

Food

The Southern Rural Development Center addresses...

ACCESS

Quality and Cost



Highlights of RIDGE-funded research in the Southern Region



Four research studies explore food access, quality and cost

One of the key goals associated with of our nation's 15 food assistance programs is to provide children and low-income adults with access to healthy, nutritious and high quality foods. Despite the commitment to improving the health status of participants, research continues to show that the diet and nutritional outcomes of those taking part in these programs are not as significant as one would expect. But why? While the answers are far from simple, the SRDC has awarded RIDGE grants to a variety of researchers whose purpose has been to decipher the set of contextual or environmental factors that could be at play in shaping the nutritional health of low-wealth people in the rural South.

Retail Concentration, Food Deserts and Food Disadvantaged Communities in Rural America

Troy Blanchard, Mississippi State University
and Thomas Lyson, Cornell University

A food desert is defined as a place where residents have limited access to supermarkets and supercenter stores. The goal of this study was to develop a measure of food deserts for non-metropolitan counties in the United States, describe the characteristics of food desert populations and assess the impact of food deserts on the consumption of fruits and vegetables. A central finding of the study was that individuals living in food deserts pay higher prices for groceries or incur a higher travel cost to access a larger food retailer. More importantly, healthy alternatives, such as fruit and vegetable markets, are less prevalent in food deserts. The study suggests that food deserts may compound severe nutritional problems and further exacerbate the socioeconomic disparities in health status.

The Impact of the Food Stamp Program on Transient and Chronic Poverty

Bradford Mills and Elton Mykerezi
Virginia Tech

This study's purpose was to examine the role of the Food Stamp Program on reducing household exposure to transient and chronic poverty. According to the researchers,

the common reasons for transient poverty (short-term poverty due to a negative economic shock) and chronic poverty (consistently below the poverty line) are low human capital, minority status and geographic location. The study showed that poor and near-poor families appear to use the Food Stamp Program as a short-term stabilization tool rather than for long-term support and suggests that a two-track Food Stamp Program may be warranted that would enhance short-term program use and improve program effectiveness for transiently poor families.

Is it Just Food? Geographic Differences in the Cost of Living

Julie Zimmerman, Sunny Ham and Sarah Michelle Frank
University of Kentucky

This research project looks at whether prices are consistent for the same purchases in rural and urban areas. Focused on eight rural Kentucky counties, this study replicated the same methods used in a national study to collect local prices and compare them to urban counties. The results did not indicate a consistent pattern of lower prices across all rural places in the study. In fact, prices in some rural areas were higher than those in urban areas. Though most people believe it costs less to live in a rural area, this project revealed a much more complex picture showing that the diversity of rural areas makes it difficult to declare that prices are always lower there.

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Impact of Local Food Prices on the Relationship Between Food Stamp Program Participation and Bodyweight Status of Adults in the South

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Qi Zhang, Old Dominion University
and Zhuo Chen, University of Chicago

2008

The goal of this currently ongoing project is to investigate the association between local food prices and body weight of adults who are eligible for the Food Stamp Program. Some evidence suggests that program participation may distort participants' food consumption choices, making them prone to obesity. However, the possible impact of local food prices on the body weight of program participants has yet to be considered. The results of this study could provide knowledge to policymakers regarding whether they should consider adjustments to Food Stamp Program benefits based on local food prices.

For More Information:

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