



FOOD for EVERY CHILD

THE NEED FOR HEALTHY FOOD ACCESS IN NORTH CAROLINA



There are too few supermarkets and healthy food resources in many North Carolina communities. The situation is pressing: Residents in these communities suffer from disproportionately high rates of obesity, diabetes and other diet-related diseases, and are more likely to experience higher than average rates of food insecurity. They are also **cut off from the quality jobs and economic revitalization** that a local grocery store or other fresh food provider delivers.

The percentage of adults with diabetes has increased by almost 25% in North Carolina in the last decade.¹ The maps presented in this report show the gravity of this issue across the state. From rural communities in the eastern part of the state to western Appalachian communities, North Carolina has a need for access to healthy food.

KEY FINDINGS

Through mapping, *Food for Every Child* outlines the extent and implications of the scarce healthy food availability in North Carolina by identifying the gaps in food accessibility and the relationship between grocery access, diet-related diseases and neighborhood income levels.

Key findings include:

- **Access to nutritious food is unevenly distributed in North Carolina.** There are significant areas of the state with few full-service grocery stores, and many communities in which none exist.
- **The uneven distribution of supermarkets in North Carolina leaves a disproportionate number of lower-income people without access to nutritious food.**
- **Areas with both lower income and low sales have few or no supermarkets,** and people living there are less able to afford to travel to where supermarkets are concentrated.
- **More than 2 million people in North Carolina, including over 435,000 children** under the age of 15, live in areas where residents are suffering with diet-related disease and can't easily access healthy food.²
- The areas that are in need of access to healthy food are also in particular need of the **jobs and economic development** that grocery stores bring.

North Carolina's Grocery Gap

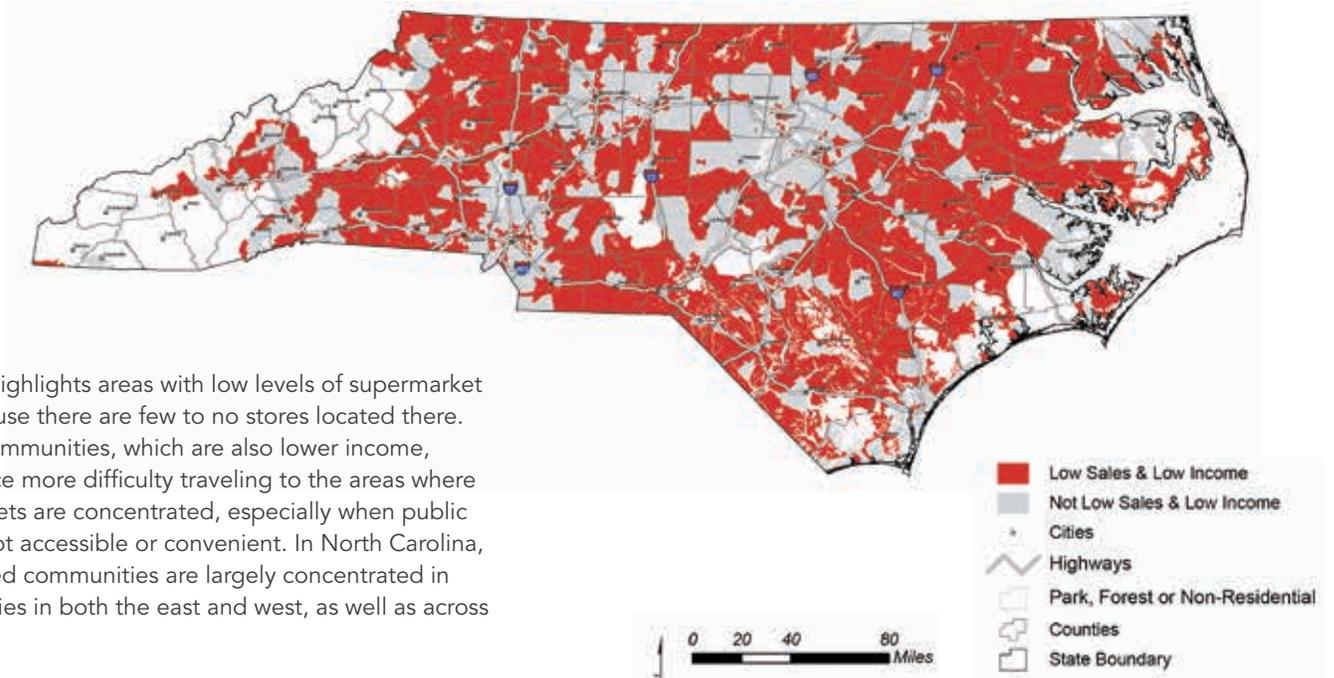
According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), over 40 million Americans continue to live in communities where access to healthy food is limited³—where it is far easier for most residents to buy grape soda than a bunch of grapes. Lower-income families have access to fewer supermarkets and other healthy food retail outlets that provide a wide selection of affordable, nutritious foods.⁴ **In North Carolina, almost 1 in 4 children face hunger on a daily basis.**⁵ This problem impacts residents of both urban and rural areas across the state, and is compounded by disproportionately higher rates of diet-related disease and the lost commercial vitality that makes communities livable and helps local economies thrive.

Why Access to Healthy Food Matters

- Children who experience food insecurity are at a higher risk of growing into unhealthy adults, which can contribute to greater health care costs later on.⁶
- Access to nutritious food is associated with lower risk for obesity and other diet-related diseases.
- Healthy food retail creates jobs and helps revitalize lower-income neighborhoods and towns, in addition to providing important venues for North Carolina's growers to sell their wide range of products.

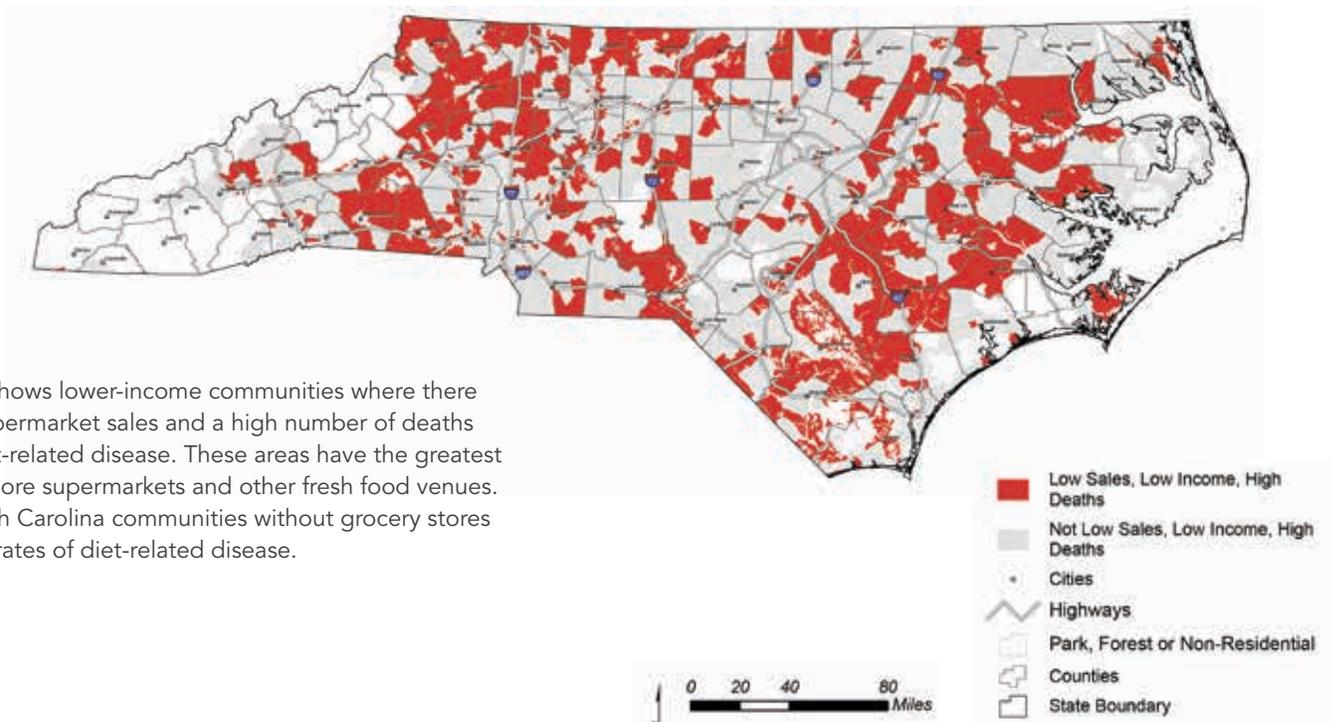


Low Supermarket Sales and Low Income in North Carolina



In North Carolina, underserved communities are largely concentrated in rural counties in both the east and west, as well as across the coast.

Areas with the Greatest Need in North Carolina



Healthy Food Financing Across the Country

Throughout the U.S., Healthy Food Financing Initiatives have funded grocery stores, food hubs, farmers markets, small retailers and other venues that provide access to healthy food.

- In Alabama, the state launched the Alabama Healthy Food Financing Initiative in late 2017 and has already awarded **grants to 7 organizations and businesses** across the state.
- Since 2016, in **Louisiana, Mississippi and Tennessee**, the Mid South Healthy Food Initiative has created or retained **over 138,000 square feet of retail space** and continues to fund projects across the Mid-South region.
- In Pennsylvania, the Fresh Food Financing Initiative has supported **88 projects**, creating or retaining **5,000 jobs**.
- Just launched in Kansas, the Kansas Healthy Food Initiative is a public-private partnership **seeded with \$4.2 million** that has helped leverage additional investment at the local level to support healthy food access projects in areas of greatest need across the state, and **has already funded six projects**.

NEXT STEPS

North Carolina must address the significant need for fresh food retail in many of its communities. In order to overcome the high cost and risk associated with development in underserved areas, grocers and other healthy food entrepreneurs need public sector support. The lack of supermarkets in lower-income communities across the state has contributed to a public health crisis that negatively impacts North Carolina's economy. The maps in *Food for Every Child: The Need for More Healthy Food Retail in North Carolina* document these findings in the work toward ensuring that all children and their families live in neighborhoods that have access to healthy and affordable food. The maps and findings presented here demonstrate the need for a statewide financing program to encourage healthy food retail development in North Carolina.



We recommend that state and local partners in North Carolina convene leaders from the grocery industry, government, public health, economic development and civic sectors to develop a strategy to address the need for access to healthy food in lower-income communities. This strategy can support North Carolina's local growers by providing important venues for their products.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2017). Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. Retrieved from <https://www.americashealthrankings.org/explore/annual/measure/Diabetes/state/NC>
- 2 Nielsen TDLinX Services, November 2016; US Census, ACS 5 Year, 2010–2014; North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, 2014.
- 3 Rhone, A., et al. Low-Income and Low-Supermarket-Access Census Tracts, 2010–2015. United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service. [Online] January 2017.
- 4 Rhone, A., et al. Low-Income and Low-Supermarket-Access Census Tracts, 2010–2015. United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service. [Online] January 2017.
- 5 Weinfeld N., Mills G., Borger C., Gearing M., Macaluso T., Montaquila J. and Zedlewski S. (2014). Hunger in America 2014, Feeding America, Prepared by Westat and the Urban Institute.
- 6 Case A., Fertig A. and Paxson C. (2005). The Lasting Impact of Childhood Health and Circumstance. *Journal of Health Economics*, 24(2), 365–389.

The North Carolina Alliance for Health

The North Carolina Alliance for Health (NCAH) is an independent, nonpartisan, statewide coalition of individuals and organizations that convenes and mobilizes partners to advance equitable health policies that promote wellness and prevent obesity and tobacco use. For more than 15 years, NCAH has worked to ensure all North Carolinians will live healthier lives, protected by strong health policies that prevent chronic disease. For more information about NCAH, visit ncallianceforhealth.org.



**NORTH CAROLINA
ALLIANCE FOR HEALTH**

The Food Trust

Ensuring That Everyone Has Access To Affordable, Nutritious Food

The Food Trust's mission is to ensure that everyone has access to affordable, nutritious food and information to make healthy decisions. Working with neighborhoods, schools, grocers, farmers and policymakers, we have developed a comprehensive approach to improved food access that combines nutrition education and greater availability of affordable healthy food. To learn more, visit thefoodtrust.org.



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