

Food Economics: Access to Healthy Food in Low-income Neighborhoods

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BACKGROUND RESEARCH ON TOPIC

American History : The Founding Principles, Civics and Economics is a survey of the creation and foundation of American government, its economic system and how they are intertwined. A lesson that I would like to explore focuses on the economic impact of food deserts and food swamps in low income communities. We will tie it to essential standards **F.P.E.1.1: Compare how individuals and governments utilize scarce resources.**
F.P.E.1.2: Analyze a market economy in terms of economic characteristics, the roles they play in decision making and importance of each role (private property, free enterprise, competition, profit motive, and allocation of resources in the price system)

What is Food Justice?

Food justice, in the simplest of terms, is equality. It's about ensuring everyone, regardless of wealth, race, or location, has access to the same foods.

There are three main aspects of food justice:

1. Access to nutritious and fresh foods
2. Living wage jobs for all food system workers
3. Cooperative community organizations

CLASSROOM DISCUSSION

Start a conversation by asking your students three questions:

1. Where does your family shop for groceries?
2. How long does it take to drive there?
3. How far away is the closest convenience store?

Answers from students will vary, but this is a good segway into talking about food deserts. Make sure to differentiate convenience from grocery stores, talking about the different foods primarily available in each.

Explain the importance of maintaining a balanced diet and demonstrate the connection between healthy eating and food access. People don't always choose to eat unhealthily; sometimes it's their only option. It's important to voice the positive effects that better food access has on our bodies and communities.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Have students survey family, friends, and community members about needs in their neighborhoods for homework. Have them ask where they shop for groceries, how often they go, and what they typically purchase. Students can then develop a concept for their own grocery store. Have them write down the healthy items they hope to carry in their grocery stores. They can then develop a plan to promote healthy eating and their new grocery store to the community. Take it one step further by creating a mock grocery store in your classroom. Bring in various fruits, vegetables, and packaged foods with price tags. Show students the differences between purchasing these items in a grocery store vs. a convenience store. This will show students the importance of equal food access, while also teaching them about maintaining a balanced diet.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How do we combat "food deserts and food swamps" in communities of color?
2. How can we get companies to invest in the health of minority communities?
3. What is the larger "cost" of food inequities to the overall economy of the nation?

RESEARCH

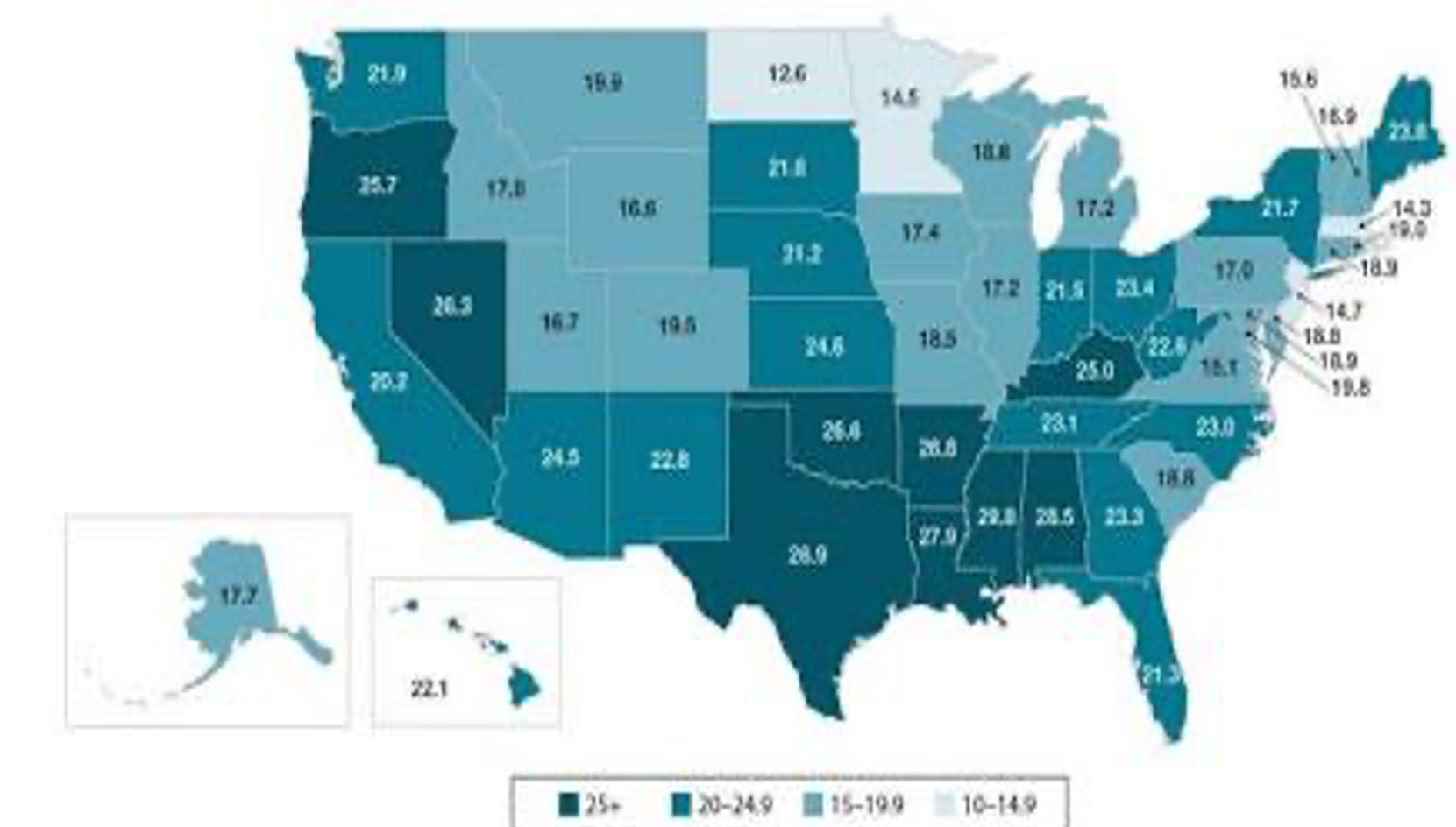
- Maps show that over 2.35 million people lack access to a supermarket within one mile of their home. Studies show that that low-income census tracts had one half as many supermarkets as wealthy tracts and eight percent of African Americans live in a tract with a supermarket compared to thirty-one percent of whites (UConn Rudd Center, 2014).
- Access to healthy food is associated with lower risk for obesity and other diet-related chronic diseases (Treuhart and Karpyn, 2010).
- People who live near supermarkets or in areas where food markets (supermarkets, grocery stores, and farmer's markets) outnumber corner-stores have lower rates of diet-related disease than those who live in areas lacking food access (Treuhart and Karpyn, 2010).
- Studies show that low-income census tracts had one half as many supermarkets as wealthy tracts and eight percent of African Americans live in a tract with a supermarket compared to thirty-one percent of Whites (Schwartz, 2014).
- There is a shown connection between poverty and obesity. One-third of adults who earn less than \$15,000 compared to fewer than twenty-five percent of those at \$50,000 a year are obese (Khazan, 2017).
- Nearly fifteen percent of Mecklenburg County residents live in what is classified as a food desert. This figure is higher than the US average of eleven percent, and the state of North Carolina's thirteen percent (McFadden, 2020).

SOLUTIONS

- Offer incentives to grocery stores like property tax rebates, subsidies for building operations or leasing land to retailers.
- Encourage farmer's markets to accept federal nutrition program benefits (SNAP) and WIC (for mothers and children).
- Partner with local churches to plant orchards and community gardens.
- Work with local hospitals to operate a food pharmacy so people can access the foods they need to help combat chronic illnesses.
- Develop Urban farms and community co-ops.

Percentage of children living in food-insecure households by state, 2012-14 average

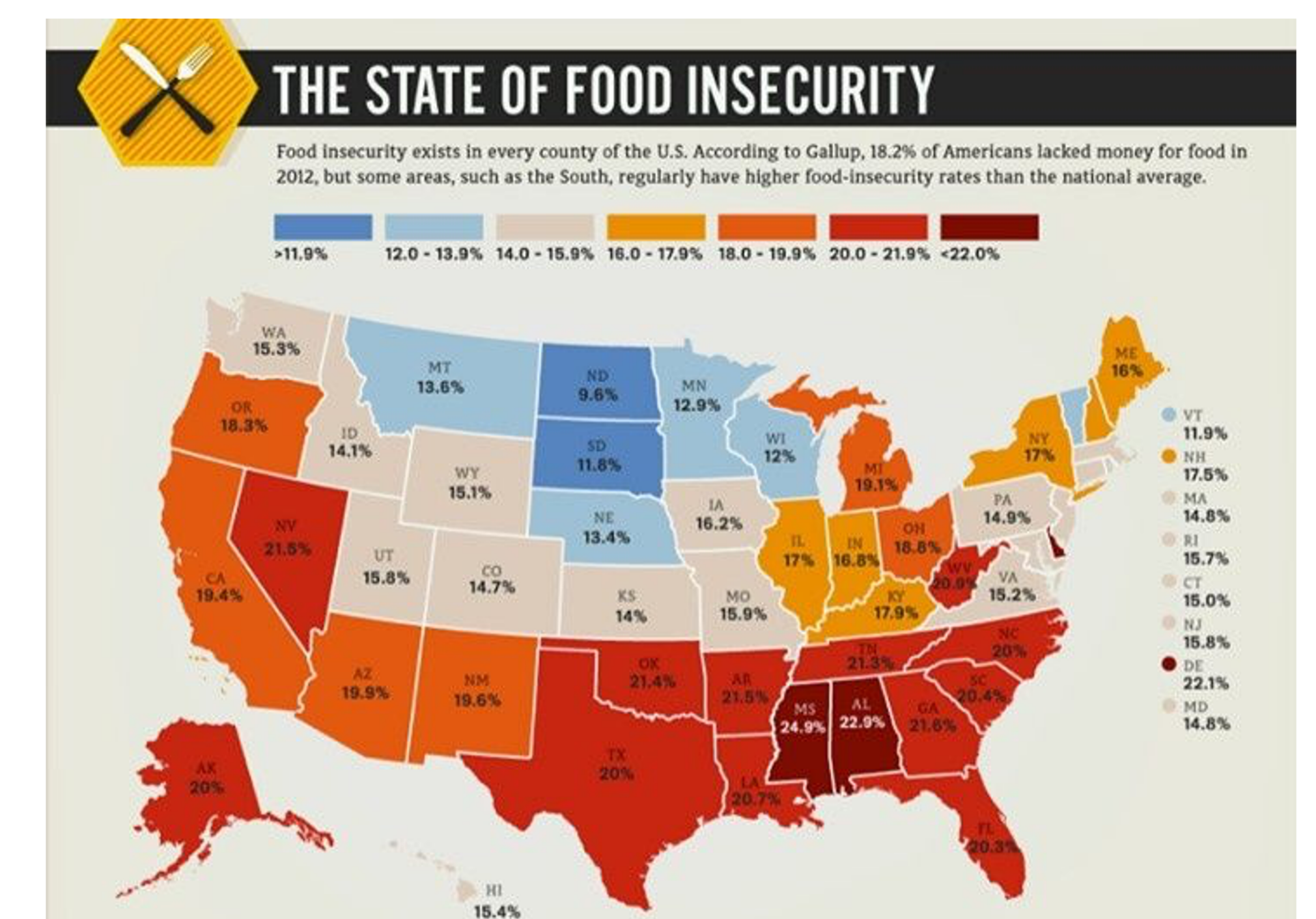
Louisiana, Alabama, and Mississippi have the highest rates of food insecurity, with almost 30 percent of children living in a food-insecure household.



Source: Sources: CPS December-FBG 2013-14.

Note: Because of data variability due to the relatively small sample sizes available in a single year in each state, we take average food-insecurity rates across a three-year period, 2012-14.

THE HAMILTON PROJECT
BROOKINGS



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