available to those who are food insecure. Food with low nutrients can lead to high rates of obesity (Daniels 2011).

Cardiometabolic diseases, including diabetes, coronary heart disease and congestive heart failure, and cardiovascular risk factors, such as hypertension and obesity, are leading causes of morbidity and mortality in the United States (National Institutes of Health 2018). Health disparities emerge in the county when people face food vulnerabilities.



(Pennsylvania County Health Profiles 2018)

“I would like her to eat more healthier and I really try to provide that, but healthier options are more expensive.”

Project SHARE Client 2/20/18

SINGLE PARENT FAMILIES

The prevalence of food insecurity among single parent families is high relative to other groups (Bartfeld 2003). 19% of households in Cumberland County are headed by single parents. Single mothers are particularly vulnerable because they are more likely to use food pantries rather than SNAP or other government services, despite meeting income criteria (Bartfeld 2003).

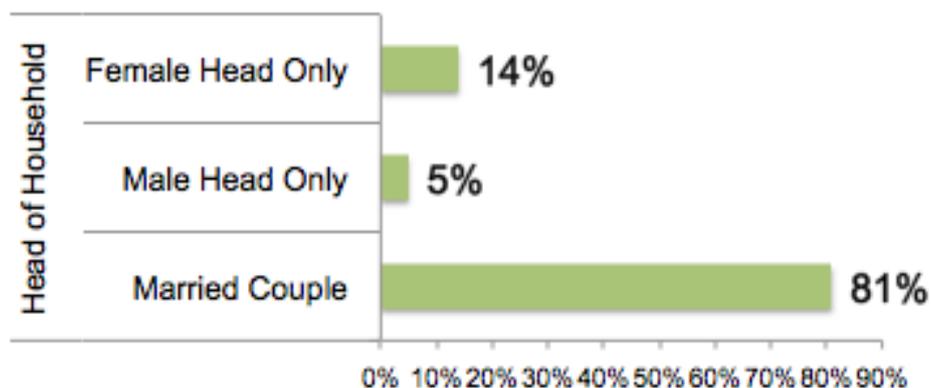
Single Mothers
Living Below the
Poverty Line

22.2%

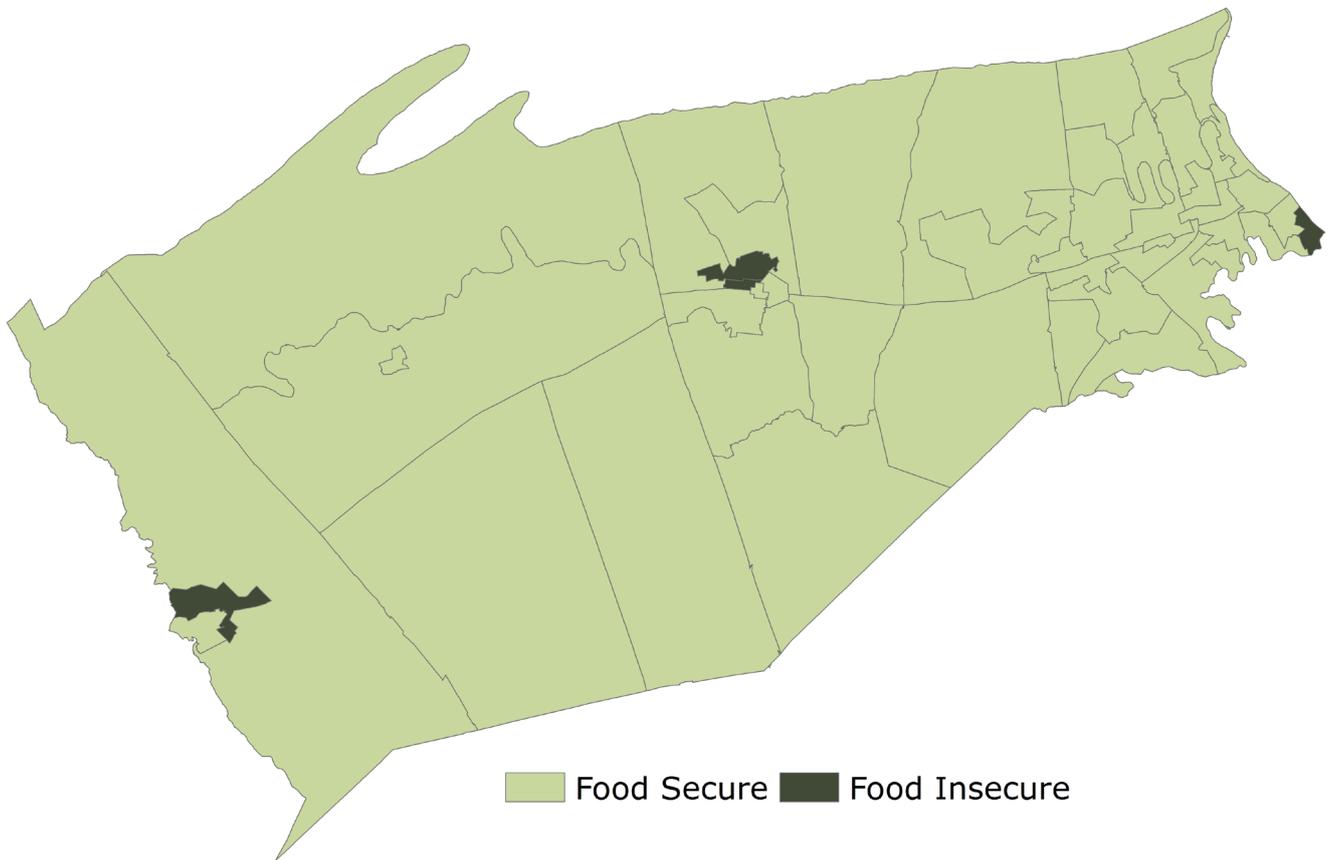
(American Community Survey 2016)



Single Parent Cumberland Households



(American Community Survey 2017)



FOOD DESERTS

Cumberland County is the fastest growing county in Pennsylvania in terms of both size and diversity. However, some residents still live in food deserts. This section highlights the three food deserts in the county: Shippensburg, Carlisle and New Cumberland. All of these regions are considered urban areas by the United States Department of Agriculture. To qualify as a food desert, residents living within an urban food desert do not have access to supermarkets within a mile from their homes. The resources provided vary widely from food insecure region to region.

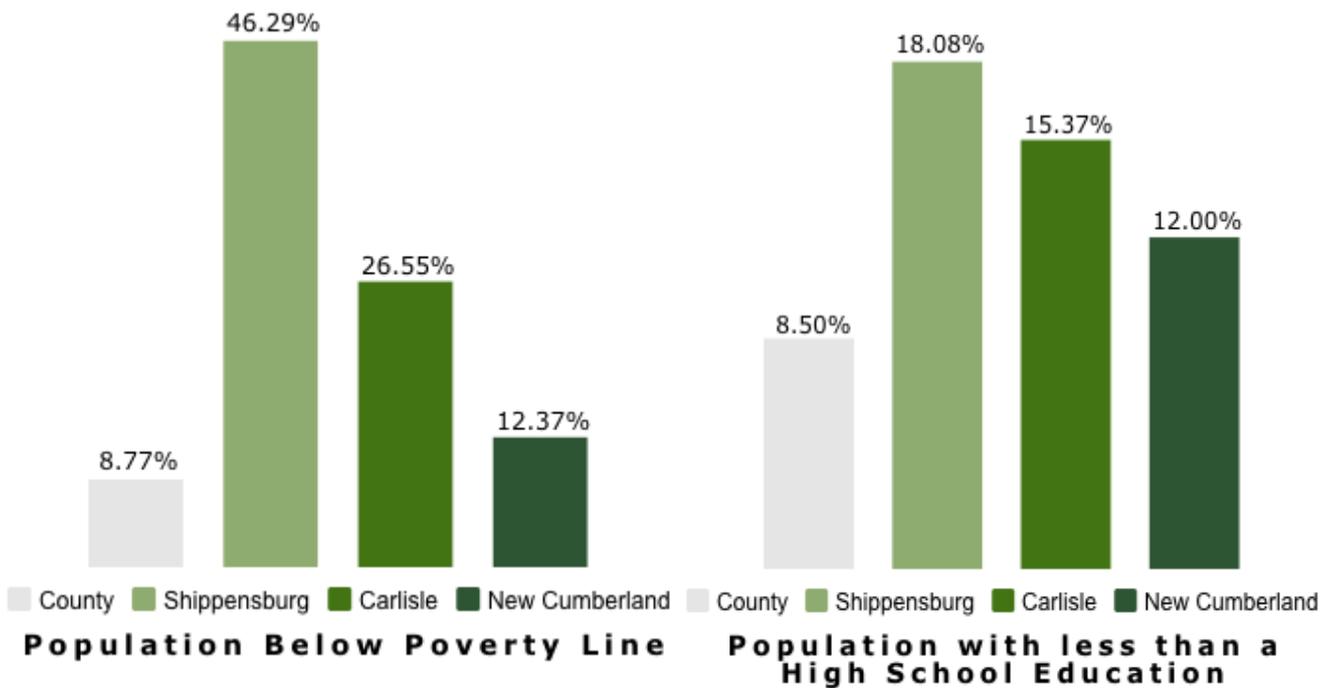
The one commonality across all three food insecure regions is their median income, which is comparatively lower than the rest of the county's income. When evaluating food deserts, the amount of culturally appropriate food available should also be taken into consideration. Food deserts can be the result of low income, lack of access to vehicles, poor public transportation systems and unrealistic standards for federal aid. Often these are experienced simultaneously.

FOOD DESERTS

“parts of the county vapid of fresh fruit, vegetables, and other healthful whole foods, usually found in impoverished areas... To qualify as a low-access community, at least 500 people and/or at least 33% of the census tract's population must reside more than one mile from a supermarket or large grocery store (for rural areas, 10 miles).”

(U.S. Department of Agriculture 2011)

EDUCATION AND POVERTY



*The statistics for Shippensburg and New Cumberland represent only the demographic makeup of the census tracts that qualify as food insecure. Since there were two census tracts in Carlisle that were considered food insecure, the statistic represented in these graphs is an average of the demographics for the two tracts. (U.S. Census 2016)

TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS

Public transportation in Cumberland County exists, but lacks the funding necessary to create a high quality transportation system. Two companies, Capital Area Transit and rabbittransit, provide bus and paratransit services for the county. While express routes allow for transportation between towns and cities, the few local routes are insufficient and difficult to commute within towns in order to access necessities including healthy food, health care, employment opportunities and education.

CARLISLE

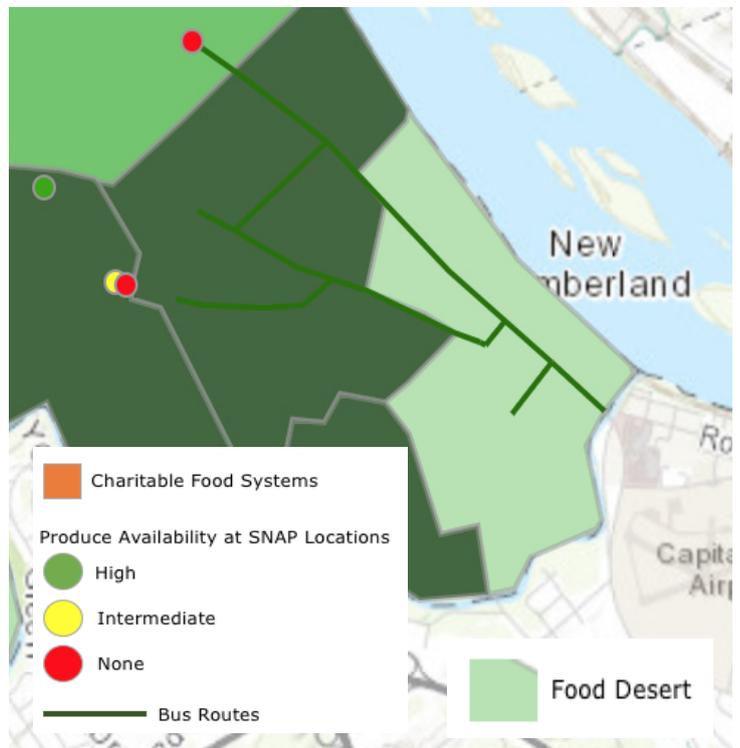
The food insecure region of Carlisle is made up of two census tracts next to one another. The tracts have a percent below the poverty line of 35.43% and 15.89%, compared to 8.77% for the county. The food insecure areas of Carlisle have seven locations that accept SNAP. Of those seven locations, five have fresh produce available, one is unknown, and only one location has high amounts of fresh produce available. Unfortunately, the location with produce availability is Farmers' on the Square, a farmer's market that only occurs once a week. This is also the only local produce available in the area.



Carlisle Food Desert

NEW CUMBERLAND

New Cumberland has 12.37% of its residents living below the poverty line, compared to 8.77% for the entire county. There are no SNAP approved locations within the food desert, there are no local food options, no transportation for people with disabilities, and no charitable food systems available. In addition to paratransit service, New Cumberland is serviced by Capital Area Transit with one express route between New Cumberland and Harrisburg. However, the town does not have any local routes.



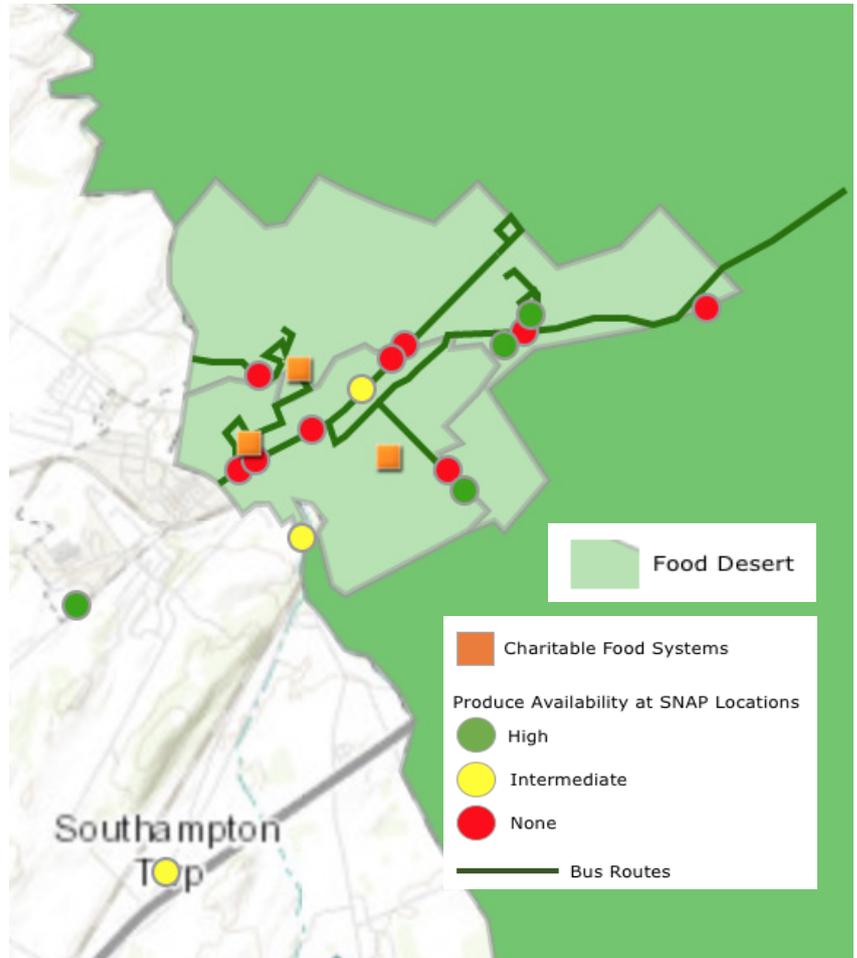
New Cumberland Food Desert

SHIPPENSBURG

Of the residents living in Shippensburg's food insecure region, 46.2% of them are under the poverty line, compared to the 8.77% of all of the county's residents.

Shippensburg's food insecure areas contain 17 SNAP approved locations. Of these 17 locations, three of them provide a high amount of fresh produce - Walmart, Giant and Aldi. Lock Farm provides a Community Supported Agriculture program with eggs and seasonal fruits and vegetables, which is a local food option.

There are three charitable food programs in this area: Shippensburg Produce and Outreach, Kings Kettle and Oasis of Love. The Shippensburg Produce and Outreach program is a food bank for residents in Mount Holly Springs, Gardners, and Boiling Springs. Shippensburg has two Capital Area Transit (CAT) routes, one local and one express between towns. In addition, paratransit services are available.



Shippensburg Food Desert

COPING STRATEGIES

While there are plenty of public game lands which the public can use to supplement their food supply in Cumberland County through hunting, these are not located near any of the food insecure areas and would require a vehicle to access. The food deserts in New Cumberland and Carlisle have low vehicle access and therefore limited access to these coping strategies.





SUPERMARKETS, GROCERY STORES AND ALTERNATIVES

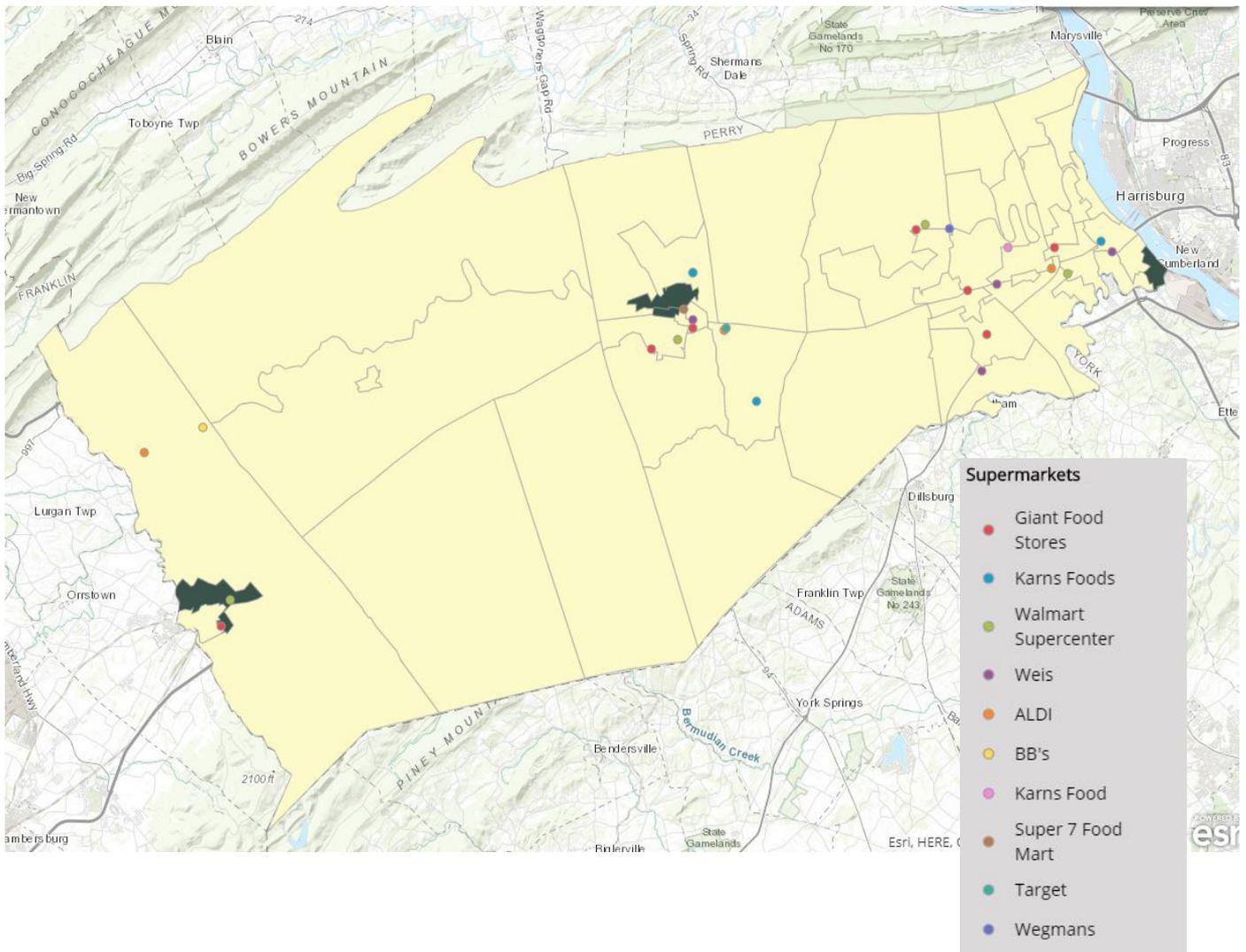
Since the mid-twentieth century, large scale supermarkets have been the standard model for buying groceries in the United States (Eisenhauer 2001). While supermarkets provide a wide variety of fresh, packaged and frozen foods, this high concentration of food in one place can be problematic for many people who lack transportation to get to the supermarkets or who cannot afford the available products.

In the map on page 16, we see a contrast in the amount of supermarkets between the eastern and western half of Cumberland County. Across the river from Harrisburg, the eastern side of the county has multiple supermarket chains scattered in different locations. As we move west however, the county becomes more rural and there are fewer supermarkets apart from those in Carlisle and its immediate surroundings.

SUPERMARKET REDLINING

Driven primarily by the goal of making a profit, the supermarket industry makes decisions about investing in certain neighborhoods based on stereotypes about income, race and the reputation of the neighborhood (Eisenhauer 2001).

While supermarket redlining is most typically found in urban areas, keeping this practice in mind may shed light on the issue of food access in Cumberland County. Since the rural areas of the county are less densely populated than the urban areas, supermarkets are less likely to make a profit and therefore less likely to open new stores in these areas.



The map above includes primarily supermarket chain locations, but these aren't the only food options available in Cumberland County. There are several independent or specialized food stores throughout the county, but again, these are primarily concentrated in and around the suburbs of Harrisburg and Carlisle. For individuals with low incomes or individuals in rural parts of Cumberland County, buying groceries at a supermarket may not be economically viable or accessible due to lack of transportation, so they may rely on corner or convenience stores, gas stations or dollar stores which may be cheaper and more accessible for their groceries.

As seen in the map, much of the western half of Cumberland County has few supermarkets. Because of the lack of supermarkets in this area, this is most likely an area that relies heavily on non-supermarket methods of getting groceries such as corner stores and gas stations, which tend to carry mostly packaged and processed foods and little or no fresh foods.

RURAL VERSUS URBAN CASE STUDY:

BB'S AND GIANT

A case study of two grocery stores allows for the comparison of rural and urban food options in the county. The variation and quality of foods offered, the organic options or spaces provided and the cost of healthy versus unhealthy food for customers provided the basis for comparison.

The case study consisted of BB's Grocery Outlet, a local Mennonite salvage grocery store chain, compared to a Giant which is categorized as a "chain" supermarket that operates throughout Cumberland County and Pennsylvania at large.

A majority of the produce, dairy, and healthy options were fairly common among both stores. Prices and types of the following items provided the basis for comparison: apples, onions, celery, melons, milk, organic yogurt, juice and water.

Although there was high prevalence among the three sections, there was a designated space for organic options from Nature's Promise, a Giant brand of organic foods, while BB's had less options or were spread out among the other salvage groceries.

"I wanna go to B.B's as often as possible. It's in Newburg. It's a once a month thing and you have to plan it right and you also have to have the space."

Project SHARE Client 2/27/18

CHAIN SUPERMARKET APPLES



PRICE: **\$1.88/lb**

SALVAGE GROCERY STORE APPLES



PRICE: **\$0.59/lb**

"If you can flip the gas bill to get there [BB's] or you're living fairly close to there, I can only recommend it...it's very impressive what you can get with the food stamps there..."

Project SHARE Client 2/15/18

Despite the variability, low income individuals could be disadvantaged from purchasing the quantity of food they need. The disadvantages come from the much higher prices offered at chain supermarkets like Giant. Comparatively, BB's grocery outlet offers considerably lower prices for the same produce, dairy and other food options found in Giant. Apples found at Giant were \$1.88/lb., while similar apples at BB's were \$0.59/lb. Although the apples at BB's have comparatively less external appeal as the apples at Giant, individuals who are food insecure in the county greatly benefit from nutritious fruits in higher quantities, by partly sacrificing the quality.

For dairy, which is important for bone strength and other essential nutrients, a half a gallon of milk was priced at \$2.39 at Giant, while BB's offered a half a gallon of a typically expensive brand (Turkey Hill) for \$1.67. Even bottled water was found to be \$3 per case, while a case costs \$2 at BB's. These significant or even smaller prices add up on the receipts and make all the difference for individuals or families that survive from paycheck to paycheck, or struggle to acquire the quality of foods that have the right amount of nutrients.

CHAIN SUPERMARKET MELONS



PRICE: **\$1.99**

SALVAGE GROCERY MELONS



PRICE: **\$0.99**

Furthermore, the Giant that was used in this study is located in the heart of Carlisle which is a fairly urbanized area, while BB's is a 20 minute drive in the county's rural hills. Urbanized areas are highly dense populations of people while rural areas are far more spread out and have higher numbers of agricultural workers (Lance 2018).

A majority of populations in urbanized areas like Carlisle are more likely to shop for their groceries at the nearby chain supermarkets, but the lack of affordability creates numerous difficulties for improving health and overall well-being.

Cheaper prices with higher variation for essential foods can alleviate the struggle for the surrounding community. BB's Grocery Outlet is a significant improvement to affordable and nutritious foods, yet it is located a fair distance away that can be challenging for people that have lack of transportation. Making salvage grocery outlets more accessible can be a benefit in more populated areas to improve access and overall health to the Cumberland community.

CHAIN SUPERMARKET MILK



PRICE: **\$2.39**

SALVAGE GROCERY MILK



PRICE: **\$1.67**

MOVING FORWARD

For the areas with low income and high rates of diet related deaths it is imperative to find a way to increase affordable food access. As Brenda Landis, a Carlisle Borough councilor noted, putting chain supermarkets in these communities may not be the most viable option since they can be economically or physically unattainable for some people. Instead, alternatives like salvage grocery outlets such as BB's or Salvation Army's non-profit grocery store may provide a wide variety of foods and a supermarket style shopping experience at the fraction of the cost. Creating a network of smaller storefronts in the county, especially in the areas of greatest need, could be an excellent way to make these communities more food secure and provide affordable and nutritious foods.



FARMING

With the eighth most lucrative agricultural economy of the 67 counties in Pennsylvania, Cumberland County is known for its agricultural production (U.S. Department of Agriculture 2012). However, there are several misconceptions about farming and farmers in the county. These primarily deal with what food is produced, how this food gets to consumers and whether farmers themselves have access to this food.

44%
of land

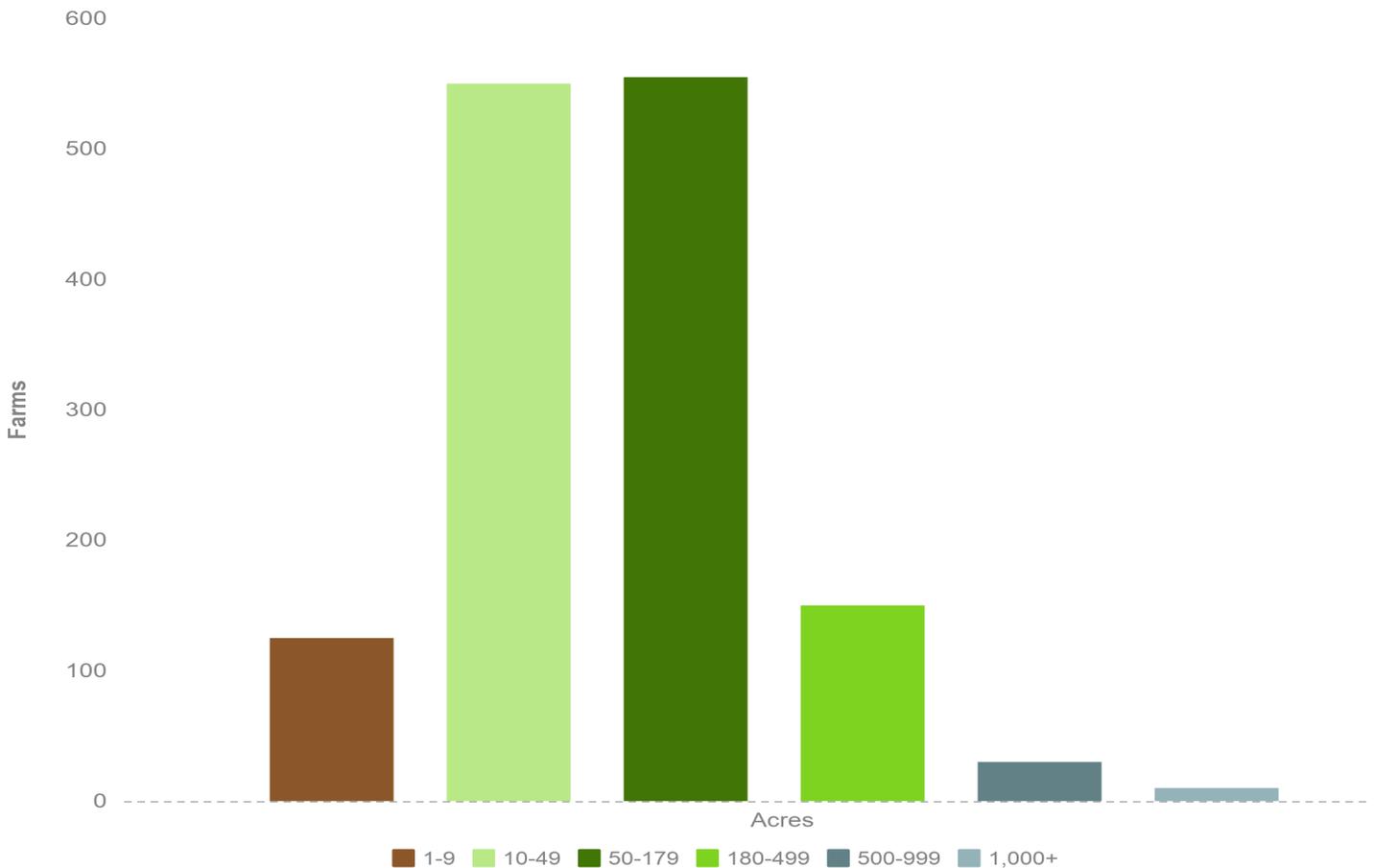
15,000
farms

19,000
acres
preserved

Of the 352,000 acres in the county, approximately 44%, or 155,000 acres, is dedicated to farmland, with 19,000 acres preserved by the Agriculture Land Preservation Board as permanent farmland (Cumberland Valley Visitors Bureau 2018, Agriculture Land Preservation Board 2016 and U.S. Department of Agriculture 2012).

This land is divided between 15,000 farms, which include both large, monoculture enterprises and smaller, more diversified farms (Cumberland Valley Visitors Bureau 2018). Cumberland County has a very small number of organic farms, only 10, compared to the approximately 600 statewide.

FARM SIZE BY ACREAGE



(U.S. Department of Agriculture 2012)

MISCONCEPTION 1:

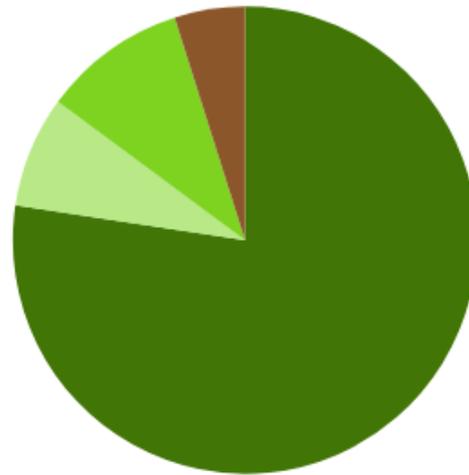
MOST OF THE FOOD PRODUCED GOES DIRECTLY TO CONSUMERS IN THE COUNTY

While much of the land in Cumberland County is dedicated to agricultural production, this doesn't necessarily result in an abundance of food for direct human consumption within the county.

LAND USE

77.3% of the county's farmland is used to grow crops, however, the most abundant crops are not produce, but animal feed (hay, haylage, grass silage, greenchop, or corn silage) and grains (corn, soybeans and wheat) (U.S. Department of Agriculture 2012).

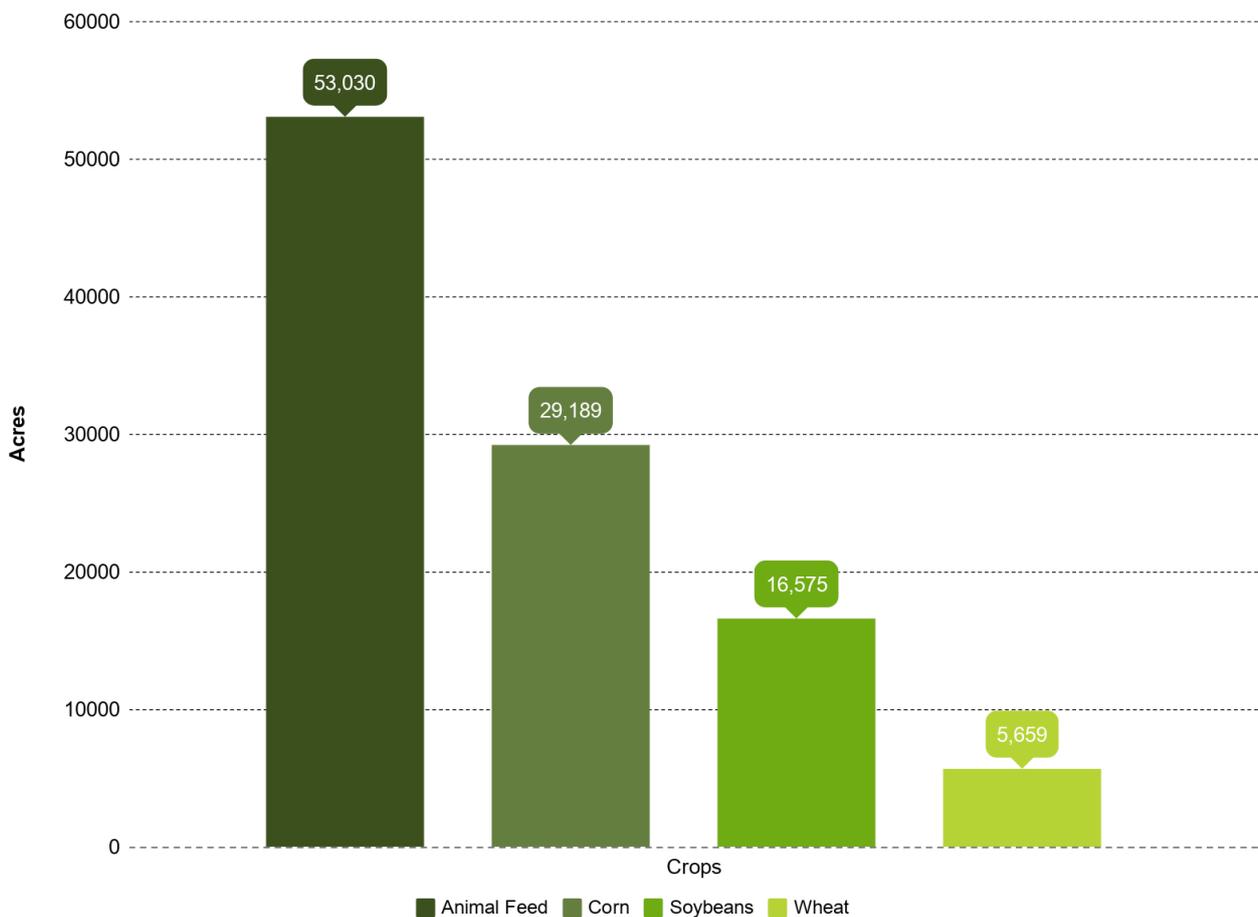
In other words, most of the cropland is used to feed livestock, which is a large source of income for the county.



■ Cropland (77.38%) ■ Pastureland (7.71%) ■ Woodland (10.01%)
 ■ Other Uses (4.90%)

(U.S. Department of Agriculture 2012)

TOP CROPS BY ACREAGE



(U.S. Department of Agriculture 2012)

Still, **links** between farmers and residents of Cumberland County do exist. This relationship takes a variety of forms:



✓ **CONVENTIONAL GROCERY STORES**

Many farms in Cumberland County have contracts with big grocers, such as Toigo Organic Farms in Carlisle, which sell their U.S. Department of Agriculture certified organic tomatoes to Whole Foods Market.



✓ **FARMERS MARKETS & COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE (CSA)**

There are approximately 18 farmers markets in the county (Cumberland Valley Visitors Bureau 2018). As part of the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), qualified recipients can also receive up to \$20 in vouchers to spend at a local farmers market through the Farmers Market Nutritional Program (FMNP). A similar program, Seniors Farmers Market Nutritional Program (SFMNP) also exists for elderly residents (Pennsylvania Pressroom 2015).

CUMBERLAND FRESH MATCH

A program at Farmers' on the Square, a produce-only farmer's market in Carlisle, Fresh Match doubles the value of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits up to \$20 that can be redeemed at the market each week. WIC and SFMNP recipients can also double their benefits up to \$10.



✓ COMMUNITY GARDENS

Community gardens are small plots of land within communities where the residents cultivate food for their own consumption. Cumberland County does have an ordinance outlining the creation of community gardens, which suggests the practice is popular, however no data exists on how many of these gardens are actually present in the county (Cumberland County Planning Department 2014).



✓ CHARITABLE FOOD ORGANIZATIONS

Farms can donate their surplus harvests to charities that fight hunger while being reimbursed for the costs of harvesting, processing and transporting the produce through the statewide program Pennsylvania Agricultural Surplus System (PASS). In Cumberland County, the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank receives PASS donations and then distributes them to local food pantries (Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture 2018). Some of these pantries, like Project SHARE in Carlisle, go directly to the farms to collect excess produce through their gleaning programs. In 2014, Project SHARE gleaned over 35,000 pounds of produce from 36 farms and markets in the area.

Furthermore, the relationship between farms and charities is mutually-beneficial. Project SHARE also donates its excess produce back to select farmers to use as compost or animal feed. Thus, there is local effort not to waste the produce that exists in the county.

GLEANNING (v.)

the act of gathering the leftover produce after a harvest

MISCONCEPTION 2:

FARMERS ARE FOOD SECURE

While the statistics of farm production seem impressive, for most farmers, farming is far from a profitable endeavor, as many of the actual costs and facts surrounding farm life are hidden.

The average cost of operating one acre of land in Cumberland County for agricultural use is \$987.30, while the net income is \$327.41 (U.S. Department of Agriculture 2012). This does not take into account the current rate of renting an acre of farmland, \$98, which most farmers do in large parcels.

This comes to an average income of \$35,873 per farm, right under the U.S. Department of Agriculture Guidelines for qualifying for federal assistance programs, which is \$36,000. Over half of farmers in the county, 53%, farm full-time, meaning they rely on farming as their primary source of income (U.S. Department of Agriculture 2012).

\$987.30
Average Cost
per Acre

Average Net
Income per
Acre
\$327.41

Average Income per
Farm:
\$35,873

Federal Assistance
Threshold:
\$36,000
*(for a family of four)

Based on this data, farmers in Cumberland County are, in fact, at-risk for food insecurity. This means the group of people in the county who grow and produce our food may struggle to feed themselves.

These residents are also losing the land from which their livelihood exists, as more and more farmland in Cumberland County continues to be developed. Combating this trend is one of the motivations behind the effort to preserve farmland in the county (Agricultural Land Preservation Board 2016). Overall, the small percentage of large farms that earn a large profit skew the data, making farming in the county seem more profitable than it is and masking the vulnerabilities of farmers themselves.

“If you want to preserve farms, preserve the farmer.”
Kent Strock, Cumberland County Farm Bureau President, *The Sentinel* 2018



FOOD BENEFITS

Many Cumberland County residents receive benefits from federally and state-funded food assistance programs. Due to confusion regarding eligibility, allowed duration of program participation, benefits provided by the programs and the danger of becoming financially ineligible for the programs and “falling off” of the benefits cliff, **far fewer residents use these benefits than are eligible.**

Misconceptions like these can contribute to the stigma experienced by residents who are beneficiaries of these programs. When looking at the disparity between the enrolled population and the eligible population, program education arises as an issue in informing the eligible population of the benefits that they can receive. Additionally, rural isolation, lack of transportation and stigma all contribute to this disparity, which in the case of SNAP for example, encompasses almost 15% of the county’s eligible population.

COMPARISON OF FEDERAL FOOD PROGRAMS

In terms of specific programs, the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) is a good resource for seniors who are food insecure but does not provide beneficiaries with particularly fresh or nutritious foods. Since seniors receive a monthly prepackaged box, recipients are not necessarily receiving food that is culturally or dietarily appropriate.

Comparatively, the program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), provides healthier food and vital nutritional supplements to mothers and babies. Flaws with WIC surround the population’s knowledge about the program and the program’s ability to reach rural areas. SNAP, a program previously referred to as Food Stamps, provides benefits to more than 18,000 recipients in Cumberland County. This number however, does not come close to representing the county’s SNAP eligible population, which includes families or individuals earning 130% or less of the poverty line. The number of Cumberland County residents that fall into this category is closer to 50,000. These statistics raise the question if federally sourced food assistance resources are beneficial or if they are simply a way for individuals to scrape by from month to month as a short-term solution to a long-term problem.

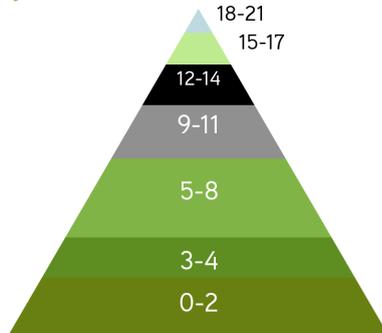
SNAP

Supplemental
Nutrition Assistance
Program

A monthly food purchasing assistance program serving over 40 million low-income Americans each year. Benefits are deposited into an electronic benefit transfer (EBT) card to purchase foods at supermarkets, convenience stores, and special food retailers, including some farmers' markets.



Age Breakdown of Persons Under 21 Enrolled in SNAP in Cumberland County



Source: PA Department of Public Welfare



Recipients of SNAP

Cumberland County:
18,089

Pennsylvania: 1,841,659

Total SNAP Dollars per month

Pennsylvania: \$220,353,981

Cumberland County:
\$1,917,647

(PA Department of Human Services 2017)

SNAP Enrollment versus SNAP Eligibility

Eligibility

To qualify for SNAP benefits, individuals or families must be 130% or below the federal poverty line.

Of the 246,338 residents of Cumberland County, 54,574 qualify for SNAP benefits. Of those 54,574, only 18,809 residents use SNAP.



22%

Percentage of residents in Cumberland County that qualify for SNAP

7.6%

Percentage of residents in Cumberland County that use SNAP

Why the Disparity?

Challenges to SNAP



Education



Restrictions



Stigma

INCOME QUALIFICATION REQUIREMENTS

Name of Program	Income Eligibility (% of the Poverty Level)
SNAP	130% or below
WIC	185% or below
CSFP	130% or below
TEFAP	150% or below

(U.S. Department of Agriculture 2017)

WIC ASSISTANCE IN CUMBERLAND COUNTY

In Cumberland County, WIC program director, Alyssa Feher is finding ways to mitigate the associated problems with the federal food programs. The Tapestry of Health in Carlisle provides incentives to encourage client participation and retention. At the two local organizations in Camp Hill and Carlisle, clients are given gifts after milestone appointments with their child. Additionally, the organization tries to meet the needs of their clients by accommodating with transportation options and by processing applications online to get in contact with a broader range of people who might not know of the resources available to them otherwise.

There are many misconceptions surrounding the program that her organization tries to debunk for their clients. For instance, a common misconception is that an individual is not able to receive SNAP and WIC assistance, however clients who receive SNAP are automatically eligible for WIC.

Cumberland County has been an innovator in terms of its ability to incentivize programs and to come up with ways of informing people of the details of the program, which can help individuals to understand that a federal food program might be a better fit for them than they might think.

Federally subsidized programs also face natural barriers in terms of what they offer since the money is coming from the federal government with strict rules and little room for exceptions. For instance, with the WIC program if a women's WIC checks are stolen, even with proof from a police officer, a WIC center is unable to replace the checks simply due to the nature of the program and the rules that they must follow. This situation is difficult for both the directors who must refuse additional help and the women who are denied assistance.

WIC is a public health nutrition program that serves low income pregnant, postpartum care for breastfeeding women, infants and children up to age five who are a nutrition risk



The program provides nutritional support, supplemental foods, referrals, and breastfeeding promotion. The monthly food box providing essentials for a mother and infant is valued at \$70

How WIC increases public health outcomes

- Reduces premature births
- Reduces fetal and infant deaths
- Increases access to prenatal care
- Increases pregnant women's consumption of key nutrients
- Improves diet quality
- Increases access to regular health care

"It is estimated that every dollar invested in WIC saves the taxpayer about \$3.00 in future healthcare costs"

(County WIC expert 2018)

State and National Monthly Participation Rates

226,060

Clients in Pennsylvania

7,285,889

Clients Nationally

(Food Research and Action Center 2016)

WIC Participation in Cumberland County

February 2018 Participation:
(Carlisle and Camp Hill locations)

2,939
Individuals
per month

"It is estimated that one of every two children in Pennsylvania are eligible for the WIC program, however our numbers are significantly lower than that"

(County WIC expert 2018)

Why Eligible Clients Don't Participate in WIC:

Misconception #1: The program is only for women with newborns

FACT: Women can start the program as soon as they find out they are pregnant, up until their child's 5th birthday

Misconception #2: The WIC program only provides formula and few necessities

FACT: The WIC program provides a variety of foods including dairy, canned goods, whole grains, and proteins

Misconception #3: If a person receives SNAP benefits they are not eligible for WIC

FACT: If a women is eligible for SNAP, they are automatically eligible for WIC. (A client must be 185% of the poverty line)

**Participation data is only tracked by local agency; the above figures represent an estimate of participation for Cumberland County. This data has the possibility to fluctuate month to month, and can vary based on the time and date the query is processed.

Current Improvements to the WIC Program



Milestone gifts for different appointments



Nutrition training with clients



Increased social media presence and online applications



Transportation in order to increase access



Grow with WIC Grant: A three- year \$500,000 grant seeking an overall reduction in barriers by 25%

Ideal Changes for the Future

Volunteer

It is important for individuals to become involved to discuss and bring awareness to these issues. Food insecurity is a very private issue for individuals dealing with these circumstances.

Policy Change

Increase WIC program until age 6. Children are starting Kindergarten later so there is a gap of time before children can receive the free and reduced lunch program, and after the WIC services have concluded.

Utilize Resources

Government programs have limits and rules which can be inflexible. No exceptions can be made, even in extreme circumstances. However, individuals can be referred to organizations, including food pantries in order to seek emergency assistance.

Local food pantries, like Project SHARE and New Hope Ministry, are able to step in and provide emergency food assistance, but this is not a systematic solution. While helpful during these extreme circumstances, local food pantries could do a better job working in harmony with federal food assistance. For instance, Project SHARE gives out baby food and formula during their distribution. However, baby food is covered by WIC. Mothers are generally in greater need of diapers, an item not covered by SNAP or WIC and not abundant at Project SHARE. **If federal and local resources worked in conjunction, individuals in need would be able to better benefit from all the available resources.**

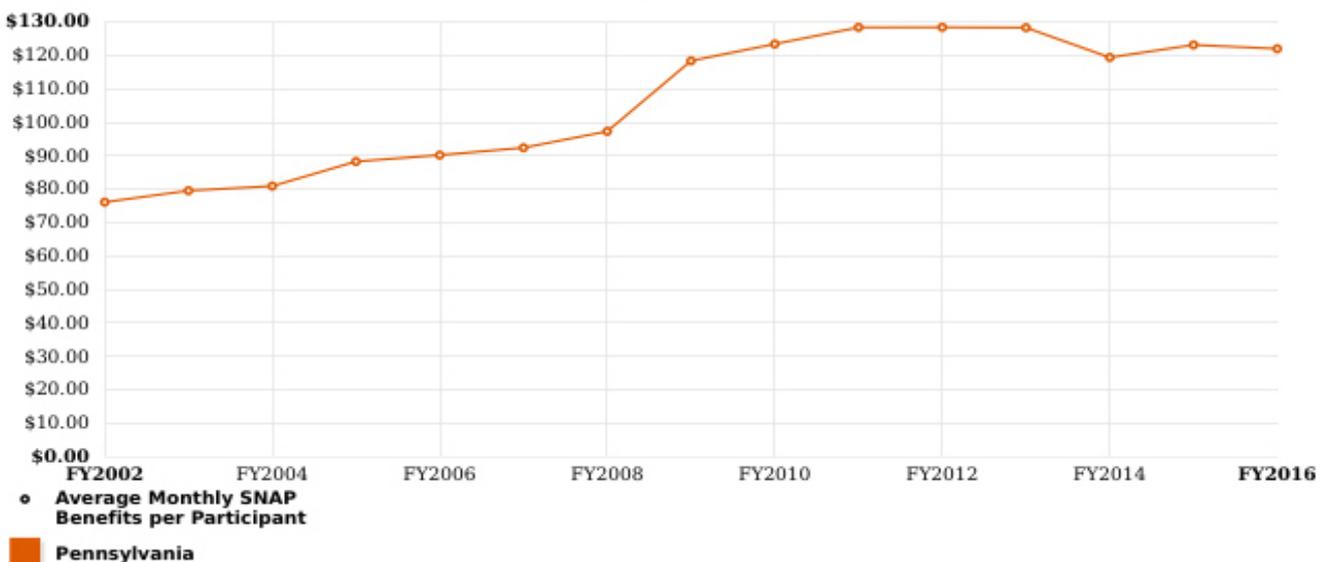
BENEFICIARY PERSPECTIVES: SNAP PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS

Cumberland County has a disparity between individuals who are eligible and individuals that use SNAP. The following conversation was a part of a focus group conducted at a local foodbank. It demonstrates several reasons as to why there is gap in terms of people who are not taking advantage of the federal resources that are available to them.

Respondent 4: I don't get hardly anything on food stamps. You know what I mean? On a fixed income.

Respondent 2: No, no, if they really don't have any income, one person gets \$192. And I went to the grocery store with them, I'm telling you, by the time that they got their meats, there was nothing left for sides. Back in the day it was like \$300, \$400 worth.

Average Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Benefits Per Person: FY2002 - FY2016



(Kaiser Family Foundation's State Health Facts 2017)

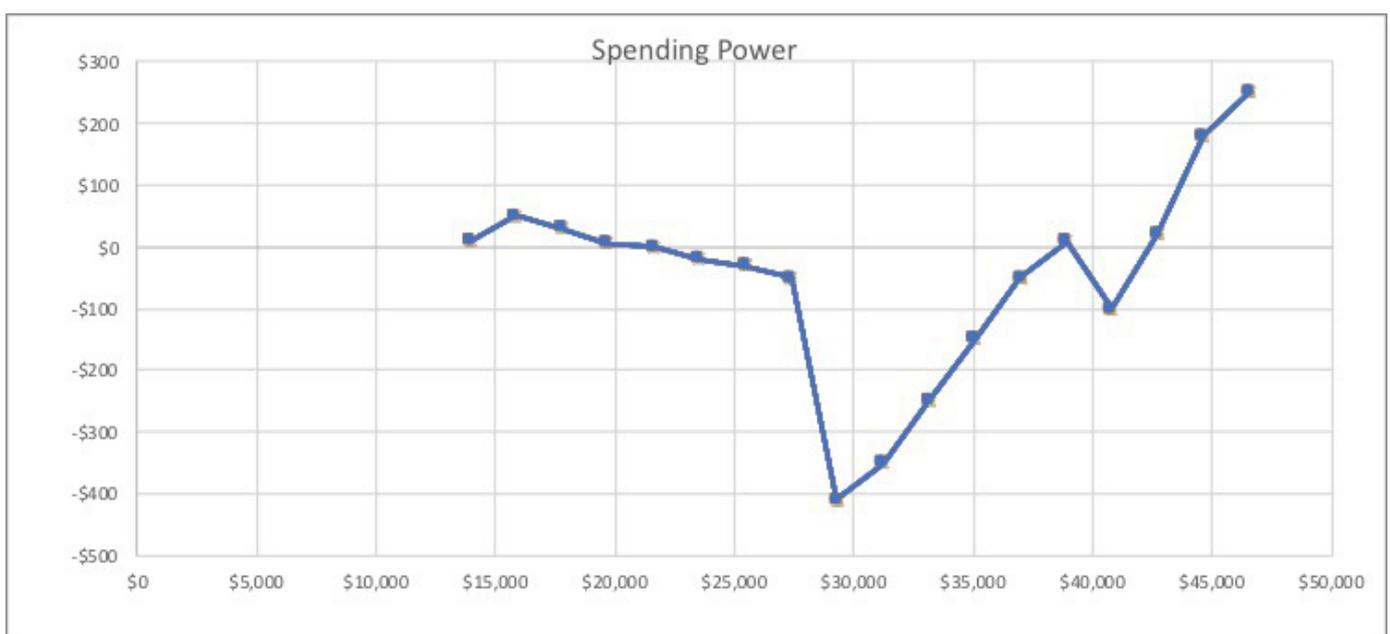
The Benefits Cliff

Although SNAP benefits decrease gradually as an individual's income increases, some households risk losing all benefits if they exceed the qualifying income threshold of 130% below the poverty level. This can create disincentives toward economic mobility.

The "benefits cliff" is a term used to describe the situation in which a program beneficiary loses their benefits because their income exceeds the maximum amount specified for that program. For a family of 3 (single-mother and two children), this would mean losing all SNAP benefits due to an income increase as minimal as a quarter per hour. The danger of "falling off" is mitigated by SNAP's benefit structure, which incrementally increases and decreases benefits as incomes increase and decrease, however the potential sudden reduction or elimination of benefits is remains a barrier for many and acts as a deterrent in seeking promotions or anything else that would contribute to an increase in income. A Boston-based study found that among families who saw reductions or full termination of benefits, depression among mothers increased 17%, children became 70% more likely to be at risk of developmental disorders, and 55% more likely to become food insecure. These statistics portray the ripple effect that even a small decrease in benefits can have on a family, particularly on mothers and children.

(The Federal Reserve Bank of Boston 2017)

The below benefits cliff chart was specifically made with Adams County in mind, however it is generally reflective of Cumberland as well. The graph displays the correlation between salaries increasing and overall spending power decreasing. This trend creates what is known as the "wage gap," or the benefits cliff. Despite an individual's salary increasing, their spending power can stay the same. Spending power begins to decrease significantly when wages hit \$14.25 per hour and does not reach a positive net spending power until wages hit \$19.25 per hour.



(Grote 2010)



National School Lunch Program



Overview

Signed into law by President Truman in 1946, the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act is a United States federal law that created the National School Lunch Program. The program provides low cost and free lunch meals to qualified students through subsidies to schools.

State and National Daily Participation

672,588	21,452,496
Students receiving Free and Reduced Lunch in Pennsylvania	Students receiving Free and Reduced Lunch Nationally

(Food Research and Action Center 2016-2017)

Cumberland County Participation

Free Lunch

To qualify for the Free Lunch Program, a student's family income must be 130% of the poverty level.

16,316 = 32.3 %

Total number of students eligible for Free Lunch in Cumberland

Average percent of students enrolled in the Free lunch Program at schools in Cumberland

Reduced Lunch

To qualify for the Reduced Lunch Program, a student's family income must not exceed 185% of the poverty level

1,946 = 3.8%

Total number of students eligible for Reduced Lunch in Cumberland

Average percent of students enrolled in the Reduced Lunch Program

(Pennsylvania Department of Education 2017-2018)

"In Pennsylvania we're really fortunate that we have a really good data matching system within the schools to try to get kids free school meals if they're receiving SNAP, and automatically enrolling them if they're eligible."

Local SNAP Expert 3/8/18

For low-income individuals over the age of 60, the CSFP box is a way of receiving more food than they would otherwise. According to a local CSFP expert, many seniors only have one form of income, such as the Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Additionally, since seniors are responsible for picking up their own box, they stay active by engaging in society. From this additional responsibility comes additional challenges, such as commuting or finding a ride to the pick-up location.

For homebound seniors, a care taker (spouse, sibling, child, etc.) can sign up the eligible senior and pick up their box each month. For seniors that cannot pick up their box for any other reason, a proxy can do so with the appropriate paperwork. These measures exist so that no seniors are simply 'left in the dark'. Compared to a program like SNAP, CSFP is less varied with fewer products, however as the name implies, it is simply a supplement.

The program is not meant to be an all-inclusive source of food, but rather a means of supplementing food received from pantries, SNAP allowances and personal purchases. There are 10 locations for pick up in the county with one more additional site catering to the privately run ElderShare program by the Central PA Food Bank. The ElderShare program is based directly off of the CSFP program, however the income guidelines are higher (up to 150% of the federal poverty level) and certification is only required upon sign up for the program in comparison to CSFP where recertification is required twice per year.

The recertification requirement is a major issue for some recipients. Since some parts of central Pennsylvania are very rural, pick-up sites can be a 40-50 minute drive from where seniors live, thus making it difficult for the patron to remain on the program if transportation is an issue. According to a local CSFP expert, many seniors find the process to be cumbersome considering that it is common to be on a fixed income. Recertification once per year would be more practical because it can be detrimental for the seniors who forget to recertify and thus lose benefits. The certification process is also strenuous and stressful for the partner organizations as well who must keep track of all the associated paperwork which includes sign in sheets, distribution agreements, proxy forms, amongst others.

The Central PA Food Bank, the lead agency in charge of food distribution in this region has room to expand the program and would ideally like to serve more seniors in the coming years. Since this age demographic is not typically apt with technology, word of mouth is often the most effective way to reach more people. Due to the low population density of this predominantly rural county, organizations like the Central PA Food Bank can have trouble spreading information about programs such as CSFP.

The CSFP program can be a way of cutting back on grocery store expenses and saving for critical expenditures including healthcare costs. Overall the program can be a vital resource that should be taken advantage of, but has relatively low absorption and retention rates.

CSFP

Commodity Supplemental Food Program

Program Description

A monthly supplemental food box for seniors ages 60 or older
Valued at \$50

Cumberland County

262
users

10
locations

In Pennsylvania: 6,000 users
Nationally: 600,000 users
(Food Research and Action Center 2017)

Foods Included

4 canned vegetables
2 canned fruits
2 boxes of cereal
2 containers of juice
1 can of beef or chicken
1 shelf stable milk
Peanut Butter
Carbohydrate
2 lbs. of cheese (perishable)

Eligibility

- Age 60 +
- Income 130% of the federal poverty line

*Program can be used in conjunction with other federal and local food assistance programs

(Peterson 2018)

Challenges to the Program


 Location


 Recertification


 Communication


 Finding Partners

ElderShare

A Central PA Food Bank funded program replicated off of CSFP.
Seniors who are no more than 150% of the poverty line are eligible.
Approximately 75 seniors in Cumberland County use this service

(Central PA Food Bank 2018)



CHARITABLE FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

Cumberland has nine community food banks and pantries, which distribute food to thousands of individuals all over the county. While these terms are used fairly interchangeably, according to Feeding America, food banks are predominantly larger storage centers, while food pantries are smaller distribution sites (Feeding America 2018).

All of the main organizations are religiously affiliated. They vary in size and provide a range of food offerings and services, such as transportation or cooking classes. Although the county is fortunate to have these organizations, there still are barriers to food access and serving the needs of clients, such as transportation, funding and providing for those who are financially above the federal eligibility requirements but are still struggling to access food. Yet, increasing the access to charitable food systems is not the solution to the problem of food insecurity. Thanks to strategic fundraising, some organizations have been able to provide services to help their clients seek higher employment so that they do not find themselves without enough money for food. Charitable food systems are key players in the food and social service systems in this county.

THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

The food banks and pantries in this county have various systems when it comes to food distribution. As recognized in food security literature, a successful distribution experience is key, as those in need may be deterred from accessing help if they are uncomfortable in a given environment. Traditionally, receiving food from a food bank involves waiting in line for short to extended periods of time and filling out paperwork to prove one's eligibility. In some facilities, food is distributed using pre-packaged boxes. Professionals in the field have found that the distribution process can feel, **“Undignified. Racist. Toxic. Stigmatizing. A slow death of the soul. Humiliating”** (Fischer 2017). Organizations such as New Hope and Carlisle's Salvation Army try to empower the process by using a personal shopping system rather than a pre-set box system for their clients. Clients get to select their desired food based on the amount they qualify to receive so that they can choose their food based on personal and cultural preferences. It is also seen as a more dignified distribution system because it not only gives the client more power to choose their food based on their preferences, but it also feels more like a natural shopping experience.

FAITH IN FOOD BANKS

Of the 9 emergency food assistance organizations in this county, all are run by or hosted in a faith-based organization. In most of these facilities or on their websites there is a clear religious aspect to their practices. It is important to consider how religion can influence clients to feel more or less comfortable when receiving food and services from these organizations, especially in this situation where the majority of food assistance programs are faith-based.



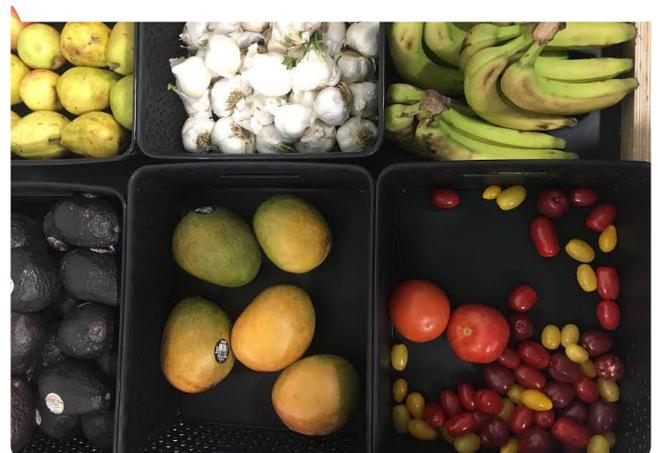
“Our goal is not to convert people, our goal is to love people”

Food Pantry Director 3/2/18

When speaking with the director of a Christian-Protestant food bank, he pointed out the fact that his organization is faith based. When asked if he sees religion interfering with the client experience or services, he confidently replied “no” and emphasized the idea of inclusivity in their organization. The desire to help and not to judge or put religious pressures on their clients seems to be a similar goal to the other food assistance programs. The director proceeded to explain that each distribution and service location has clients from a wide array of nationalities and religions who are welcomed no matter their background. Cumberland County is no exception to the pattern of faith playing a role in food assistance. Whether it is running the food banks, serving meals, organizing volunteers or holding can drives, religion is a major actor in organizing charity work.

FOOD QUALITY

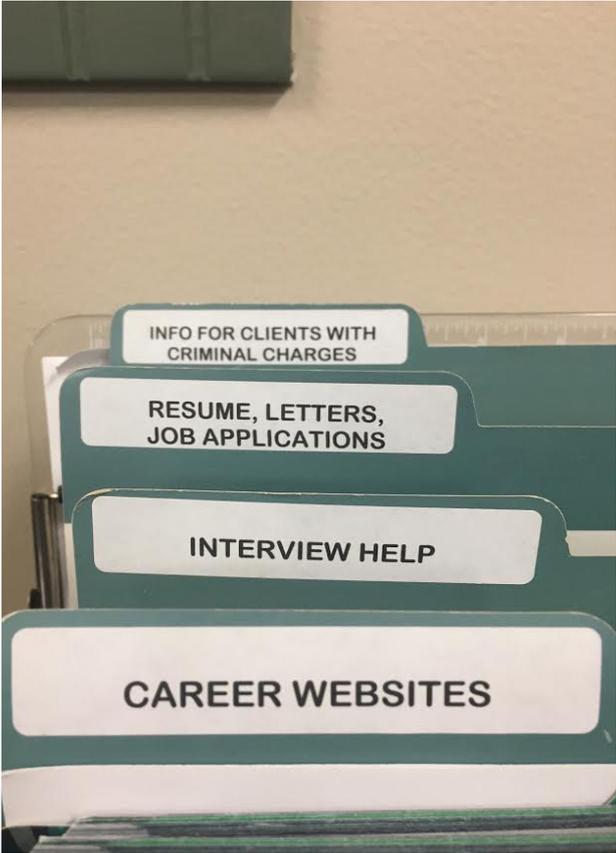
Many food banks make a very conscious effort to increase their distribution of healthy foods. One food bank president stated that their mission was to “distribute healthy, local food” (Food Bank Representative 2018). This mainly includes fresh fruits and vegetables. Another representative noted that she “only gives away food that she would feed her family” (Food Bank Representative 2018).



However, it is often difficult to provide higher quality foods, due to limited donations of this type and funding. Also, clients are not necessarily accustomed to all types of produce, and some may not want them or know how to prepare them. One organization, Project SHARE, is addressing this disparity by providing cooking classes on preparing produce being distributed the following week (Food Bank Representative 2018).

Charity Profiles

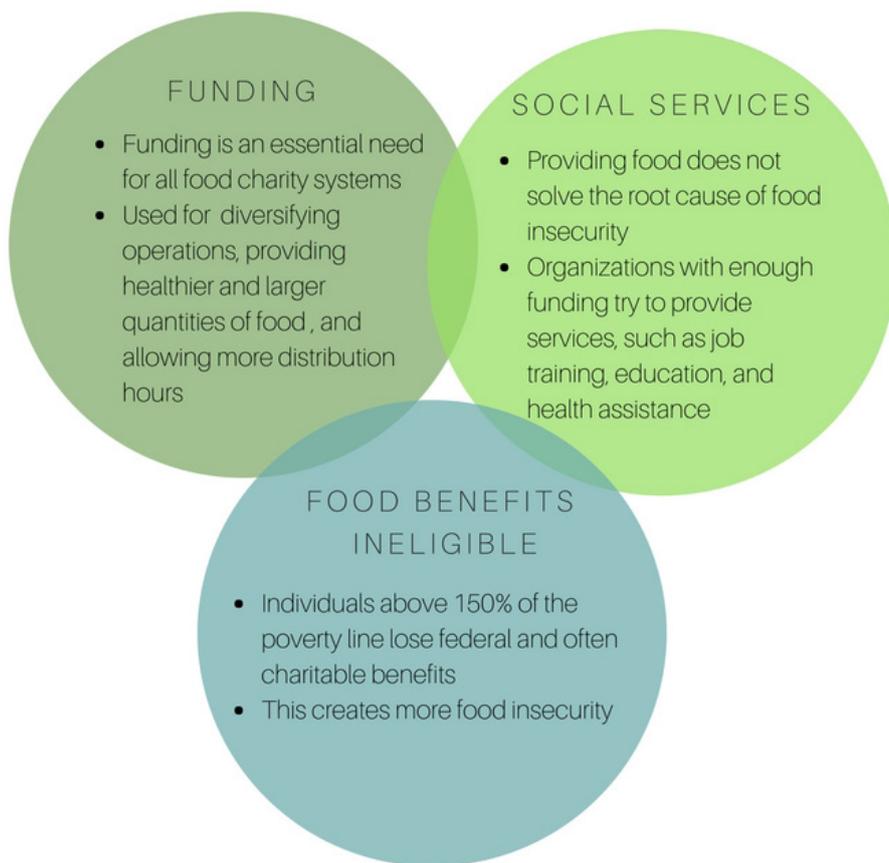
	Service	Impact	Offerings	Eligibility
Salvation Army, Carlisle	Provides food assistance services via a pantry and a soup kitchen.	Serves approximately 500 individuals per year.	Includes produce, frozen meats, canned foods, packaged foods & beverages.	Income less than 150% of the Federal Poverty Guideline. My Brothers Table program has no requirements.
Shippensburg Produce & Outreach	Their main service is the food bank and diaper bank.	Serves approximately 6,000 families per year.	Food such as fruits and vegetables, eggs, meat, and other packaged items.	Living in the Shippensburg school district and being below 150% of the federal poverty level.
Project SHARE	Food assistance services and others, such as home deliveries, cooking classes, and backpack programs.	Serves approximately 30,000 individuals per year.	Foods, such as fruits and vegetables, breads, eggs, meat, and other packaged foods.	Income less than 150% of the federal poverty level. The farm stand is open to all.
New Hope Ministries	Food assistance, consulting, assistance with housing, transportation, heat and utilities, & more.	Served 19,500 clients in 2017. With two new locations, this is expected to increase to 21,000 people.	Produce, canned foods, and meats.	Income less than 150% poverty level income and residing in an outlined service area or being part of an associated church's congregation
Big Spring Area Food Bank	Main service is food bank.	Serves approximately 4,800 clients per year.	Produce, milk, eggs, canned and packaged foods.	Residence in Big Springs and income below the federal poverty line



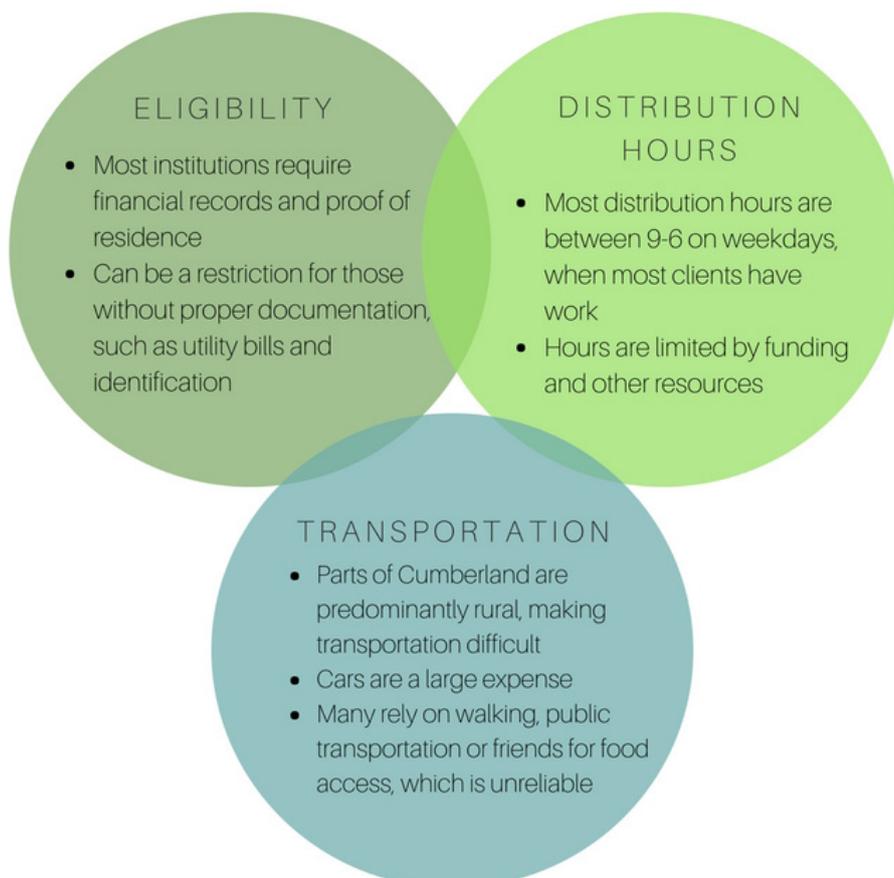
Some Charities offer services beyond food assistance, such as career skill building and consultations. New Hope Ministries has a mobile food bank that has various locations in and around the county so communities that are far from assistance get the food that its food-insecure residents need.



LIMITATIONS TO SERVING THE NEEDS OF CLIENTS



LIMITATIONS TO RECEIVING SERVICES





CREATING OPPORTUNITIES

The root of food insecurity in Cumberland County and in the nation, lays within the prevalence of systematically reinforced poverty. This research reveals economic vulnerability in food deserts and among the populations who barely exceed the poverty threshold for food benefits. The county needs more efforts which invest in moving people out of poverty rather than feeding the hungry (Fisher 2017). While it is well-intended, charitable food assistance is often seen as a shallow technique for solving hunger. Rather than addressing the reason for why so many residents cannot afford to feed themselves, it only reinforces the pattern of covering up the problem. Government food assistance programs also mitigate the effects of poverty, but do not prevent it. Systematic efforts to change minimum wages and job opportunities could make significant improvements for these vulnerable populations.

✓ MAKING A LIVING WAGE

Earning a living wage is paramount to living a life free from food insecurity. The living wage of a single parent in Cumberland County is \$10.50 per hour. The minimum wage in Pennsylvania remains \$7.25 per hour, which is not high enough to raise a family out of poverty. If two parents work full time at minimum wage, they would earn about \$30,000 a year, which is well below the living wage of a family of four in this county, which is about \$52-54,000 a year. If the government increased the federal minimum wage to \$10.10 an hour 4 million Americans would be lifted out of poverty (Vallas 2014).

✓ MENTORING

Mentorship programs, such as The Integrated Education and Training Program, although resource intensive, have been successful at sustaining unemployed individuals in careers. Mentors act as navigators to help job-seekers gear their interests towards a field or profession and may provide training.

✓ TRAINING

While Cumberland County has a low unemployment rate of 3.5—3.6%, there are still individuals who lack the opportunity to a well- paying job. Under this environment, an individual usually faces a barrier to employment. For manufacturing jobs like forklifting that require a special certification, price is an enormous barrier. Certifications can cost upwards of \$600. Additionally, it can be challenging to find vulnerable populations eligible for employment.

✓ PATHWAYS TRAINING

Having opportunities for employers to have a “pathways program” for training allows individuals the opportunity to move up within a company under the premise that they will be able to retain workers and personally develop individuals through a trade or craft. Through these programs, a company shows an investment in their people. For example, at Meadowbrook Gourds, a prominent gourd manufacturer, the company hires many high school students in hopes that they will be able to train the students to eventually be in substantive leadership position.

SELECT TRAINING AND MENTORING PROGRAMS IN CUMBERLAND COUNTY

	New Hope Ministries	South Central PA Works	Cumberland Area Economic Development Corp
Focus	-Fight income inequality -Challenge the gap between a living wage and lost benefits	-Help those who lack social mobility -Undereducated -Previously incarcerated	-Connect employers with labor needs to education providers -Emphasis on: heavy equipment operation, advanced manufacturing and advanced nursing
Mentoring or Training Programs	-Job Training -Finance classes -GED program -Pre-K childcare	-Discounted forklift license program -Mentor and education program Provides -Supplemental income to advance career paths	-Launching a pilot pathways program for heavy equipment operators -Encouraging mentorship and apprenticeship programs
Targeted Population	-Immigrants -Those who continually are found without their needs met	-Younger people (16-24) able to work, but lacking the connections or education	-High school students, not looking to pursue higher education
Type of Organization	-Christian Social Service Agency	-Non-profit Organization	-Quasi Governmental Non-Profit Organization

The Cumberland County Food Assessment reveals that vulnerable groups remain susceptible to food insecurity. Particularly vulnerable populations include residents earning below \$50,000 in the three food deserts in the county, single mothers, and veterans. Through conversations with Project SHARE clients and food experts in Cumberland, the urgent need for pathways to move out of poverty emerged as an area of vital importance. Existing programs, including those included above, can create opportunities for some to move beyond the cycle of poverty and become food secure. While resource intensive, training and mentoring programs provide tangible skills for industries in demand in Cumberland. Opportunities exist to strengthen the existing programs, create more connectivity for these programs, and create new programs to provide opportunities for those most vulnerable in the county. These efforts could help to address the systemic poverty challenges that drive food insecurity in Cumberland County, and to work towards community food security.

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Students in Dr. Heather Bedi's Spring 2018 Food, Poverty and Place course at Dickinson College conducted the focus groups, interviews and research featured in this report. Dr. Bedi developed the community-based research Environmental Studies and Food Studies certificate course in response to discussions with food advocates regarding the need for an assessment of the current status of food insecurity and poverty in the county.

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