

FOOD DESERTS: THE WHAT, WHERE, WHO, & WHY OF A MISSISSIPPI CRISIS

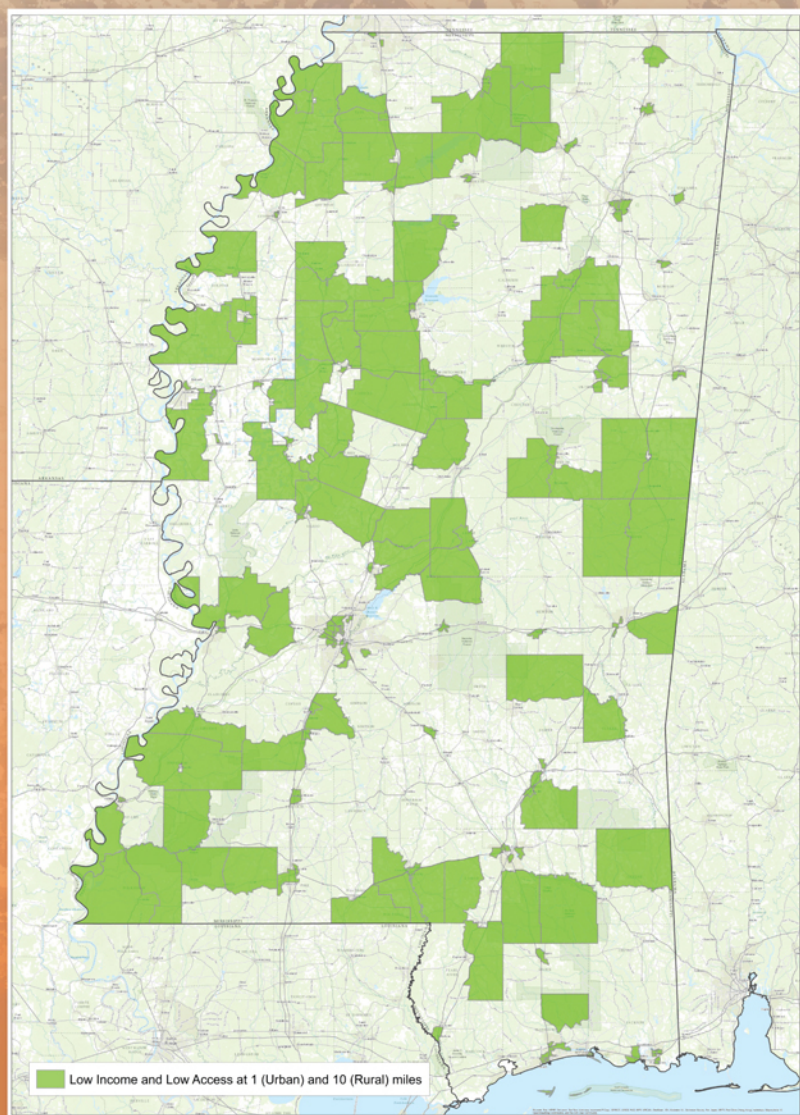
What Are Food Deserts?

Food Deserts are areas with limited or no access to fresh foods. While there are often several convenience stores and fast food restaurants, a food desert does not have a local grocery store selling fresh fruits, vegetables, and meats. Food Deserts are associated with Food Insecurity or not having access to affordable and nutritious food.

An area is defined as a Food Desert if it meets the following criteria:

- For urban areas, residents live more than 1 mile from a grocery store
- For rural areas, residents live more than 10 miles from a grocery store
- There are increased numbers of convenience stores and gas stations
- 20% or more of an area's residents live at or below the federal poverty line

Where are Food Deserts in Mississippi?



* Food Access Research Atlas www.ers.usda.gov

Who Is Affected By Food Deserts?

All Mississippians, whether living in a Food Desert or not, rich or poor, rural or urban, are affected by the social and health care costs associated with food insecurity. However, two groups of Mississippians are affected the most: low-income families and rural residents.

Low-Income Families:

Statewide, over 70% of food stamp eligible households travel more than 30 miles to reach a supermarket. Traveling far distances and paying extra transportation costs is especially hard for low-income families who already struggle financially. When nutritious food is available in food deserts, food costs are often high, again hurting low-income families.

Rural Residents:

Rural counties in the Mississippi Delta average one supermarket per 190.5 square miles. Traveling such long distances can be expensive and there is often no public transportation in rural areas.

Why Are Food Deserts Important?

Limited Food Options = Obesity & Poor Health

Limited Food Options:

Food Deserts have increased numbers of convenience stores and fast food chains, but restricted access to supermarkets. In fact, studies show that low-income zip codes have 30% more convenience stores than middle-income zip codes. Convenience stores and fast food restaurants offer highly processed foods like chips, sodas, candy, burgers, and fries. Fresh food offerings in these areas are limited, expensive, and/or unavailable.



Obesity:

Increased junk and fast food consumption coupled with limited fresh foods leads to obesity due to the high calorie content of convenience foods. Unfortunately, many individuals living in Food Deserts get more calories than they need, but do not get adequate nutrients for a healthy body.



Other Health Problems:

People living in Food Deserts have higher rates of diabetes, heart disease, obesity, and high blood pressure than areas with a grocery store. Junk and fast foods, often the only food options available in Food Deserts, are loaded with extra sugar, salt, and fat, which contribute to chronic diseases.

For more information and further resources, please visit www.umc.edu/cbmh

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