



Food for thought

Raising awareness on the
impact of food deserts with
data and analytics



Executive summary

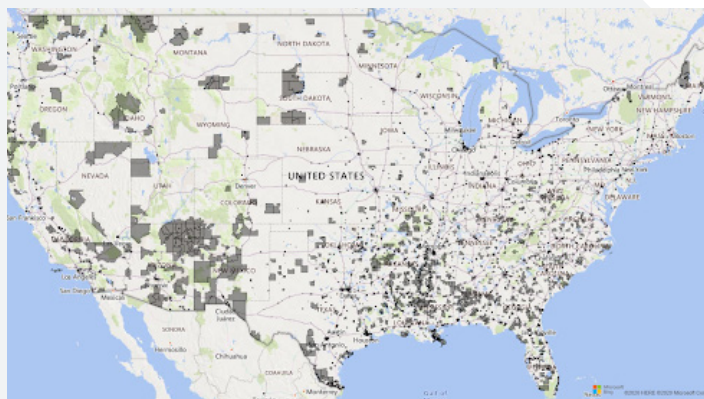
Food insecurity is an issue that burdens millions of people in the United States. The impact of food deserts can have lasting effects on the health, income and opportunities of its residents. Long-term economic factors have driven grocers out of many urban and rural areas, creating an almost insurmountable barrier for low-income and immobile residents to access affordable and healthy food. Grocery store chains and manufacturers alike can combat the impact of food insecurity by understanding the role they play in the disparate and unequal food system in America.

Section I

Food deserts are defined as geographic areas where residents' access to affordable, healthy food options, particularly fruits and vegetables, is either restricted or non-existent due to the absence of grocery stores within convenient travel distance. In recent years, economic factors have driven grocery stores chains out of many cities, which has resulted in fewer locations and/or alternative store formats with limited selection.

Socioeconomic and racial inequities contribute to the suffering of the food insecure population. Food deserts are most commonly found in low-income areas that are disproportionately Black and Brown communities. Wealthy and predominantly white neighborhoods in the US have three times more supermarkets than poor ones. Low-income and high unemployment perpetuate a gap in the American food system that grocery retailers exacerbate by neglecting areas that are not as profitable. Store closures result in job losses in low-income areas, which only further drives unemployment rates up and limits opportunities for the residents. The cycle of food insecurity persists.

Another key factor in food deserts, in addition to lack of equitable access, is lack of choices. Food options are severely limited not only by what is available, but also by what is affordable. According to NielsenIQ data, the average price of healthier food options, such as a 16oz package of strawberries is \$3.01, compared to the average price of unhealthy food options, such as a 16oz pack of ice cream, averaging \$1.52. The higher cost of healthy foods often puts them out of reach for many lower income families. Feeding America Map the Meal



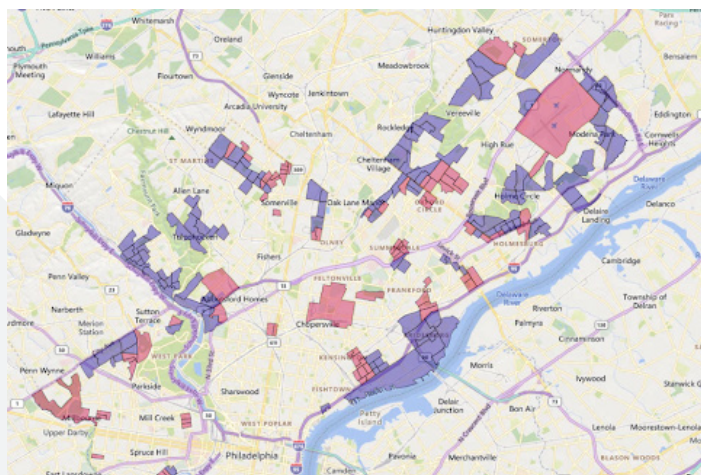
USDA map shows census tracts with 20% poverty rate and low access to a supermarket (0.5 miles for urban, 1.0 non-urban)

Gap data reports that the average dollar amount spent on food per meal for food-secure individuals is \$3.13. As a result, food deserts have an overabundance of fast-food chains that sell meals that are low priced (ie \$1 menu items), high in fat, sugar and salt. Dietary restrictions, both religious and nutritional, can hinder food choices and those in food deserts may also find it difficult to find foods that are culturally relevant.

The consequences of restricted access to healthy food are long-term. The Black and Brown population suffer from statistically higher rates of obesity, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease and other diet-related conditions than the general population. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) reports that Black (47.5%) and Hispanic (46.9%) adults aged 20 and over are most likely to be obese. With the emergence of COVID-19, many are susceptible to infection caused by their pre-existing conditions in which access to healthy food is a contributing factor. In fact, a Pew Research survey shows that 31% of Blacks and 43% of Hispanics are very concerned that they will get COVID-19 and require hospitalization, compared to only 18% of Whites. For more information about other trends driving Health and Wellness, please visit the **NIQ** site.

Section II

Food deserts occur in poor urban and rural areas around the country. This report looks closely at Philadelphia, Pennsylvania



NielsenIQ data map shows Philadelphia county block groups that do not have access to a supermarket within 0.5 miles. Pink areas have median income of <\$50,000. Purple areas have median income >\$50,000

to demonstrate the impact each of the factors that define a food desert has on its residents. According to Feeding America food insecurity data, 12% of the population in Philadelphia has been projected to be food insecure and 4.7% are projected to have very low food security in 2021. That is a combined total of nearly two million people who are not food secure in Pennsylvania.

The issue of access is apparent in Philadelphia and surrounding areas. Of the cities' constituents, 16.8% of people live more than one half mile away from a supermarket and do not own a car. Moreover, an individual's food shopping trip is difficult in areas where public transportation is either limited or unavailable. For some, a trip to the grocery store may require taking several buses or trains.

The racial and socioeconomic factors as described at a national level plays out in Philadelphia as well. Over 37%

of white adults live within a half a mile of a grocery store compared to only 21% of Blacks. Even if distance and transportation issues are overcome, income remains a barrier. Over 30% of high-income earners live relatively close to grocery stores, compared to only 20% of low-income earners, which tend to be disproportionately Black and Brown people. The barriers become increasingly complex for those who rely on US food assistance programs. NielsenIQ data shows that less than one third (27%) of Black and Hispanic adults who use SNAP, for instance, have access to a store within a reasonable distance that accepts the benefit compared to 40% of Whites. For WIC, Whites (21%) are twice as likely to access those benefits within one mile of their homes, compared to Blacks (8.9%) and Hispanics (5.6%). For more information on NielsenIQ's contributions to the Feeding America Map the Meal Gap project, please visit [this site](#).

	Total adults	Grocery no supercenters				Grocery with supercenters				Supermarkets plus				SNAP access				WIC access			
		Half mile or more		Mile or more		Half mile or more		Mile or more		Half mile or more		Mile or more		Half mile or more		Mile or more		Half mile or more		Mile or more	
		# of adults	% of adults	# of adults	% of adults	# of adults	% of adults	# of adults	% of adults	# of adults	% of adults	# of adults	% of adults	# of adults	% of adults	# of adults	% of adults	# of adults	% of adults	# of adults	% of adults
HH income																					
Income under \$10,000	182,528	35,104	19.2%	2,852	1.6%	35,054	19.2%	2,852	1.6%	42,951	23.5%	4,028	2.2%	42,951	23.5%	4,028	2.2%	68,233	37.4%	21,981	12.0%
Income \$10,000-\$19,999	174,172	37,995	21.8%	2,881	1.7%	37,939	21.8%	2,881	1.7%	45,054	25.9%	4,176	2.4%	45,054	25.9%	4,176	2.4%	67,243	38.6%	19,351	11.1%
Income \$20,000-\$29,999	176,258	40,915	23.2%	2,942	1.7%	40,832	23.2%	2,942	1.7%	48,367	27.4%	4,378	2.5%	48,367	27.4%	4,378	2.5%	69,381	39.4%	18,701	10.6%
Income \$30,000-\$39,999	163,559	41,935	25.6%	3,292	2.0%	41,826	25.6%	3,292	2.0%	48,627	29.7%	4,765	2.9%	48,627	29.7%	4,765	2.9%	67,886	41.5%	18,144	11.1%
Income \$40,000-\$49,999	148,092	39,831	26.9%	3,319	2.2%	39,772	26.9%	3,319	2.2%	46,153	31.2%	4,712	3.2%	46,153	31.2%	4,712	3.2%	63,352	42.8%	17,041	11.5%
Income \$50,000-\$74,999	304,265	85,035	27.9%	7,928	2.6%	84,827	27.9%	7,928	2.6%	97,996	32.2%	11,166	3.7%	97,996	32.2%	11,166	3.7%	138,359	45.5%	40,432	13.3%
Income \$75,000-\$99,999	211,054	64,260	30.4%	5,836	2.8%	64,039	30.3%	5,836	2.8%	73,421	34.8%	8,042	3.8%	73,421	34.8%	8,042	3.8%	101,671	48.2%	29,354	13.9%
Income \$100,000-\$149,999	258,721	86,638	33.5%	8,902	3.4%	86,293	33.4%	8,902	3.4%	97,654	37.7%	11,833	4.6%	97,654	37.7%	11,833	4.6%	137,727	53.2%	43,970	17.0%
Income \$150,000 or more	231,402	82,289	35.6%	9,274	4.0%	81,633	35.3%	9,274	4.0%	91,882	39.7%	12,588	5.4%	91,882	39.7%	12,588	5.4%	137,804	59.6%	52,551	22.7%

	Total adults	Grocery no supercenters				Grocery with supercenters				Supermarkets plus				SNAP access				WIC access			
		Half mile or more		Mile or more		Half mile or more		Mile or more		Half mile or more		Mile or more		Half mile or more		Mile or more		Half mile or more		Mile or more	
		# of adults	% of adults	# of adults	% of adults	# of adults	% of adults	# of adults	% of adults	# of adults	% of adults	# of adults	% of adults	# of adults	% of adults	# of adults	% of adults	# of adults	% of adults	# of adults	% of adults
Race																					
Whites (Non-Hispanic)	768,263	289,581	37.7%	30,534	4.0%	288,06	37.5%	30,534	4.0%	310,916	40.5%	41,249	5.4%	310,916	40.5%	41,249	5.4%	444,994	57.9%	164,918	21.5%
Blacks (Non-Hispanic)	597,556	126,556	21.2%	8,781	1.5%	126,509	21.2%	8,781	1.5%	165,327	27.7%	12,535	2.1%	165,327	27.7%	12,535	2.1%	235,204	39.4%	53,048	8.9%
Hispanics	311,558	57,438	18.4%	4,903	1.6%	57,336	18.4%	4,903	1.6%	67,622	21.7%	7,823	2.5%	67,622	21.7%	7,823	2.5%	91,133	29.3%	17,527	5.6%
Asians (Non-Hispanic)	132,503	29,882	22.6%	2,054	1.6%	29,779	22.5%	2,054	1.6%	35,913	27.1%	2,848	2.1%	35,913	27.1%	2,848	2.1%	62,032	46.8%	20,495	15.5%
Other (Non-Hispanic)	40,356	10,606	26.3%	956	2.4%	10,588	26.2%	956	2.4%	12,389	30.7%	1,236	3.1%	12,389	30.7%	1,236	3.1%	18,387	45.6%	5,570	13.8%



Section III

Racial injustice and social unrest in the United States over the past couple of years have pressured many organizations to support local, diverse communities and address disparities. Retailers and manufacturers have an increasingly important role to play in combating food insecurity. While public awareness of the problems posed by food deserts is growing, consumer sentiment about corporate responsibility is at a fever pitch. In fact, a recent NielsenIQ Omnibus survey shows that 38.8% of respondents state that a brand's support of 'Hunger and Food Insecurity' makes them more likely to purchase their products. Consumer purchasing is shifting to the brands that align with values important to the buyers and accountability for those social causes will be key.

In order to meet the shifting demands from consumers, companies must invest in flexible technology. The power of analytics and granular intelligence is imperative to meeting the changing business needs. The NielsenIQ On Shelf Availability (OSA) solution is one way in which data can both be used for good as well as help retailers and manufacturers uncover opportunities to mitigate the impact of food deserts for local areas in which they operate. Retailers and manufacturers can partner with NielsenIQ to leverage the OSA Barometer capability to predict food surplus in their supply chain at a store level in a timely manner. With the daily sales data by item, large grocers could partner with organizations, such as local area food banks, to donate their food surplus stock to help meet the needs of food banks that serve the communities. There are many logistical and supply chain efficiencies that retailers should explore in providing food from key categories that are limited or inaccessible in the food deserts. The NielsenIQ OSA Activation tool can be used to integrate sales and supply chain data to create a powerful view of gaps that retailers and manufacturers can fill with existing inventory and supply chain management. The impact of this investment and effort could change and save lives. A partnership with local organizations that are assisting the communities in which large companies operate will bolster greater reach and impact for the residents. Community involvement from grocery retailers and manufacturers is an important aspect to understanding and solving the complex problem of food deserts. For more information about the NielsenIQ On Shelf Availability tool, please click [here](#).

Finally, assortment improvements at both the retailer and manufacturing level can be made to ensure an array of healthy and affordable options are available in-stores. Innovation will be important in bringing culturally relevant offerings to market as well. An opportunity exists for manufacturers to invest in packaging designed to better preserve fresh foods,

for example, so that they are accessible and affordable to those in food deserts. Equally important, understanding the cultural preferences of multicultural consumers can result in innovative offerings that appeal to a growing consumer base. The taste, preferences and behaviors of the multicultural consumer vary widely. Insights about the key trends that drive consumer purchasing will enable companies to develop meaningful products and ultimately gain loyalty among the consumer base. To learn more about the NielsenIQ offerings for Innovation and Multicultural Consumer Insights, visit the [NIQ site](#).

Conclusion

Transforming the food system can positively impact millions of people globally each year. A unique opportunity exists for retailers, manufacturers and information systems firms, like NielsenIQ, to bring awareness to food inequity with the intent to solve it. Sharing data and insights that will remove barriers to food equity as well as aid organizations in making informed decisions that affect systemic food disparities is the key first step. NielsenIQ has data tools and solutions that will help retailers advance their corporate citizenship goals and make a difference in communities across the nation. To learn more about ways in which your organization can partner with NielsenIQ on pro bono initiatives related to hunger and food insecurity, please visit our [site](#).