

PERCEPTIONS OF FOOD ACCESS AMONG BLACK RESIDENTS IN RURAL LOUISIANA

STUDY SUMMARY

Focus group discussions were held to better understand experiences of food access among mostly Black residents in rural Louisiana. The study found that low-income and majority Black rural residents in Louisiana do not have adequate access to food in their community and experience challenges getting food in and outside their community.

PRICE AND PRODUCT QUALITY ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT FACTORS WHEN SHOPPING



44
TOTAL PARTICIPANTS
AGE RANGE: 26-81



OVER HALF
of the participants reported running out of food before the end of the month within the last year.

PARISH CHARACTERISTICS

Focus group discussions were conducted in five Louisiana parishes: Assumption, East Carroll, Madison, Morehouse, and Tensas

Table 1. Descriptive Characteristics of the Target Parishes.

	Louisiana Parishes					LA Average
	Assumption	East Carroll	Madison	Morehouse	Tensas	
Population, <i>n</i> ^a	21,891	6861	10,951	24,874	4334	-
Black, % ^a	29.4	68	62.4	48	54	32.7
Obesity prevalence, % ^b	34.8	42.1	41.8	39.4	34.8	34.5
Poverty, % ^c	17.4	48.6	37.8	28.5	40.0	19.4
Unemployment Rate, % ^d	6.1	10.6	8.1	8.3	8.3	4.8
Food Insecurity, % ^e	15	33	26	22	26	17
Food Pantries ^f	4	1	1	4	3	-
Summer Feeding Sites ^g	1	1	1	1	1	-

^a Source: 2019 Census Population Estimates. [25]. ^b Source: 2017 Louisiana Department of Health [26]. ^c Source: 2018 American Community Survey 5 year estimates [19]. ^d Source: 2019 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Labor Force Data by County, 2019 Annual Averages [27]. ^e Source: Feeding America, 2019 [20]. ^f Source: LSU AgCenter inventory of food pantries in targeted parishes [28]. ^g Source: USDA Food and Nutrition Service Find Meals for Kids Tool [23].

MAJOR THEMES

FOOD INSECURITY

Most participants said they had to adjust how they fed their households to be able to make it to the end of the month by changing what they eat. *"To feed somebody healthy...it costs way more. A lot of people are pretty much looking at food that's filling...like rices and starches and stuff like that to make sure food can go further, I guess. But healthy food, it really costs."*

TRANSPORTATION

Leaving the parish, and sometimes even the state, to find lower prices and better quality was reported in every focus group. Most participants described having to pay a ride—even if riding with a family member—and going 30-60 minutes away to get food. *"Ain't nothing free."*

STORE CHOICE

Price and quality were the main factors for participants when choosing a store to purchase groceries. *"We compare these prices. We get the sale paper and we compare the price. We also go for the cheapest." "It could be a penny difference, I'm still going there. Things add up."*



SNAP/ WIC

In every focus group, almost all participants received SNAP benefits, though many participants mentioned receiving only \$16 to \$35 per month. *"The benefits, they don't fit. They don't give enough. It's not enough and if I went and made \$100 more a month, they're gonna take half of my stamps away...The more you make the more they take."*

PRICES

Participants among 4 focus groups explained prices consistently decreasing during the last half of each month, after SNAP benefits are exhausted. *"After you done finished your stamp that's when the best sales come."*

POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS



FIX WATER ISSUES.

Residents from two parishes with ongoing water issues shared that fixing this problem would allow them to spend more money on food instead of bottled water.

INCREASE FOOD RETAIL OUTLET COMPETITION.

Participants from two parishes suggested that a lack of competition contributed to high prices and expressed desire for more stores to open in their communities.

IMPROVE PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION.

Most participants reported paying between \$10-40 for a single ride to purchase food each month. Offering reliable access to public transportation would allow residents to spend more money on food instead of travel.

PROVIDE JOB OPPORTUNITIES.

The most impactful way to improve the food environment would be to provide job opportunities with reliable hours and a livable wage. Participants shared *"you gotta know somebody, you gotta be kin to certain people to get a job down here."* Knowing the right people was viewed as the most important factor for securing a job.