

Creating Access to Healthy, Affordable Food

Objective

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Health and Human Services (HHS), and the United States Department of Treasury are working together to support projects that increase access to healthy, affordable food, and encourage the purchase and consumption of healthy food. As part of the First Lady's *Let's Move!* initiative to combat childhood obesity, these three departments will aim to expand the availability of nutritious food through the establishment of healthy food retail outlets, including developing and equipping grocery stores, small retailers, corner stores, and farmers markets to help revitalize neighborhoods that currently lack these options. Residents of these communities, which are often referred to as "food deserts," are typically served by fast food restaurants and convenience stores that offer little or no fresh food. Frequently, healthy food options are hard to find in these communities or are unaffordable.

Why the focus on food deserts?

The 2010 White House Task Force on Childhood Obesity cited research that limited access to healthy food choices often leads to poor diets and high levels

of obesity and other diet-related diseases, including diabetes and heart disease. Millions of Americans living in food deserts also face higher levels of food insecurity, increasing the number of low- and moderate-income families without access to enough food to sustain healthy, active lives. The First Lady's *Let's Move!* initiative seeks to reverse childhood obesity within a generation, and increasing access to healthy, affordable foods is one key component.

The 2008 Farm Bill defined a "food desert" as "an area in the United States with limited access to affordable and nutritious food, particularly such an area composed of predominantly lower-income neighborhoods and communities." These areas include rural, urban, and Tribal communities. The Farm Bill directed the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to conduct a study of food deserts to assess, among other things, the incidence and prevalence of food deserts. The study found that more than 23 million Americans, including 6.5 million children, live in low-income urban and rural neighborhoods where the closest supermarket is more than one mile from their homes.



For the first time, USDA, Treasury, and HHS are working together to increase access to healthy, affordable food.

Where are the food deserts?

There are food deserts in all types of communities: urban, suburban, rural, and Tribal. To help community leaders identify the food deserts in their area, USDA recently launched its new Food Desert Locator tool <http://www.ers.usda.gov/data/fooddesert>, which maps and provides selected population characteristics of census tracts that are food deserts—low-income neighborhoods without easy access to a supermarket or large grocery store. Additionally, the a Food Environment Atlas www.ers.usda.gov/FoodAtlas/ allows users to retrieve data on a county-by-county basis pertaining to food access, participation in food assistance programs, and overall health indicators. More information about food deserts can also be found online at www.usda.gov/fooddeserts and on www.letsmove.gov.

How is the federal government solving this problem?

USDA, Treasury, and HHS will use their expertise and resources to increase access to healthy food, which will improve public health, create jobs, help revitalize distressed communities, and open new markets for farmers to sell their products. By better connecting producers and consumers, the goal is to build stronger connections between cities and rural parts of the country and increase access to a fuller range of healthy foods.

What types of projects will be funded?

Priority consideration will be given to organizations located in communities with healthy food access needs and whose projects seek to eliminate food deserts. Interventions should address the range of supply chain segments, including:

Retailers: Projects that build or support healthy food retail outlets. This can include grocery stores, corner stores, mobile food vendors, farmers markets, and community supported agriculture projects. Retailers should offer a range of quality foods and prices that make healthy choices affordable.

Producers/Distributors: Agricultural producers and



distributors whose products primarily benefit food deserts—this can include businesses that add value to or facilitate the movement of healthy food into food desert areas.

Marketers: Projects that better market healthy food to communities within food deserts. Consumers need adequate information to make healthy choices, while retailers need support to market healthy food options.

For more information on grant programs and who is eligible to apply, please visit www.usda.gov/fooddeserts.

Who should get involved?

Many types of organizations are eligible for funding and/or technical assistance. These include:

- Businesses
- Local and Tribal Governments
- Non-profit Organizations
- Cooperatives and Agricultural Producers
- State Departments of Agriculture
- Colleges and Universities
- Treasury-certified Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs)
- Community Development Entities (CDEs)
- Community Development Corporations (CDCs)

Interested parties are encouraged to form partnerships and develop sustainable projects and integrated strategies prior to applying. Strong partnerships will be able to leverage multiple programs, providing greater resources to combat food deserts.