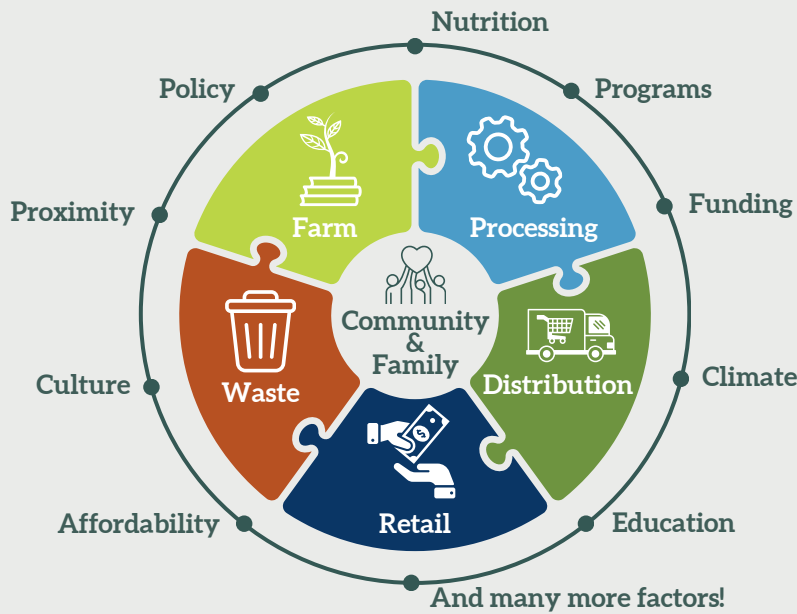


Cultivating Community Resilience in the Jefferson County Food System

2024 Analysis and Recommendations for Policy, Systems, and Environment Change

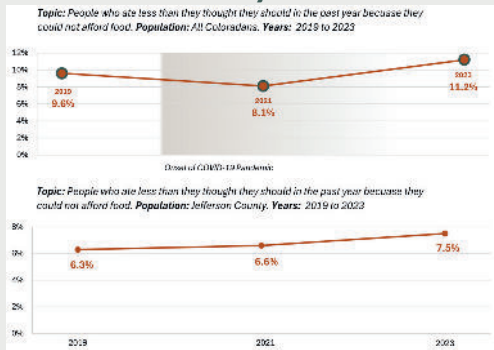


Jefferson County's food system is a complex network with many factors influencing how well the system works for our communities.



And many more factors!

Food Insecurity Trends



The COVID-19 pandemic exposed some of the food system's weaknesses but also sparked new food access ideas and organizations. However, there are still gaps, with many facing food insecurity and farmers struggling to access suitable land for food production.

The report evaluates the Jefferson County food landscape, integrating policy analysis alongside demographic data to understand land use and food access patterns. The resulting recommendations identify strategic priorities for the Jefferson County Public Health **Food in Communities (FIC)** initiative, encouraging collaboration from all stakeholders. Additional detail about methodology and findings are available in the full report.



Food in Communities (FIC)

A regional collaborative working to increase equitable access to healthy, affordable, and culturally important foods through food policies, systems, and environmental changes.

Key Findings of this Project:

- Jefferson County has a significant agricultural presence and growing local food interest, but high land prices and restrictive zoning laws can hinder farming. Strategic land use planning and policy support are needed to enhance resilience and community connectivity.
- Proximity to supermarkets is crucial for Jefferson County residents to access nutritional foods. Rising costs of living and uneven access, especially in low-income areas, worsen disparities and require substantial resources for no-cost food access points.
- Jefferson County's food systems planning and implementation are decentralized across various departments and municipalities, leading to fragmented processes.
- Limited sustained funding mechanisms and policies hinder efforts to ensure a healthy county with access to local food, despite growing need and increasing demand for locally grown products.
- Efforts to strengthen the food system are supported by a dedicated community of residents and leaders, with 72 participants directly involved in this project and many more expressing interest.

High-Level Recommendations:

Advance **policy, systems, and environment (PSE)** changes by addressing the following data- and community-identified priorities:

Prioritize Land Access for Local Agriculture: Promote equitable policies, update zoning regulations to facilitate small-scale farming and urban agriculture, identify and conserve land for agriculture, support farmers, and leverage community involvement to enhance food production and resilience.

Establish a Centralized Coordination Framework: Involve diverse stakeholders to improve communication, streamline processes, and align food system initiatives across Jefferson County.

Policy, Systems, and Environment (PSE) Change

Implementing or modifying policies, altering systems, and changing physical or organizational environments to create sustainable improvements in public health and community well-being. These strategies work together to address the root causes of issues and promote healthier behaviors and outcomes.



LUPA (Land Use Planning Assessment):

An analysis of all Jefferson County policies and planning documents related to food systems. Here are some insights and opportunities presented in select policy documents:

POLICY LOOKED AT	CONNECTION TO FOOD SYSTEM
Jefferson County 2024 County Health Improvement Plan (CHIP)	Each of the CHIP's three priorities—mental and behavioral health, economic stability, and climate change—present opportunities to explicitly improve food systems by addressing root causes and enhancing community well-being.
Jefferson County Strategic Plan 2022	Focuses on addressing social determinants of health, as well as economic and environmental sustainability, have the potential to increase food security, and emphasizes the need for inter-departmental collaboration.
Jefferson County 2022 Climate Action Plan	The following key takeaways highlight how a robust local food system contributes to overall climate resilience: stronger local food supply chains (including increased emergency preparedness), reduced greenhouse gas emissions (related to both distribution and agricultural practices), bolstering the local economy, and improved soil health.
2020-2024 Consolidated Plan and 2020 Action Plan	Vulnerable populations, particularly those experiencing homelessness, face barriers to accessing healthy, culturally relevant foods, highlighting the need for couple efforts of addressing housing instability with increasing food access and promoting overall community resilience.

Existing Conditions Analysis:

Understanding the physical and demographic landscape of the Jefferson County food system via Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping. For the full content of this analysis, see page 11 in the Long Form.

Key Insights from Existing Conditions Analysis:

- Cultural and economic factors influence food access and choices. For example, as you can see in Figure 1, rural mountain and foothills regions generally have higher **socio-economic status (SES)** and fewer **People of Color (POC)**, and urban areas typically exhibit lower SES and higher POC presence.
- Proximity to supermarkets is crucial for nutritional outcomes yet access varies significantly across Jefferson County.
- Rural regions experience limited retail options, with only five large supermarkets in rural areas of Jefferson County.
- In urban/periurban areas of Jefferson County, convenience stores outnumber large supermarkets at a rate of ~3:1.
- No-cost food access organizations play a crucial role in addressing food insecurity.
- There are inconsistencies between population density and food access points, requiring many residents to travel outside their ZIP codes for food.
- Jefferson County has a vibrant, and often underestimated, agricultural landscape, with at least 46 farms (as identified in the map in figure 3) and at least 46 community gardens (not pictured).



Socio-Economic Status (SES)

A measure of economic variable like median household income, and sociological variable like education level and type of job.

People of Color (POC)

Refers to members of the population who identify as a race or ethnicity other than 'white. Percent POC is measured in each census block in the GIS maps.

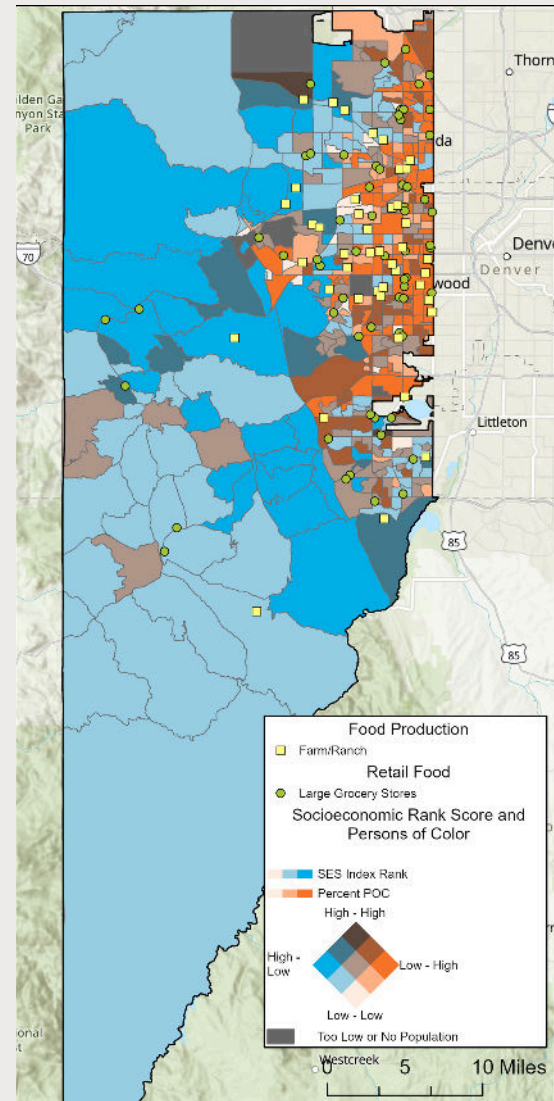


Figure 1: The bivariate relationship between Socio-economic Status (SES) and Percentage of People of Color (POC) in each census block, including the location of farms/ranches and large grocery stores in Jefferson County.

Key Insights from LUPA:

Food production: Jefferson County has a deep appreciation for agriculture, but zoning policies need to be further examined and updated to reflect support for diverse agricultural practices. It is important to continuously review and revise agricultural policies to promote equitable land access, farming, and infrastructure.

Food access: Integrated approaches to food access, like co-locating food assistance with other public services and promoting local food initiatives by improving the sustainability of the local food system are only possible through further coordination of efforts and resources.

Food retail: More policies need to clearly identify support for local and sustainable food sources, elevating efforts to connect development initiatives with local food system goals, including sustainable food retail environments.

Distribution and procurement: More measures are needed to support comprehensive distribution policies that will fortify the county supply chain.

Financial policies: Much of food systems work is funded by grants, which poses the challenge of variability, but it also allows CBOs to tap into their expertise and address local needs effectively.

Overall: Food systems planning and implementation processes are decentralized between many different jurisdictions and departments within Jefferson County and lack consistent funding.

Listening Sessions:

A method of engaging community based organizations (CBOs) and their communities to promote PSE changes tailored to the local context and to center the voices of those with lived experiences.

JCPH extends deep gratitude to Kaizen Food Share and GoFarm for partnering and facilitating, and toward all participants who attended the listening sessions and shared their expertise to help inform this report.

Community Identified Key Insights:

- Accessibility and Affordability
- Community Empowerment and Community Led Agriculture
- Health and Environmental Consciousness
- Land Accessibility and Preservation of Urban Agriculture
- Local Food Access, Infrastructure and Distribution
- Cross-Collaboration Within the Food System

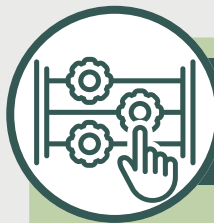
Right now, my farm [in Jefferson County] can't pay my mortgage.

Recommendations for Policy, Systems, and Environment Change for the Jefferson County Food System



Promote & Integrate Equitable Agricultural Support

- Establish explicit buy-in for local agriculture through county goals.
- Champion agriculture to improve community resilience, health, and neighborhood enhancement.
- Engage in the Together Jeffco project to implement agriculture and land access recommendations.
- Align actions with the Climate Action Plan (CAP) and Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP).



Modify Zoning Regulations

- Revise zoning codes to create smaller agricultural parcels.
- Encourage integration of food production into residential, institutional, and commercial landscapes.
- Support innovative farming methods like green roofs and vertical gardens.
- Foster interagency coordination for zoning and permitting processes.



Identify and Utilize Vacant and Underused Land

- Conduct GIS analysis to identify suitable land for agriculture.
- Explore vacant school properties, historic sites, and public/private partnerships for agriculture.
- Consider establishing a Jefferson County Right-to-Farm ordinance.
- Provide financial incentives, grants, or tax breaks for agriculture projects.
- Establish a land bank to secure land for local food production.



Prioritize Equity in Food Systems

- Integrate equity considerations into all PSE change work related to food systems.
- Ensure equitable land access opportunities for BIPOC and young farmers.
- Consider creating a land acknowledgment for agricultural policies.



Advance Collaboration and Coordination

- Form an interagency work group to improve food system coordination.
- Implement a community advisory board to provide input and feedback.
- Explore creating a shared vision or action plan for the Jefferson County food system.

Scan the QR code to see the full report with additional details about methodology and findings.

For more information, please contact Jefferson County Public Health (JCPH) at 303-232-6301.

You can also visit the JCPH Food Policy and Systems Team website at jeffco.us/3780/Food-Policy

