

Food Accessibility and Local Agriculture

Bonner Scholars Program Issue-Based Team

Jadon Jones, Amber Wilken, Benji Roush, Corbin Dutcher, Denise Webb, Francy Morales, Isabela Hurtado, Kennedy Moody, Lindsey Marshall, Mario Montes, Roger Thomas, Tess head, Tris Christensen, Victoria Andrade, Jackson Backus

Introduction

Food insecurity is a pressing issue affecting communities across the United States, and Northwest Georgia is no exception. In a region rich in agricultural resources and diversity, unbelievably, many individuals and families struggle with access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food. This project aims to explore the complex interplay between food insecurity and agriculture in Northwest Georgia, examining the underlying causes, current challenges, and potential solutions.

Background & Significance

Food insecurity is a complex issue influenced by various economic, social, and environmental factors. As of 2022, Floyd County had a population of 99,443, with 16,260 individuals experiencing food insecurity. With an average meal cost of \$3.90, many residents struggle to afford consistent, nutritious meals, highlighting the ongoing need for food assistance programs and community support.

It signifies deeper systemic problems, including poverty, unequal access to resources, and environmental challenges. Limited access to nutritious food weakens physical health, impairs learning and concentration, and restricts economic opportunities, deepening social and economic disparities over time. The significance of food insecurity extends beyond hunger—it reflects the resilience of food systems, the fairness of economic structures, and the effectiveness of policies aimed at ensuring basic human rights. Addressing food insecurity is not just about providing food; it is about fostering sustainable solutions that promote long-term security, health, and social stability.



References

<https://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2021/overall/georgia/county/floyd>
<https://www.acfb.org/facts-and-stats/>
<https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-u-s/key-statistics-graphics/>
https://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics_by_State/

Statistics

- 13.1% of Georgia residents have been classified as food insecure (1 in 8), including 1 in 6 children
- 19% of the state's population live in areas that lack access to foods that make up the full range of a healthy diet



What's Being Done?

- The Northwest Georgia Hunger Ministries Food Bank provides fresh food to communities in need.
- The Georgia Department of Agriculture currently launched a \$7.1 million Grant program for Georgia's food supply chain. This supports small farms and food businesses.
- The creation of Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure Program (RFSI) that works to provide more and better markets to small farms and food businesses.
- Feeding Georgia is an organization dedicated to providing food across the entire state of Georgia, not just specific areas. They are partnered with 2,000 pantries distributing food throughout Georgia to over 156,500 unique individuals each week.
- Sustainable Food System for Georgia Agrarian Future- Efforts are being made to develop a local sustainable food system. The increasing demand for local sustainable food is pushing these efforts forward.
- Agriculture and Rural Development Strategy- The Georgian government has outlined a strategy for 2021-2027 focusing on food security and safety. This strategy aims to enhance the agriculture sector's contribution to economic growth, employment and poverty reduction.
- Educational programs are being applied to address food accessibility and agriculture. Urban farms and community gardens in Atlanta offer agriculture training and teaching families how to grow their own food.
- Fulton Fresh Focus emphasizes providing fresh, healthy food to underserved communities while integrating nutrition and stem education.

Service Plunge

Aside from researching the issue, this research group wanted to see what was being done and to try and assist in the solution. Because of this, the group scheduled a volunteer workday with the Davies Shelter Farm, a farm that grows fresh food to be donated. In this service project, group members helped in clearing beds for future planting, harvesting, and in the installation of the plastic high tunnel cover. Through this project, our group gained a better understanding of how local agriculture can help in alleviating food inaccessibility.

Personal Reflections

"It is surprising not only how much of a problem food accessibility is within our own communities, but also the number of resources and services working hard to help combat this issue."

— Roger Thomas

"[food insecurity] is not their fault, but our problem"
-Matthew Dougherty

What Can Be Done?

- While there is already advocacy for food insecurity, there can always be more on the local, state, and federal level.
- Donate: donating from home is the easiest way to contribute to the well-being of people affected. By donating we amplify our collective impact in the community. When donating the best products to provide are fresh fruits and vegetables or food that have nutritional value. People often donate foods that provide no nutritional value when takes away from initiative of trying to prevent food deserts.
- Volunteer at food banks because they need volunteers to sort donations and serve food. There are many locations here local to Rome including the Rome Community Kitchen and Northwest Georgia Hunger Ministries.
- Pick up foods from local farms, restaurants, and stores, as it is essential to collect it instead of throwing them away and transport them to local organizations. This helps prevent the waste of perfectly good food and allows it be used for those in need.
- Meal delivery to people who are unable to go to the grocery store. Delivered meals help those in need to maintain a well-balanced diet and stay healthy. Many times, there are shut in within our community who face food insecurity, and this is a good way of bridging that gap.
- Government initiatives at the local level helps because it can directly impact communities that need support. Governments have started giving grants to non-profits and communities for helping battle food deserts and the lack of access of food across the United States.
- Maintaining good relationships with local farms provides community leaders with the needed resources to help combat food insecurities. Local farms are sometimes able to provide produce to those in need.

Topic Panel Discussion

Another goal of this group was to increase campus awareness on these issues. To accomplish this, our group scheduled and hosted a Panel event on the topic. Our panelists included Stacy Marshall, owner of Mountain Mama Farms and Davies Shelter board member, and Matthew Dougherty, farm manager of Our Giving garden. During the event, the panelists discussed questions such as:

- What are some of the most significant causes of food insecurity and inaccessibility in Rome GA and how do these challenges compare to other areas in the state?
- What are the most vulnerable populations regarding food insecurity? What barriers do they face?
- What is local agriculture and what role can it play in addressing food inaccessibility?
- Can you provide some examples of successful local programs or initiatives that have helped address food insecurity or inaccessibility?
- How can local government and community leaders help reduce food inaccessibility through local agriculture in the long term?
- What are the most effective ways to raise awareness about this issue in Rome and how can we engage more of the community in addressing the issue?

The Panelist were able to give their expert opinions on what is going on the not only Rome-Floyd area but all throughout the state. They connected with the students and helped bridge the gaps in knowledge the audience may have had. Overall, the panel was an overwhelming success and allowed us to communicate to the members of our campus and community the importance of local agriculture and how it can be used to help prevent food inaccessibility.

