

# LSU AgCenter Healthy Communities Food Systems Assessment



---

## Assessment Objective

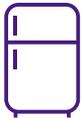
To assess the current food system needs in six rural parishes (Assumption, Texas, St. Helena, Madison, East Carroll, and Morehouse) supported by the LSU AgCenter's Healthy Communities initiative.

## Key Findings

- All six parishes had an abundance of community assets related to the food system. More than one hundred food access points were identified across all six parishes as having the potential to expand or improve their offerings of healthier foods.
- A strong network of community growers and producers was identified in all six parishes.
- Food distribution sites (food pantries, commodity distribution sites, and prepared meal sites) were found to have a high need for equipment and supplies to facilitate procurement and stocking of healthier foods. In addition, a need for procuring more healthy foods was identified for food distribution sites.
- Local grocery stores had the strongest food environment in terms of available healthy foods. Dollar stores were considered an important food access point for residents but scored relatively low compared to groceries in terms of available healthy foods. Residents did not view corner/convenience stores as a viable option for purchasing food, especially when using SNAP.
- Residents often shop for food outside their parish due to poor quality and high prices in their parish, however, five of the six parishes experience higher rates of homes with no vehicle ownership than the state average. Only three of the six parishes were found to have on-demand public transit.



## Recommendations



**Enhance** capacity of food distribution sites to enable procurement and storage of healthier items such as fresh produce, lean meats, and low-fat dairy.



**Connect** food pantries with local producers identified in each parish. Introduce policies to ensure the sustainability of partnerships.



**Implement** client choice models and/or nutrition standards at food distribution sites to improve access to and sustainability of healthful foods.



**Expand** SNAP acceptance at local food outlets already selling fresh fruits and vegetables, such as farmer's markets and produce stands.



**Target** local grocery stores for healthy retail initiatives focused on connecting local producers to food retailers and making the healthy choice the easy choice for customers.



**Increase** ridership and awareness of available on-demand transportation services to improve community-wide access to available healthy foods.



**Establish** local and/or regional food policy councils to connect key food system stakeholders and ensure the sustainability of access to healthy foods in the community.

---

## Resources



*Client-Choice Food Pantry Guide:*  
<https://bit.ly/ClientChoicePantryGuide>

*How to Accept SNAP Benefits at Farmers Markets: A Guide for Vendors:*  
<https://bit.ly/SNAPatFarmersMarkets>

*Farmers Market Vendor Training:*  
<https://bit.ly/MarketVendorTraining>

## Getting Started

Connect with LSU AgCenter Healthy Communities to learn more about how we're working to improve the food system in rural Louisiana communities!

[healthycommunities@agcenter.lsu.edu](mailto:healthycommunities@agcenter.lsu.edu)  
[www.lsuagcenter.com/healthycommunities](http://www.lsuagcenter.com/healthycommunities)  
[www.facebook.com/LSUAgCenterHC](https://www.facebook.com/LSUAgCenterHC)