

# Capstone Project Proposal

## Problem Statement

Find opportunities for ERS to make recommendations to the USDA to reduce food insecurity by 10% by 2025 through the examination of store/restaurant proximity, food and nutrition assistance programs, and community characteristics.

## Context

According to the USDA's Economic Research Service (ERS), access to food retailers, and healthy foods by extension, influence people's choices regarding how they buy food and which foods make up their diets. Economic status plays a role in determining people's access, and low income communities often experience greater barriers in accessing food retailers. Low income communities are often categorized as food deserts, meaning their access to food is limited to unhealthy food retailers such as fast food chains and convenience stores. The ERS is looking for plans of action to suggest to the USDA to reduce food insecurity across the US.

## Criteria for success

USDA needs to reduce food insecurity by 10% by the start of 2025.

## Scope of solution space

USDA will make recommendations/policy changes to increase the number of supermarkets that offer healthy food options in communities with low access and will decrease barriers to inclusion in food and nutrition assistance programs to ease costs of food to consumers.

## Constraints

The USDA is a federal program, so it is limited by factors that impact all governmental agencies. Constraints to success are as follows:

- Funding: The USDA competes for governmental funding like all other programs.
- Policy Complexity: The USDA can create policies to address problems, but policies do not always properly address the root cause. Policies also require an extensive review process, which may extend the timeline for implementing changes.
- Multi-agency Approach: To properly implement changes to better food security, the solution must include more than just governmental input; instead, it may include business owners and community members. This makes implementing a solution more complicated.

- Diversity: The US is a large country with a wide variety of geographic settings, which makes a single solution incapable of properly addressing food security for all communities.

## Stakeholders

- Economic Research Service Stakeholders
  - Data and Reporting Director
- USDA Leadership
  - Secretary of Agriculture
  - Deputy Secretary of Agriculture
  - Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) Administrator
  - Farm Service Agency (FSA) Administrator
- Eventually these additional stakeholders should be included:
  - Farmers/Ranchers
  - Grocery Store Owners
  - Restaurant Owners

## Data Sources

- Economic Research Service (ERS), U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Food Environment Atlas. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-environment-atlas/>