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West Michigan Food Deserts and How We Can Help

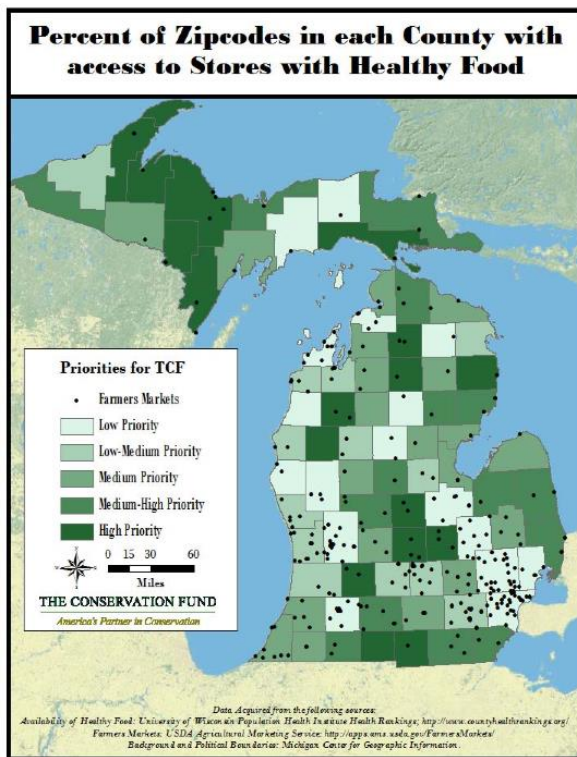
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A map of Michigan zipcodes with grocery stores accessible to them.¹

What is a Food Desert?

A food desert is a term coined in 1996 as an area where there is a lack of quality, healthy food that is reasonably priced.⁸ A food desert is not a literal desert, but rather an area with physical and economical barriers that prevent residents from accessing healthy food on a regular basis.⁸ Food deserts are caused due to low income that keep people from affording food.⁹ They also come from low access, where having the transportation to a supermarket is unattainable, or a supermarket is too far to reach.⁹ Often, food deserts occur in areas of poverty.

How to Help

Where to Donate in Ottawa County

Many churches, food pantries, and various organizations offer support for residents in need of food. The website, foodpantries.org, is an excellent resource of food pantries available based on the state and county for those in need. For Grand Valley State University students, they can visit GVSU's Replenish Food Pantry on campus for resources and food.

Appropriate Donation Items

What is Appropriate to Donate:⁴

- Peanut butter
- Pasta (preferably whole wheat)
- Rice (preferably brown rice for health reasons)
- Canned items, such as: soups, fruits, vegetables, beans, stews, and pasta
- Diapers
- Laundry detergent
- Feminine hygiene products, depending on the food pantry distributor

What is Not Appropriate to Donate:⁴

- Refrigerated items that will spoil
- Leftovers
- Baked goods
- Expired foods
- Food with packaging issues (i.e. glass containers)



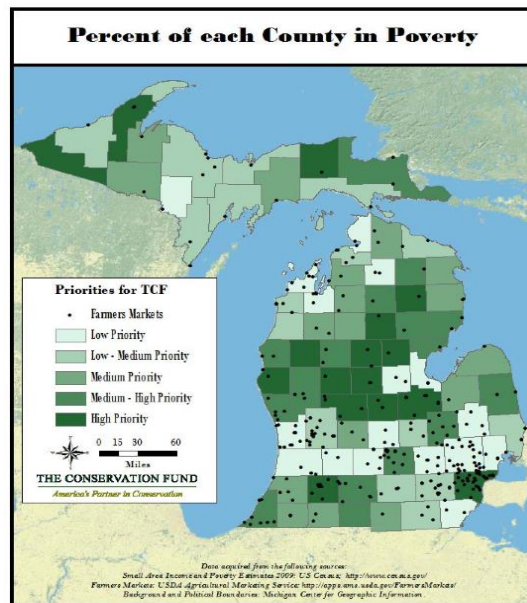
WEST MICHIGAN FOOD DESERTS AND HOW WE CAN HELP

By: Raquel Racette



*References can be found by scanning this QR code





A map of Michigan counties in poverty.¹

As pictured above, many counties in Michigan have low access to supermarkets. Each county should have its own level of resources to help its residents, like the resources listed below.

How to Help West MI

There are many ways to help residents of Ottawa County and its neighboring Kent County in food deserts. Below are the four best ways to provide help:

1. Spread awareness of food pantries to those nearby who can help⁹
2. Foster community gardens⁵
3. Donate to food pantries²
4. Our Kitchen Table, a local organization educating people to grow their own food⁷

West MI's Food Desert Issue

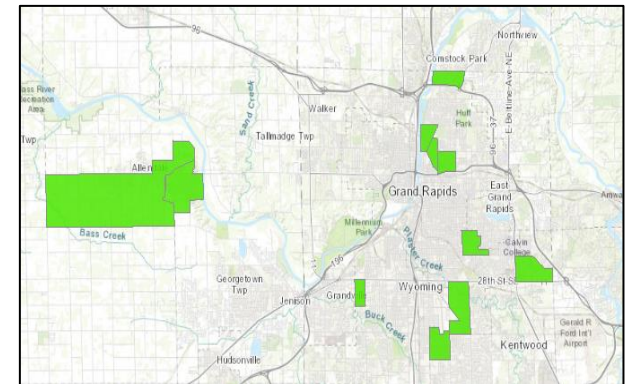
Food deserts develop when there is a lack of access not just to food in general, but to healthy food. Many residents in food deserts cannot afford to purchase fruits, vegetable, and fresh meats necessary for a balanced diet.⁵ Due to limited access and low incomes, most people in food deserts resort to purchasing a myriad of unhealthy foods that are cheap and have a long shelf life.⁹

Food insecurity – not having reliable access to affordable, nutritious food

Ottawa County residents have a food insecurity rate of 8.4% while Kent County residents have a food insecurity rate of 11.0%.⁹

Long Term Effects

Many Ottawa County residents cannot afford to drive to a supermarket multiple times a month. Due to that, it is normal for families to go shopping once a month for fresh food and survive off party store and convenience store food in-between trips.⁷ This barrier has been proven to lead to increased obesity and early mortality rates as access to nutritious food dwindles.⁹



The highlighted areas are areas in Ottawa and Kent County living in food deserts.⁹

Why are Food Deserts such a Common Occurrence?

A food desert can be defined as when a county resident has no choice but to drive over 10 miles to their nearest supermarket.⁵ All over America, rural areas have supermarkets well over 10 miles from home.⁹ This fact is prevalent in the farmlands of Allendale, MI, making it discernable as to why it is a food desert.

For many rural food deserts, its residents tend to be older, have a lower income, and they are less educated.^{2,8} Though many factors can contribute to the creation of rural food deserts, a consistent cause is due to the frequency of rural food deserts consisting of farmers who rely on regular weather patterns and their land for income.⁹ This subjects them to financial hardships when their crop suffers, which occurs often.

