



South Carolina Institute of
Medicine & Public Health

SOUTH CAROLINA OFFICE OF
RURAL HEALTH

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POLICY BRIEF | APRIL 2024

Food Access in Darlington County

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The South Carolina Institute of Medicine & Public Health (IMPH) is an independent entity serving as an informed nonpartisan convener around the important health issues in our state, providing evidence-based information to inform health policy decisions. For more information on IMPH publications, initiatives and events, please visit www.imph.org.

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IMPH takes a comprehensive approach to advancing health issues through data analysis, data translation and collaborative engagement. We encourage the sharing of our data, graphics and reports to help us improve health and health care in South Carolina.

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Introduction

Access to reliable sources of nutritious food is a leading indicator of health outcomes nationwide.¹ Rural counties in South Carolina struggle with ensuring residents have such access. The 2023 County Health Rankings assess the proximity of residents to food options like grocery stores and farmers markets as well as income levels and affordability of those options.²

Darlington County ranks above the state and national average for percentage of residents experiencing food insecurity, defined as inability to always rely on access to sufficient, affordable and nutritious food.³ The map illustrates the areas of South Carolina classified as food deserts both in terms of proximity to a food source and relative affordability.



Food Support Services

Studies suggest that lack of access to healthy food options contributes to a host of health issues and can lead to negative overall health outcomes.⁵

The Darlington County Coordinating Council (DC3) has made access to healthy foods a priority area in their work. DC3 released their [Vision for Health](#) report in 2019, a document that includes exploration of issues in the county as well as ongoing and proposed solutions to those challenges. The coalition in Darlington has committed to increase access to healthy food and address healthy eating with 500 residents of the county through community nutrition forums, organization of food drives and a collaboration with FoodShare SC.⁶

FOODSHARE SC

Foodshare SC is a nonprofit organization that seeks to eliminate food inequality by expanding access to nutritious food and education about healthy eating to residents that experience barriers. Collaborations between counties, municipalities, community advocates and nonprofit groups increase the reach of all partners and can help ensure that issues are addressed effectively. Organizations with initiatives to support food access are in no short supply in the state. They include libraries, museums, state agencies and nonprofits, all of which can be recruited to partner locally.



SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

There are numerous support services available to help people and families in need of food support. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the federal program that provides monthly benefits to eligible people to purchase food. SNAP is one of the most recognizable federal assistance programs we have but is underutilized, especially in South Carolina.⁷ The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) estimated in its most recent survey that in fiscal year 2018, more than one in five (23%) of SNAP-eligible South Carolina residents were not enrolled in SNAP.⁸

In interviews with people who are SNAP eligible but not receiving benefits in South Carolina, many cited the complex and time-consuming nature of the application process as the reason they did not receive benefits. They had trouble accessing the website and reported finding the online application confusing.⁹ Even more people reported having trouble submitting the required documents and problems accessing the phone help line.¹⁰ While many of the issues with SNAP applications and eligibility can only be solved on the federal or state level, counties can provide assistance to SNAP eligible residents either by hiring benefits counselors themselves or partnering with organizations who provide such services. SC Thrive, for example, provides support for people applying for benefits across the state and is the lead organization for the SNAP Outreach Grant Project in South Carolina. Funds are being leveraged to grow SNAP outreach by recruiting partners to offer benefit screenings and application assistance.



Conclusion

Many counties in the state have explored ways to increase the number of food outlets that are serving their residents. Counties and municipalities can provide subsidies for such outlets to open in proximity to residents, but many of these efforts are not sustainable without continued support. More successful have been efforts to provide mobile markets and farmer's markets that are continuously funded and act as nonprofit entities in the communities they serve.¹¹ Subsidies to support the longevity of these markets are available from the US Department of Agriculture.¹²

There is no single effective solution to achieving food security for people in South Carolina; however, many existing programs and organizations are working to remove barriers. We encourage counties and municipalities to reach out to the organizations currently working on these issues in their communities to form partnerships and collaborations that will increase access and improve outcomes for South Carolina's rural residents.

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