



Central Texas Food System Data Insights

Key Statistics and Community Voices

CAN Data & Research Roundup
October 8, 2025



Introduction

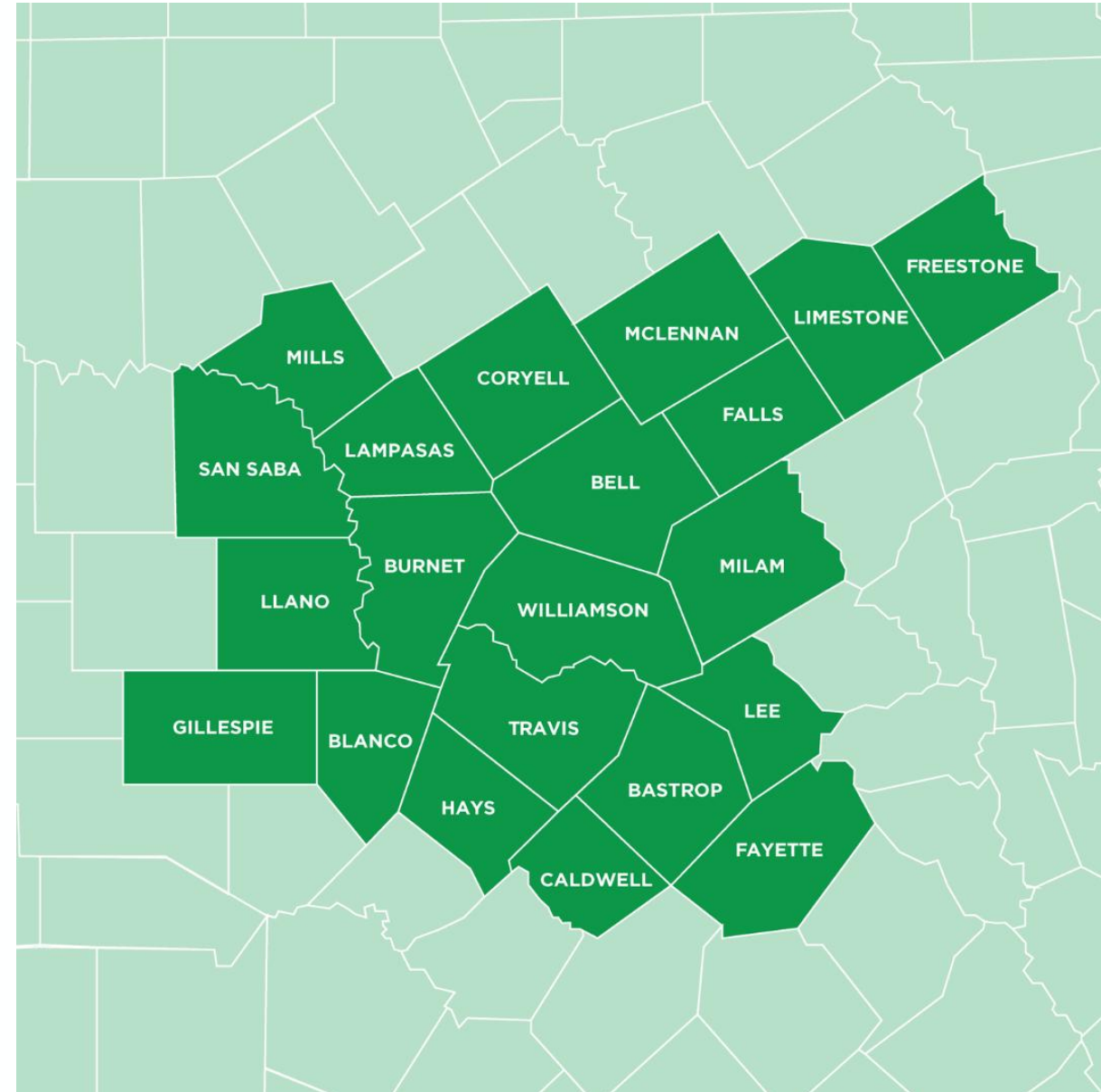


Central Texas Food Bank

- Leading hunger-relief nonprofit in the region, providing immediate access to food across **21 counties** through direct-service programs and a network of nearly **250 community partners**

Food Security: Consistent access to enough food to live an active, healthy life

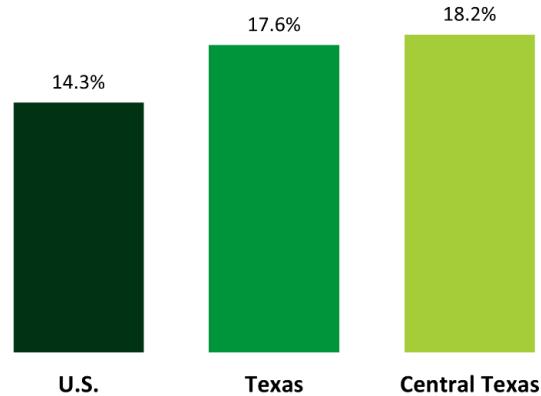
Hunger: Acute physical feeling caused by lack of food



Food Insecurity Trends

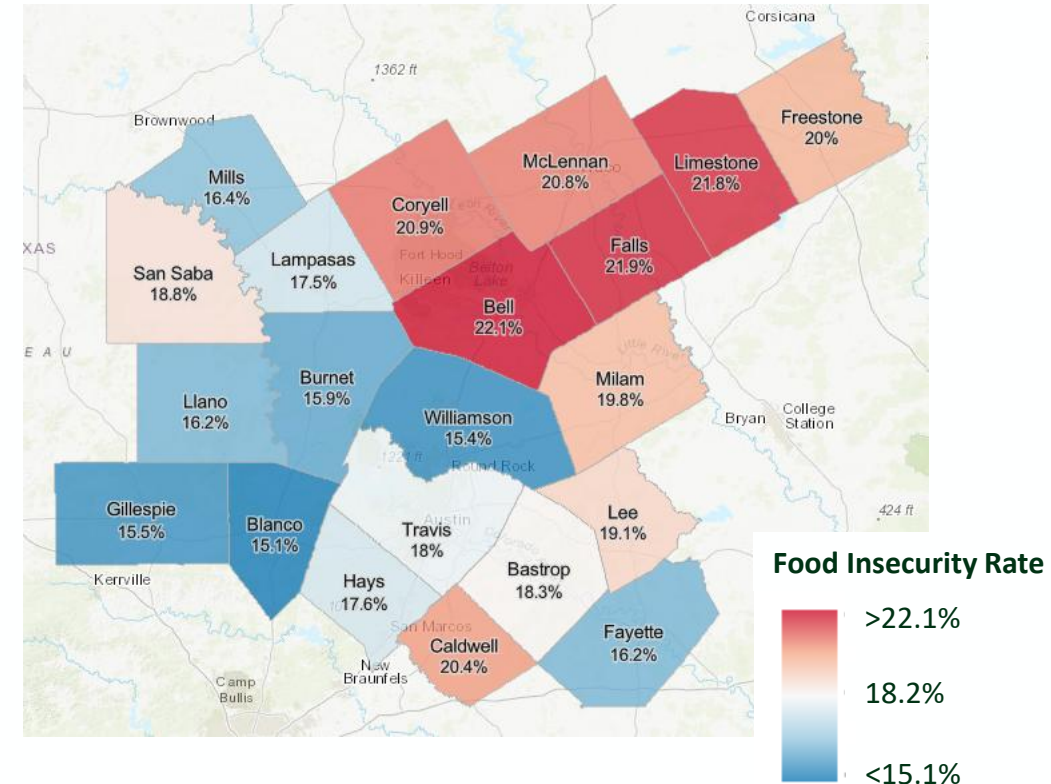
CTX food insecurity is rising. Rates exceed Texas and U.S. averages, with the highest rates in the north and lowest rates in Hill Country.

- **18.2%** of Central Texans experience food insecurity



- **Racial/ethnic disparities**
 - **Black** residents represent **10%** of the overall population but **15%** of CTX's food insecure population
 - **Hispanic/Latino** residents: **30%** overall population, **41%** of food insecure
 - **White** residents: **51%** overall population, only **38%** of food insecure

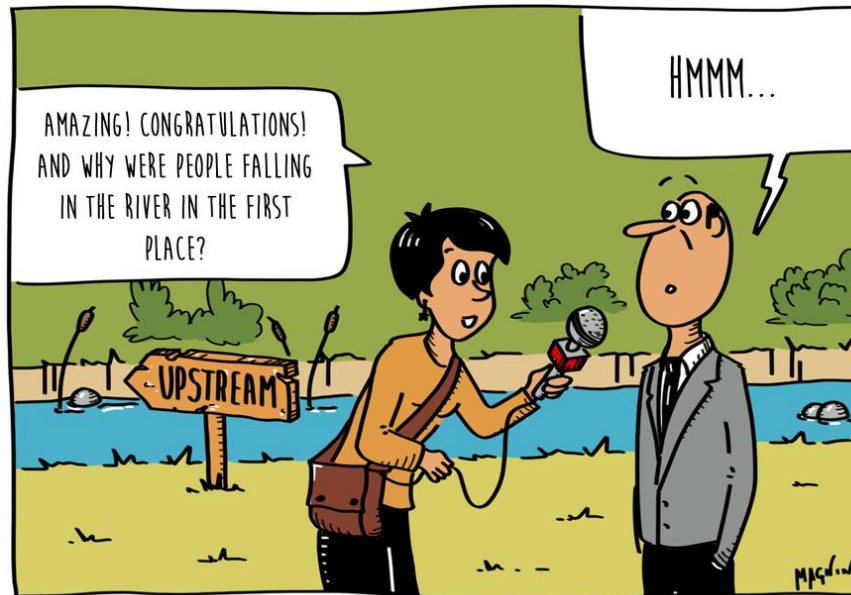
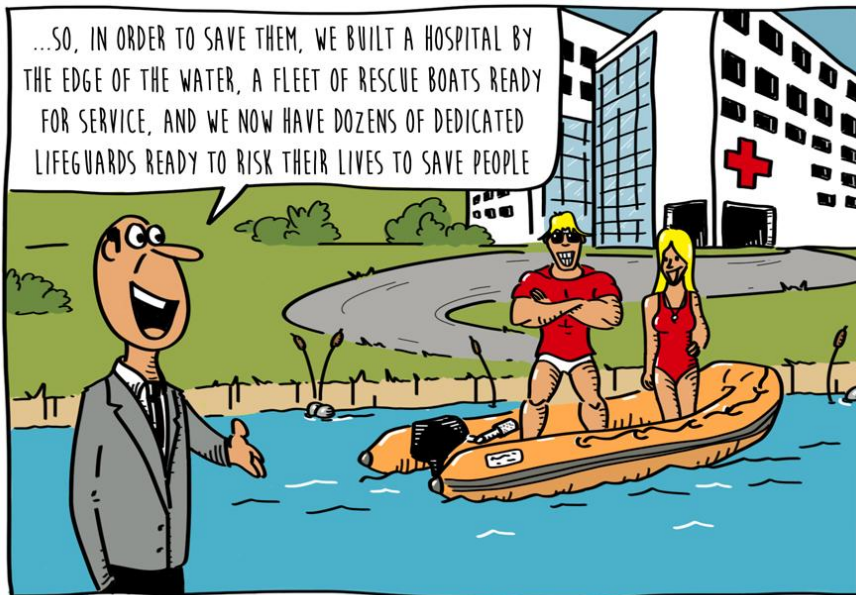
County-Level Food Insecurity Rates



Sources:

National and state rates: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, 2023

Central Texas food insecurity estimates are from Central Texas Food Bank's 2025 Food Access Convening Tool (FACT)



Downstream solutions respond to immediate needs.

Upstream solutions address the root causes.

Illustration by Alexandre Magnin - Sustainabilityillustrated.com

CTFB's Vision, Mission, and Approach

Vision

All Central Texans have immediate and equitable access to nutritious food.

Mission

To increase equitable food access in Central Texas by providing nutritious food, leading hunger and poverty advocacy efforts, and transforming lives through programs, education, and innovative solutions.

Approach

1. Providing direct access to nutritious food.
2. Providing the resources necessary for all Central Texans to access nutritious food on their own.

Supporting Local and Regional Food Systems

Upstream solutions critical to increase access to food and to strengthen the regional food economy.

Going beyond the traditional food banking model.

We are investing in:

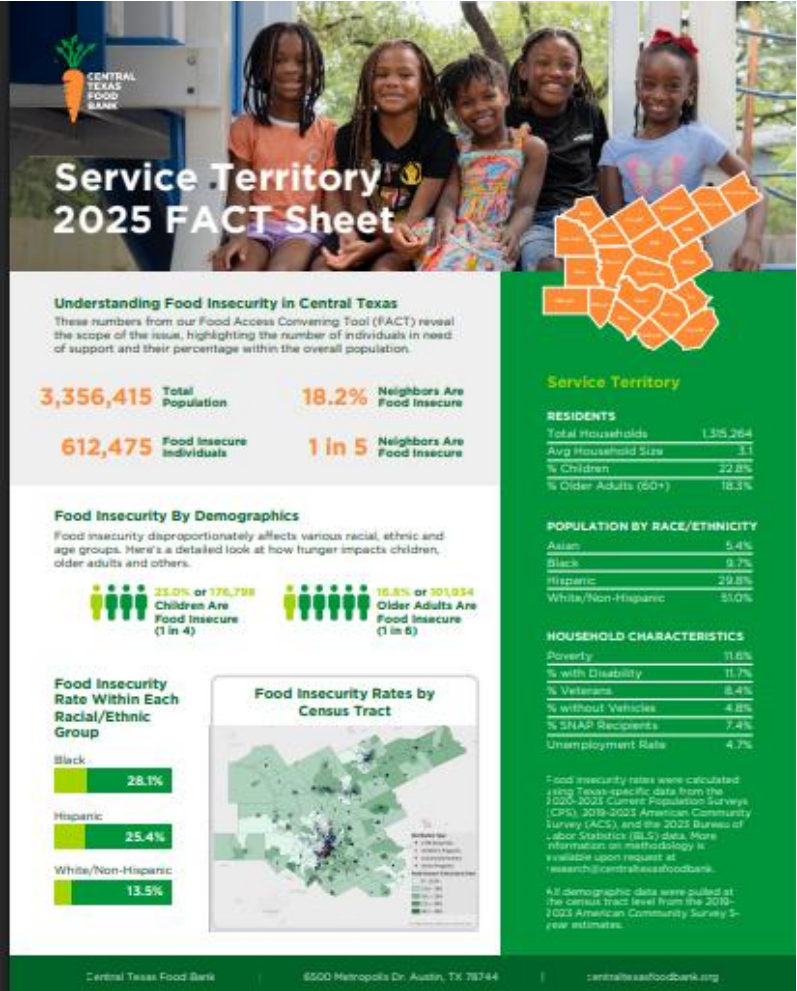
1. Research and data resources to inform food system solutions
2. Strategic partnerships to meet neighbors where they are



Outcome of an equitable food system

Data Assets

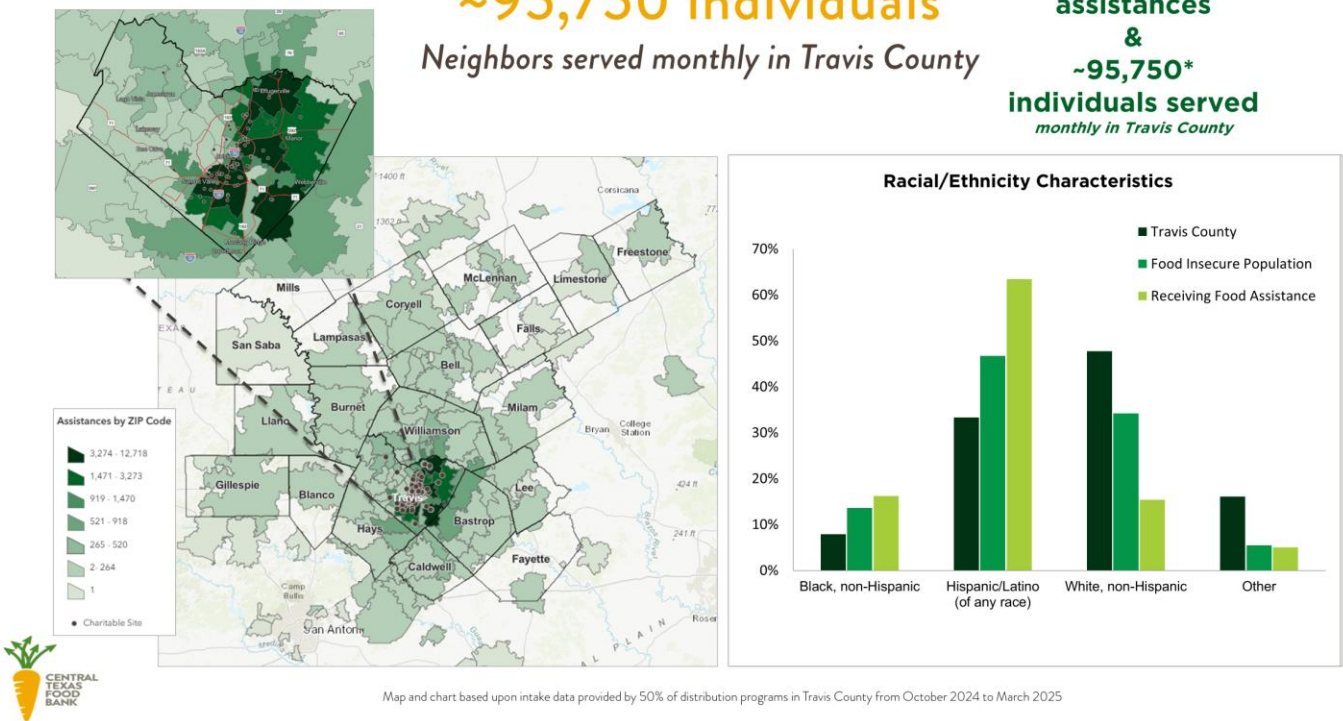
Food Access Convening Tool (FACT)



Electronic Client Intake Data

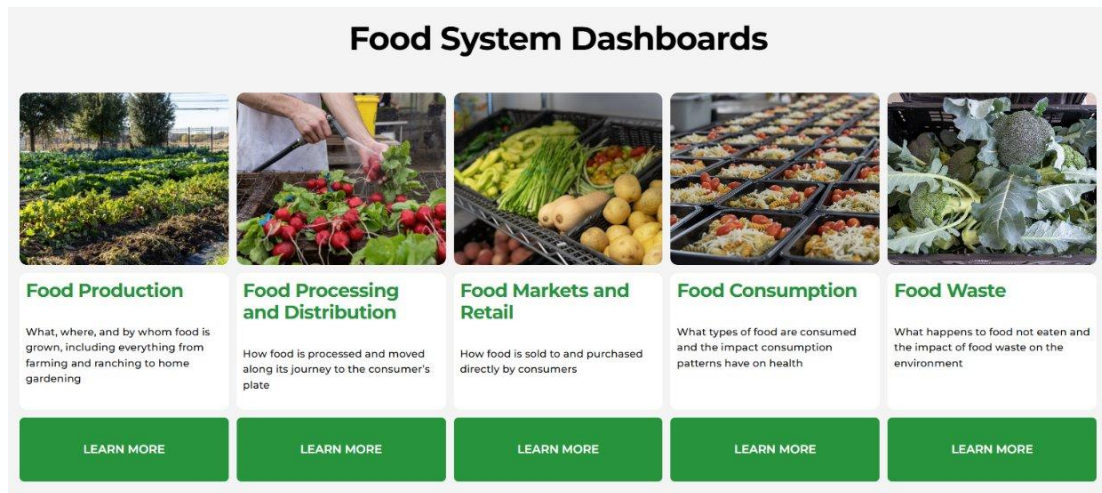
~95,750 individuals
Neighbors served monthly in Travis County

~147,000 assistances
&
~95,750* individuals served
monthly in Travis County



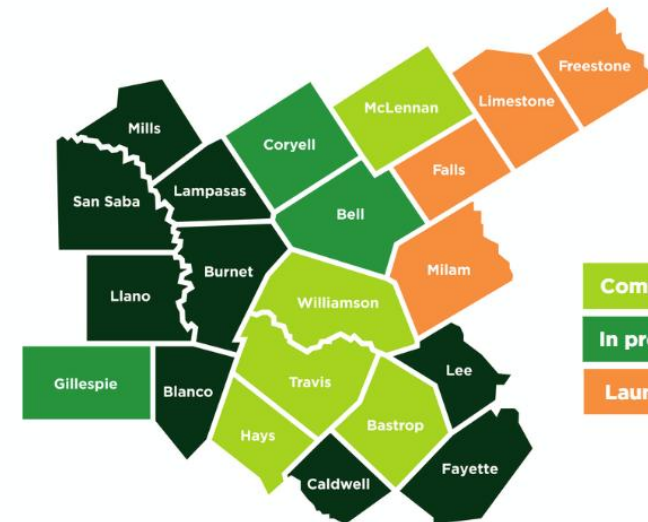
Data Assets

Central Texas Food System Dashboard



www.centraltxfoodsystem.org

Food Access Community Needs Assessments (*"Community Insights"*)



Multi-Sector Community Conversation

Resident Survey

Stakeholder Interviews

Resident Focus Groups

Policy Scans

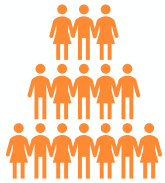
www.centraltxfoodsystem.org/the-dashboard#cna



Regional Trends

What Our Data Tell Us About Our Food System, Food Access,
and their Impacts

System-Wide Challenges



- Rapid **population growth** outpaces **infrastructure**, including grocery and transportation



- **Natural disasters** and **climate extremes** threaten agricultural production, worker safety, and community resilience

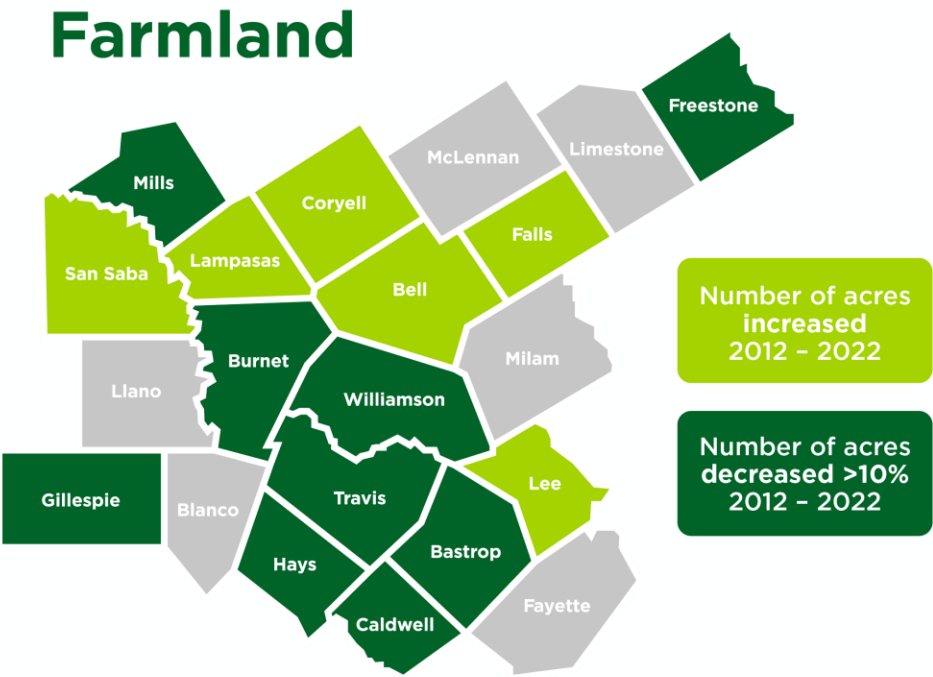
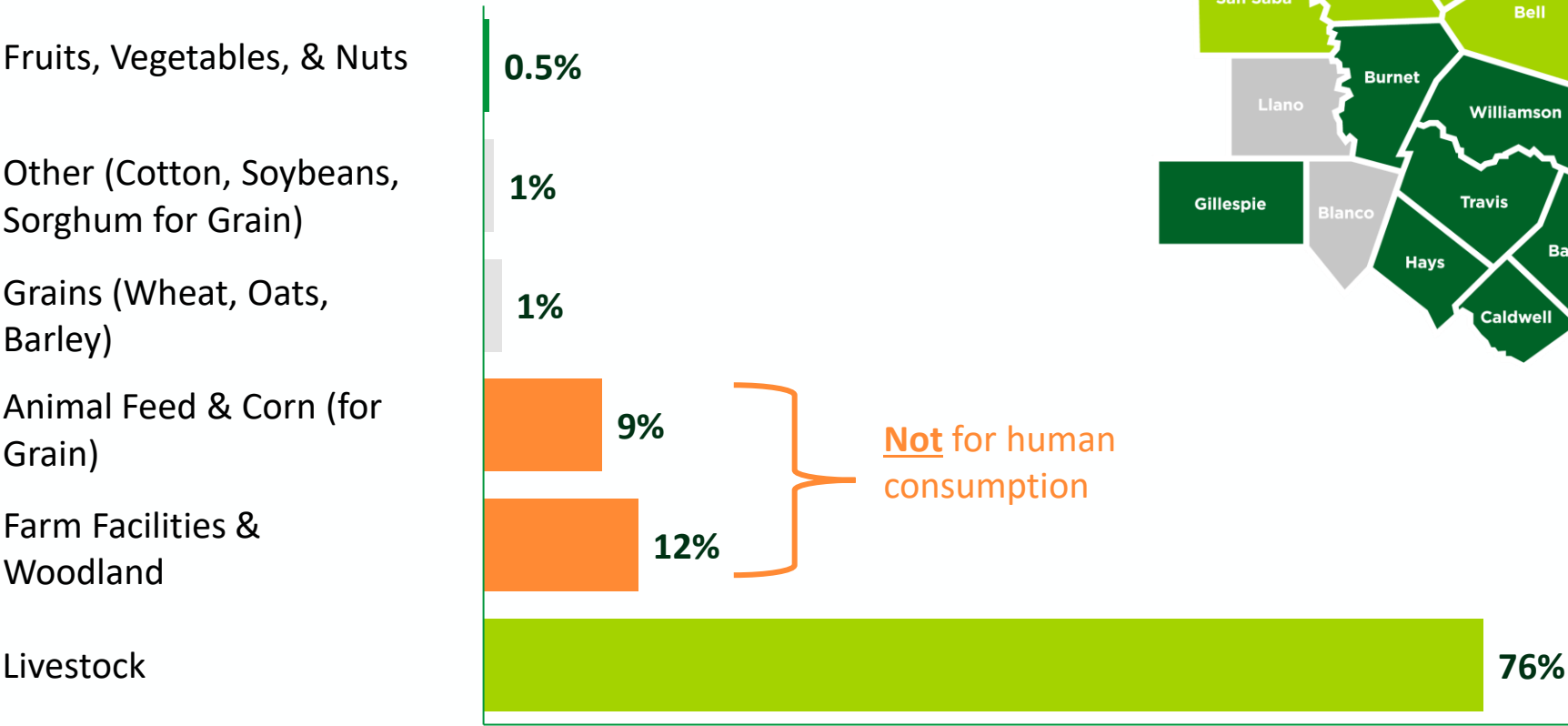


- **Transportation barriers**
 - **1 in 3** neighbors (33%) **can't easily access transportation** to buy groceries
 - **Limited public transit**
 - **Transportation** budget often reserved for commuting

Farmland* Use

<3% used to grow crops for human consumption.

- CTX’s 9M acres of farmland are used for:



Source: USDA Census of Agriculture (2012, 2017, and 2022)

*Farmland = All agricultural land (crop and ranch land).

Community Insights



Barriers

- Lack of **infrastructure** (e.g., cold storage, processing)
- Increasing **costs**, especially land
- Aging **workforce**



Strategic Opportunities

- Land use, zoning, and tax policies to **preserve farmland**
- Hands-on **training** and mentorship
- Innovative **growing practices** (e.g., controlled-environment ag)



At \$80,000 an acre, there is nothing you can grow on that and ever make a profit. [...] Farmers don't expect to be rolling in dough like a tech executive, but they do expect and deserve to earn a decent living [...] and the way land prices are [...] it's impossible.

Bastrop County Stakeholder



Food Environment

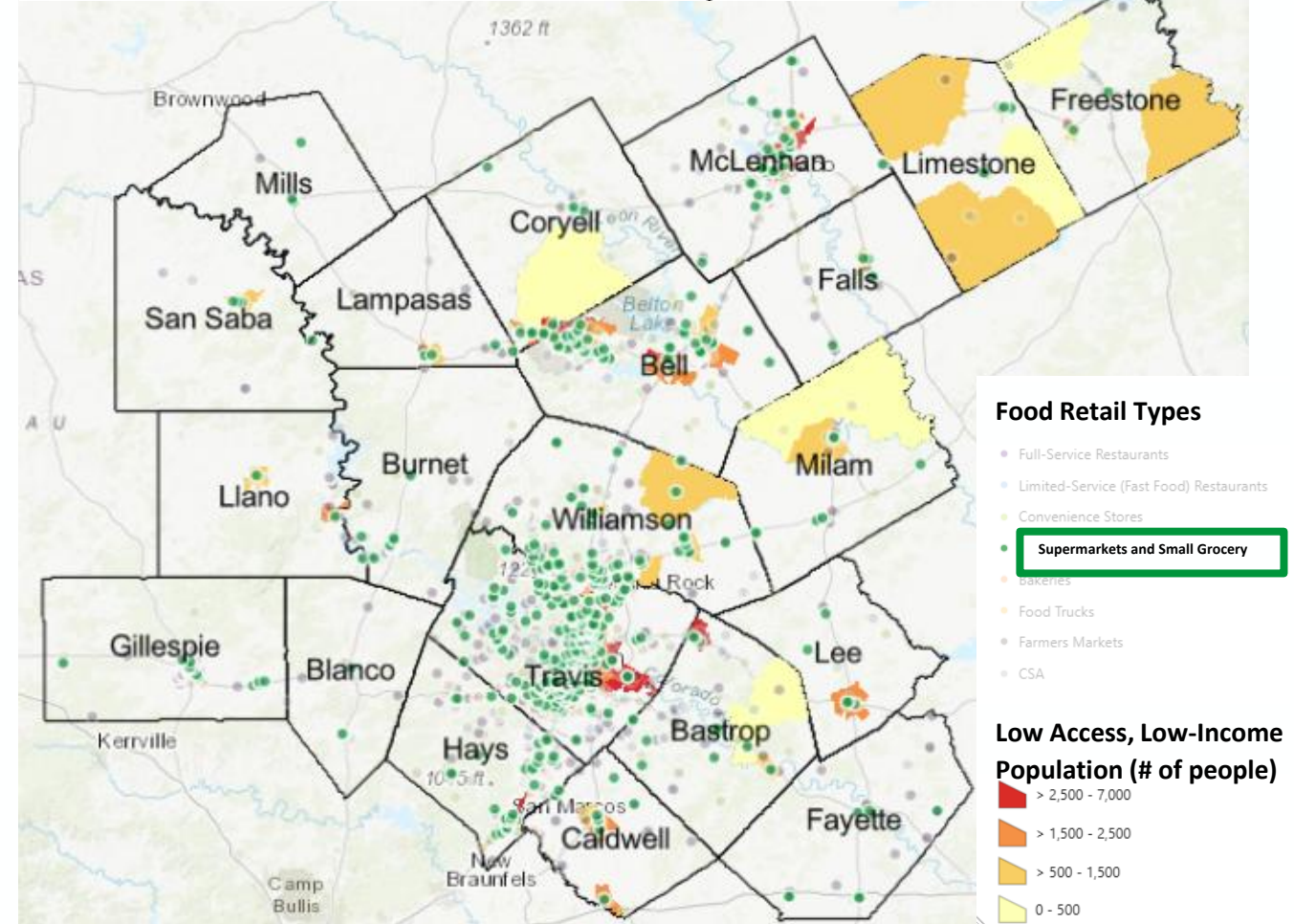
The presence of grocery stores helps increase access to nutritious foods.

- **2,000+ food retail outlets and 6,000+ restaurants in CTX**
- **“Food swamp”:** 7x as many convenience and fast-food outlets as grocery stores
- **Rural areas:** Limited grocery stores and SNAP-authorized retailers (data not shown)
- Our CNAs indicate **retail access is low** even in areas not considered LILA

Sources:

Food Retail and Restaurant Locations: Purchased from Data Axle in March 2025
 Farmers Market, CSA Locations: USDA Local Food Directories, accessed June 2025
 Low-Income, Low Food Access Areas: USDA Economic Research Service, Food Access Research Atlas, 2019-2021
 SNAP-authorized retailers: USDA Food and Nutrition Service, May 2025

Food Retail Locations in Low-Income/Low-Access Areas



What is considered a low-income, low food access (LILA) area?

Census tracts where 500+ people or 33% of the population live >0.5 miles (urban) or 10 miles (rural) from a large grocery store and where households are more likely to have limited vehicle access. Also known as “food deserts.” Source: [USDA Economic Research Service](#)

Community Insights



Barriers

- Enrollment barriers → **gaps in utilization** of SNAP, WIC
- **Limited SNAP/WIC**-authorized retailers
- Gaps in **access** to local food purchasing



Strategic Opportunities

- Incentivizing **healthy food retail** (zoning, tax policies)
- Connecting more neighbors to **SNAP, WIC**
- **SNAP, WIC** at diverse retailers (e.g., mid-sized grocery, farmers markets)
- Expanding **nutrition incentive programs** (e.g., Double Up Food Bucks)
- Incentivizing **institutional procurement**



I can't use my WIC at the supermarket. [Stores like] Dollar General and other supermarkets don't take it. I know a lot of places accept SNAP, but I don't have SNAP—just WIC—and I don't know why [they don't accept it].

Bastrop County Neighbor

Translated from Spanish

My \$265 [in SNAP] is one grocery trip and not even a fully packed cart [...] By the end of the month, I'm trying to figure out, 'Ok, we doing grilled cheese? We doing ramen?' [...] What can I make some magical meal out of? [...] [SNAP] hasn't changed, even though costs do.

Hays County Neighbor

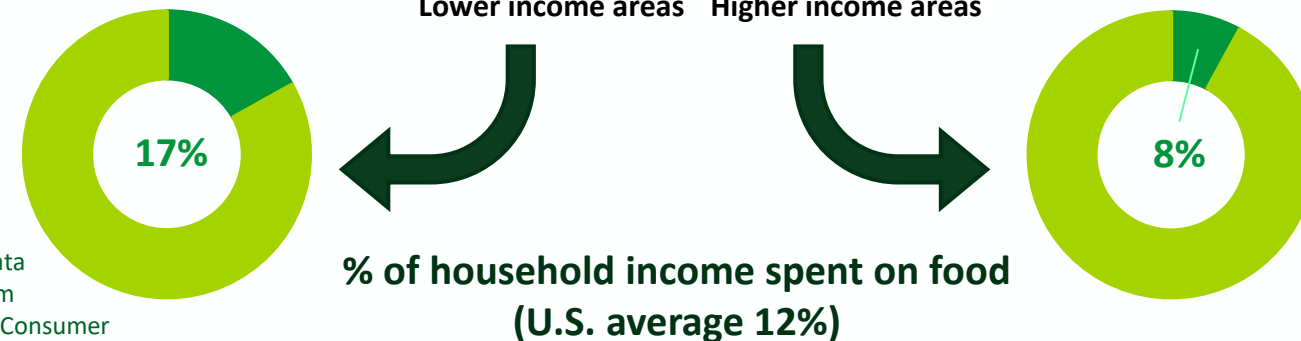
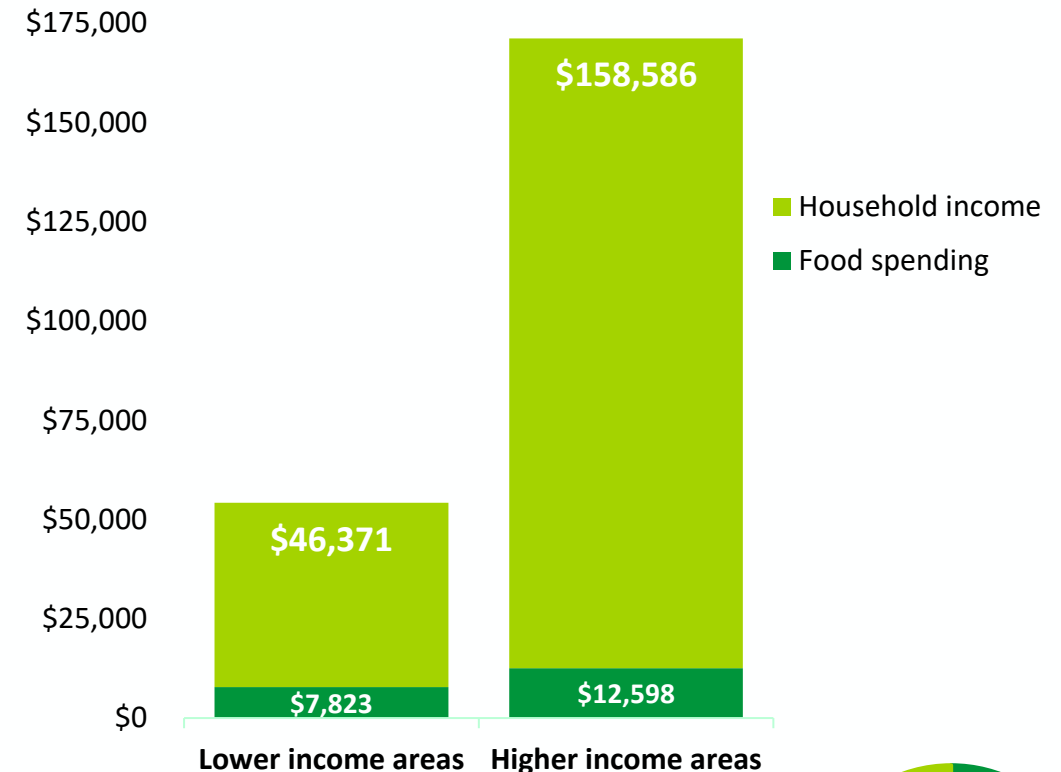


Food Expenditures

Challenges with grocery access and food cost drive disparities in household food spending.

- **Disparities:**
 - **Low-income** households spend >2× share of income vs. wealthier households
 - Many **rural** counties have **above-average** food spending

Median Household Income and Average Food Expenditure



Sources:

2022 and 2023 5-Year American Community Survey (ACS) and 2023 and 2024 Esri Consumer Spending Data PolicyMap (n.d.) Estimated Median Income of a Household, between 2019-2023. Retrieved July 2025 from <https://feedingamericahealthinnovation.policymap.com> [data from US Bureau of Labor Statistics (2023). Consumer Expenditures in 2022. <https://www.bls.gov/opub/reports/consumer-expenditures/2022/home.htm>

Community Insights



Barriers

- Neighbors strongly prefer healthy foods, but **affordability** is an issue
- Challenging to access and afford **special diets** and **culturally relevant foods**



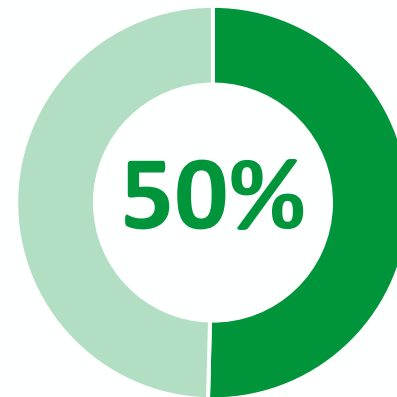
Strategic Opportunities

- Scale **Food Is Medicine (FIM)** initiatives, such as:
 - Medically tailored meals
 - Produce prescriptions
 - Nutrition/cooking and gardening education



*The cost of food has gone up. I mean, I work a full-time job, my husband works a full-time job, and we even struggle to get food. So, it's difficult, and **there's not a lot of access to healthy foods.***

Waco Neighbor



of neighbors have a household member with a **chronic illness**



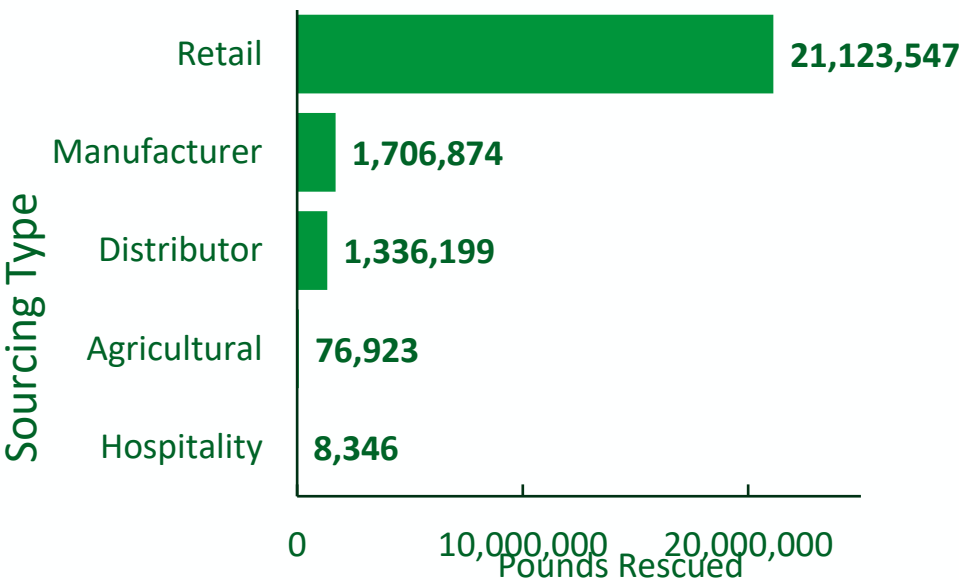
2 in 5 would be unable to afford an unexpected \$400 emergency.

Food Waste and Recovery

While food waste exposes system inefficiencies and opportunities to save resources, food recovery can reduce environmental impact by redirecting surplus food.

- Very little data at county or state level
 - National data: **Residential** and **food service** sectors each generate **40%** of **food waste**; food retail 20%
- **Food banks** play a key role in **food recovery**
 - CTFB 2024: 87% of pounds rescued come from **retail sector**

CTFB Food Rescued by Source (2024)



Food loss vs. waste vs. recovery:

Food loss happens during the production, processing, and distribution of food.

Food waste happens when food fit for consumption is thrown away.

Food recovery (aka **food rescue**) helps prevent food waste by working with food donors to intercept food fit for consumption before it goes to landfills, inspecting it for freshness, and distributing it for human consumption, most commonly through the charitable food sector.

Sources:

Food recovery data: Central Texas Food Bank inventory data (January-December 2024)

National data: US EPA. 2019 Wasted Food Report: Estimates of generation and management of wasted food in the United States in 2019. [Online] April 2023. https://www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2024-04/2019-wasted-food-report_508_opt_ec_4.23correction.pdf.

Community Insights



Theme: Lack of public composting infrastructure

- Policy scans of cities in Bastrop, Hays, Travis, and Williamson counties, and Waco revealed that:
 - In most cities, **waste management is contracted out** to private companies
 - Austin is the only city providing **municipal composting**
 - Austin requires food businesses have access to **waste diversion** (composting, feeding animals, donating)



Theme: Farm-level food loss and recovery

- Stakeholders highlighted the challenges of **preventing food loss at the farm level** and the need for solutions to increase market access and **food recovery efforts**

The background of the slide is a photograph of several cardboard boxes filled with fresh produce, including leafy greens, tomatoes, and other vegetables. The entire image is covered with a semi-transparent green filter. Centered over this background is the main title in a large, white, sans-serif font.

Regional Food System Council (RFSC)

Leveraging Data to Drive Action

Data Audience: Central Texas Regional Food System Council

- **Mission:** To address broad challenges across the Central Texas food system by **fostering the coordination of data, resources, education, policy, and advocacy**, to advance innovative solutions in our communities.
- **Vision:** We envision a thriving, sustainable, and resilient Central Texas Food System that supports access to fresh and nutritious food for all, local production, a robust supply chain, and economic stability.
- Launching on October 24
- Includes a Data and Research Advisory Group as part of structure
 - Members are academics, food industry researchers





Want to learn more?

Explore more Central Texas Food System Data here:

www.centraltxfoodsystem.org/the-dashboard

www.centraltxfoodsystem.org/the-dashboard#cna

www.centraltxfoodsystem.org/resources

Questions?

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