



Department of Health and Human Services

Richard Whitley, MS, DHHS Director
775-684-4000
rwhitley@dhhs.nv.gov

Julie Kotchevar, Ph.D., DPBH Administrator
775-684-5959
jukotchevar@dhhs.nv.gov

Office of Food Security: Food Deserts in Nevada

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Background

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), food deserts are defined as areas lacking access to affordable fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat milk, and other foods that make up a full and healthy diet.ⁱ Food deserts often result due to a lack of grocery stores, farmers' markets, and healthy food providers in a given geographic area.ⁱⁱ Individuals living in rural, minority, and/or low-income areas are more likely to live in a food desert, which may negatively affect their diet, chronic disease management, and food security status.ⁱⁱⁱ Additionally, lack of access to nutritional foods in underserved communities may be worsened by lack of personal and/or public transportation.

Assessing Food Deserts

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food Access Atlas assesses food deserts using two (2) criteria: low-income and low-access. USDA defines low-access as a census tract being far from a supermarket, supercenter, or large grocery store.^{iv} A census tract is considered low-access if $\geq 33\%$ of the population (approximately 500 people) live far from a supermarket.^{iv} Three (3) measures of food access based on distance to a supermarket are provided in the USDA Food Access Atlas including: half a mile for urban areas and 10 miles for rural areas; one (1) mile for urban areas and 10 miles for rural areas; and one (1) mile for urban areas and 20 miles for rural areas.^{iv}

The criteria for identifying a low-income census tract include: poverty rate of 20% or greater; median family income is $\leq 80\%$ of the statewide median family income; or the tract is in a metropolitan area with a median family income $\leq 80\%$ of the metropolitan area's median family income.^{iv}

Food Deserts in Nevada

According to the USDA Food Access Atlas, Nevada food desert data per the low-access measures outlined above are as follows:

- **Half a mile for urban areas and 10 miles for rural areas:** Within this criterion, food deserts are found within 183 of 688 (26.6%) Nevada census tracts, with a total low-income population of 536,325 Nevadans living in a food desert. Ninety-seven percent (97%) of the population within these food deserts reside in urban areas (520,668 people).
- **One (1) mile for urban areas and 10 miles for rural areas:** Within this criterion, food deserts are found within 58 of 688 (8.4%) Nevada census tracts, with a total low-income population of 199,639 Nevadans. Ninety-two percent (92%) of the population within these food deserts reside in urban areas (183,980 people).



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- **One (1) mile for urban areas and 20 miles for rural areas:** Within this criterion, food deserts are found within 56 of 688 (8.1%) Nevada census tracts, with a total low-income population of 193,358 Nevadans. Ninety-five percent (95%) of the population within these food deserts reside in urban areas (183,980 people).

Additionally, the USDA Food Access Atlas shows 341,524 Nevada children ages birth to 17 years live beyond one (1) mile from a supermarket, with a majority of 56% (191,253 children) living in a rural area. Among older Nevadans, 97,135 live beyond one (1) mile from a supermarket, with a majority of 74% (71,880 older adults) living in an urban area. Finally, 188 of 688 (27.3%) Nevada census tracts, both urban and rural, house ≥ 100 households with no vehicle living beyond half a mile from a supermarket.

National Strategies Addressing Food Deserts

Nationally, various states have implemented strategies to address food deserts and increase access to healthy foods for the communities needing it most. Strategies include grant and loan programs, as well as policy-related solutions including moratoriums on fast food and issuing property taxes to incentivize development of grocery stores in low-income neighborhoods. Specific strategies include:

- Establishing a statewide Fresh Food Financing Initiative (FFFI). Pennsylvania issues a FFFI Grant and Loan Program designed to encourage supermarket development in underserved neighborhoods. Other states with a FFFI include Alabama and Florida.
- Enacting a moratorium on new fast food outlets in conjunction with financial incentives for grocery stores and sit-down restaurants serving healthier meals.
- Regulating community land-use by enacting zoning policies that 1) allow designations for community food gardens and farmers markets and 2) limit commercial food retailers, such as fast food.
- Granting a property tax credit to grocery stores in low-income areas.

Program Contact

Laura Urban

Food Security and Wellness Manager

Division of Public and Behavioral Health

(775) 684-2205

lurban@health.nv.gov

<http://dpbh.nv.gov/Programs/OFS/Home> - Office of Food Security/

ⁱ <https://www.cdc.gov/features/fooddeserts/>

ⁱⁱ <http://americannutritionassociation.org/newsletter/usda-defines-food-deserts>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-choices-health/food-access/>

^{iv} <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-access-research-atlas/documentation>