



**BRIDGING RESEARCH, LEADERSHIP, AND ADVOCACY THROUGH APPLIED PRACTICE:**

# A SYSTEMS APPROACH TO ADDRESSING FOOD INSECURITY

**Jessica Marie Ramirez**

**MPH Candidate**

**Public Health Agency Sites:**

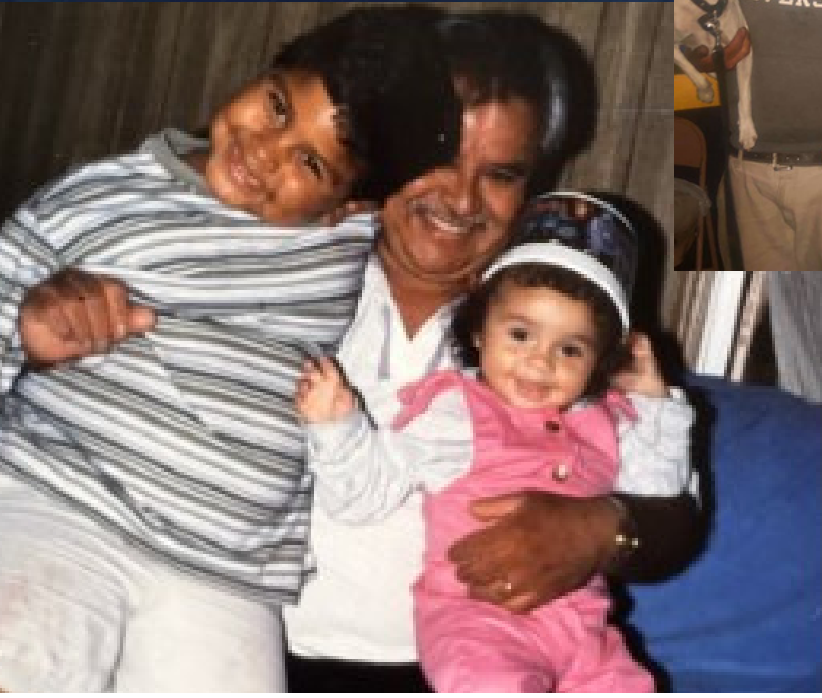
**The 'Cats Cupboard, March 2023-December 2024**

**Alternative Breaks Program, November 2024-January 2025**

**Rural Grocery Initiative, June 2022-August 2023**

**SNAP Outreach at Kansas State University Initiative, March 2024-January 2025**





# JESSICA RAMIREZ

(SHE / HER)





### **Personal Background:**

- Originally from Oxnard, California
- First Generation Student
- Sister to 3 younger brothers, 1 older brother
- Grand/daughter of an immigrant (Mexico)
- Proud to be both Mexican and Black

### **Academic Background:**

- Sociology, Social Justice Education  
(California State University Chico Kansas State University)
- Currently  $\frac{2}{3}$  way through a PhD in Leadership Communication with plans to pursue a certificate in Strategic Health Communication
- Research Interest: Complexity Theory, Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS), and the “3 C’s” (Climate, Conflict, Communicable Diseases), Food Security, Food Aid, Nutrition

### **Professional Background:**

- Instructor of Leadership Studies, Global Food Systems Leadership
- SNAP/CalFresh Outreach, Center for Healthy Communities

### **Professional Aspirations:**

- International Development, Foreign Service, International Diplomacy
- Teaching Public Health, Sociology, and Leadership
  - We need to understand people, the issues that affect them, and how to make change on said issues.

**THANK YOU FOR BEING HERE TODAY.**

# JESSICA RAMIREZ

(SHE / HER)







**DR. LINDA YARROW**

**Chair of Committee**

Associate Prof., FNDH



**DR. ELLYN R. MULCAHY**

Committee Member

- Professor, Diagnostic Medicine & Pathobiology



**DR. CAROL SHANKLIN**

Committee Member

Dean Emeritus, Graduate School

# GRADUATE COMMITTEE





# APPLIED PRACTICE PRECEPTORS

## **SHELLY WILLIAMS**

Director of 'Cats Cupboard (APE Exp. 1)

## **LEAH TSOODLE, PHD**

Faculty researcher in Agricultural Economics and supervisor of research with the Rural Grocery Initiative (APE Exp. 2)

## **KARA ROSS, PHD**

Faculty researcher in Agricultural Economics and preceptor for SNAP grant (APE Exp. 3)

## **TAMARA BAUER, PHD**

Director of Student Programs, Preceptor for Alternative Break (APE Exp. 4)

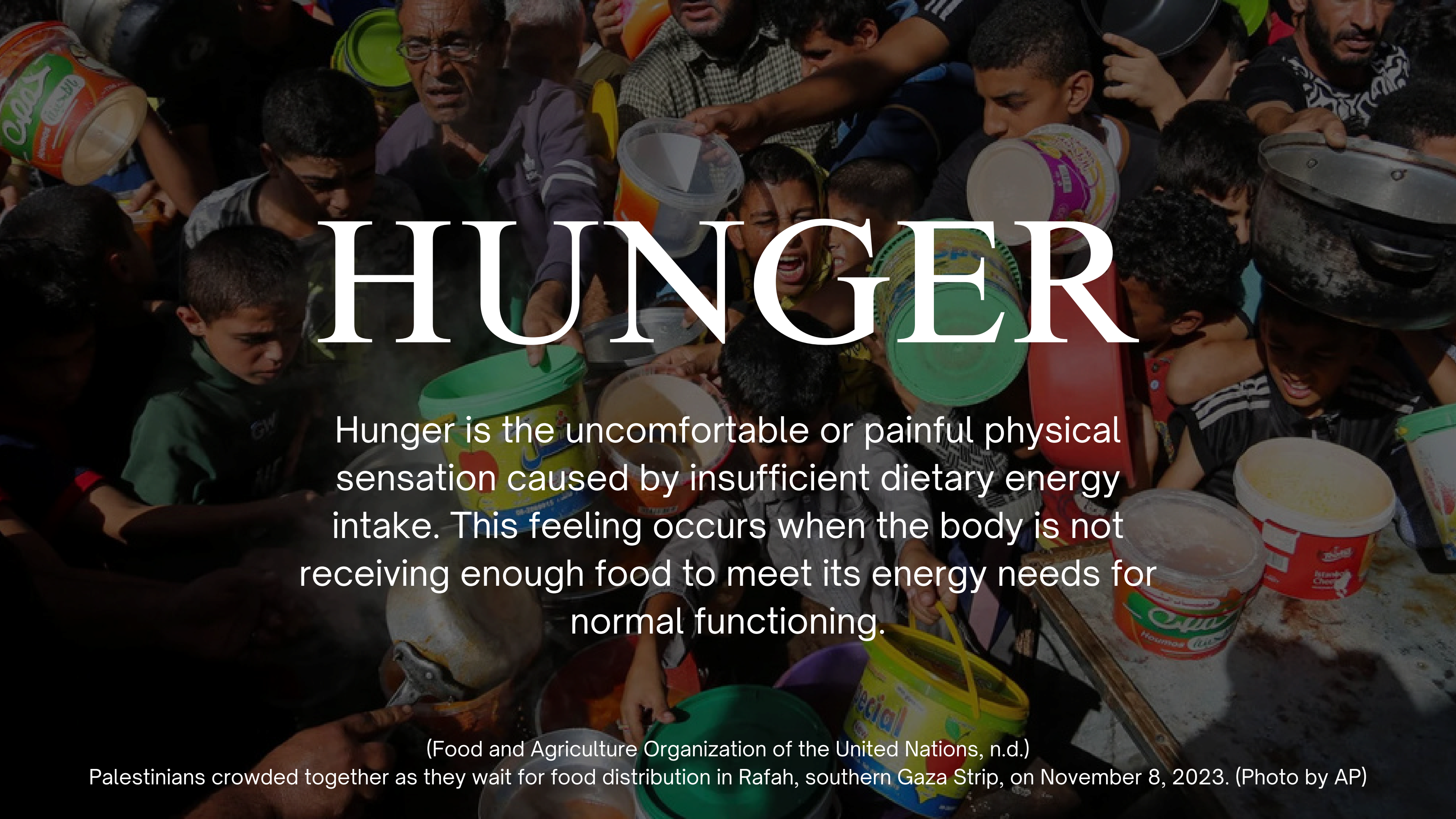




# OVERVIEW OF TODAY'S PRESENTATION

- Introduction
- Food Insecurity: A Global Perspective
- Food Insecurity: U.S. Perspective
- Applied Practice Exp. (APE) 1: Cats' Cupboard Food Pantry
- Applied Practice Exp. (APE) 2: Exploring Long-Term Strategies: SNAP
- Applied Practice Exp. (APE) 3: Research with the Rural Grocery Initiative
- Applied Practice Exp. (APE) 4: Alternative Break in Garden City: Exploring Food Security and Systems
- Competency Reflection and Summary
- Conclusion; Questions and Discussion



A large crowd of people, including many children, are gathered together, holding various containers like buckets and pots, waiting for food distribution. The scene is crowded and the atmosphere appears one of desperation and need.

# HUNGER

Hunger is the uncomfortable or painful physical sensation caused by insufficient dietary energy intake. This feeling occurs when the body is not receiving enough food to meet its energy needs for normal functioning.

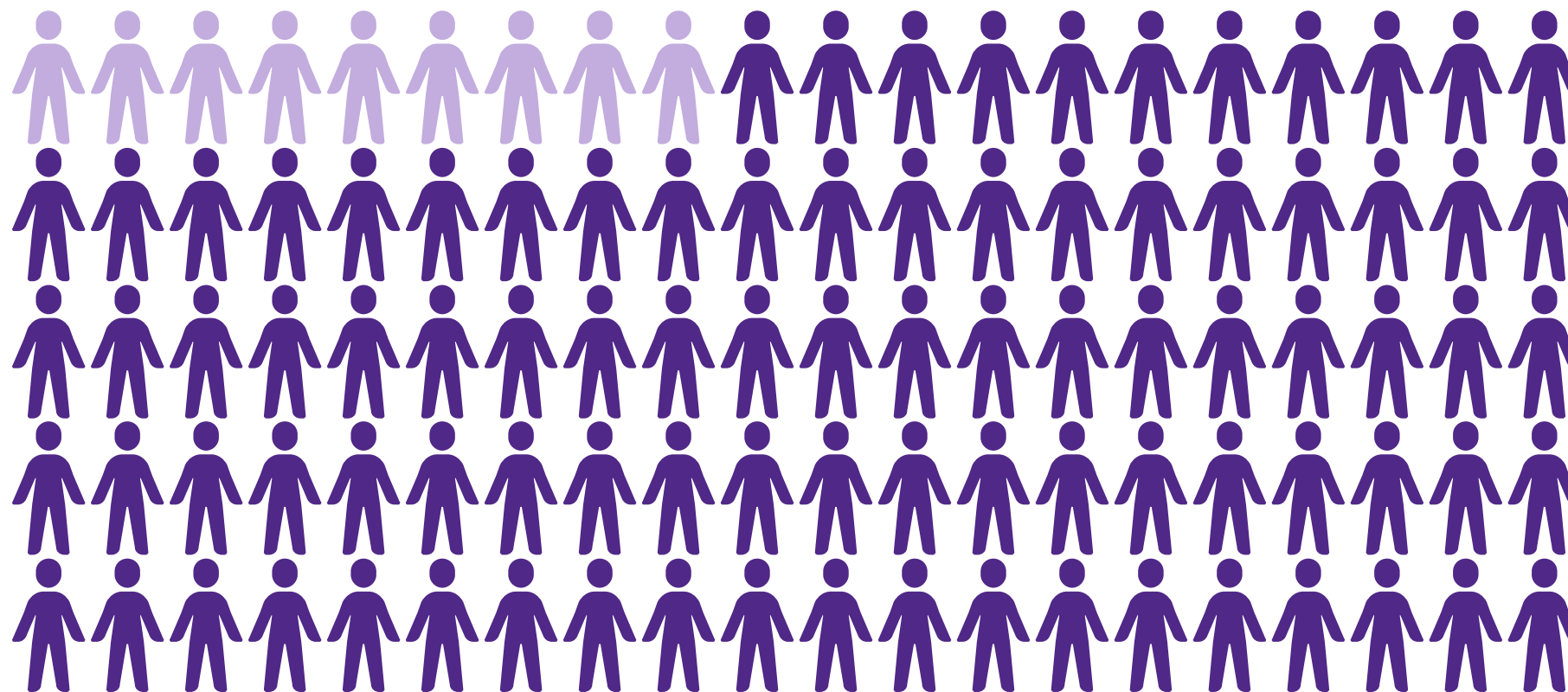
(Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, n.d.)

Palestinians crowded together as they wait for food distribution in Rafah, southern Gaza Strip, on November 8, 2023. (Photo by AP)



# Prevalence of Hunger

Hunger is often measured using the Prevalence of Undernourishment (PoU) indicator. This indicator estimates the proportion of a population whose dietary energy intake is insufficient to meet basic nutritional requirements.



# 735M

**Experience chronic  
undernourishment (PoU)**

# 9.1%

**Of the Global Population**

(Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations  
[FAO], 2024)



# UNDERNOURISHED

(Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations [FAO], 2024)

2

1

1 WORLD POPULATION

2 UNDERNOURISHED  
PEOPLE

The Number of Undernourished (NoU) and Prevalence of Undernourishment (PoU) are



A background image consisting of a grid of many small, square portraits of people from various ethnicities, ages, and genders, all smiling or looking directly at the camera. The portraits are slightly faded and overlap each other, creating a mosaic effect.

# BUT...

Many people who are not "hungry" (in the sense that they are suffering physical discomfort) may still be food insecure. They might have access to food but do not know how long it will last. They may be forced to reduce the quality and/or quantity of the food they eat to get by. This condition of food insecurity also has far-reaching consequences for mental and physical health and well-being, and for society.

(Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, n.d.)



# WHAT IS FOOD INSECURITY?

“A person is **food insecure** when they **lack regular access** to enough safe and nutritious food for normal growth and development and an active and healthy life. This **may be due to unavailability of food and/or lack of resources to obtain food**. Food insecurity can be experienced at **different levels of severity**.”

(Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, n.d.)

ADEQUATE ACCESS TO FOOD  
BUT MAY BE UNCERTAIN  
ABOUT FUTURE ACCESS

FOOD SECURITY OR  
MILD FOOD INSECURITY

People who are **food secure** have consistent access to food in both quantity **and** quality. Someone can become **mildly food insecure** when facing uncertainty about continued ability to obtain adequate food.

COMPROMISING ON FOOD  
QUALITY AND VARIETY

REDUCING FOOD QUANTITY,  
SKIPPING MEALS

People experiencing **moderate food insecurity** must decrease the quality and/or quantity of the food they consume.

MODERATE FOOD  
INSECURITY

NO FOOD FOR A DAY  
OR MORE

People experiencing **severe food insecurity** typically run out of food and/or have gone a day (or days) without eating.

SEVERE FOOD  
INSECURITY

(Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, n.d.)



# 4 SUB-FORM TYPES OF UNDERNUTRITION

There are 4 broad sub-forms of undernutrition: wasting, stunting, underweight, and deficiencies in vitamins and minerals.



## UNDERWEIGHT

Children with low weight-for-age are known as underweight. A child who is underweight may be stunted, wasted or both.

## WASTING

**Low weight-for-height is known as wasting.** It usually indicates **recent and severe weight loss** because a person has not had enough food to eat and/or they have had an **infectious disease**, such as **diarrhea**, which has caused them to lose weight. A young child who is moderately or severely wasted has an increased risk of death, but treatment is possible.



## STUNTING

**Low height-for-age is known as stunting.** It is the result of **chronic or recurrent undernutrition**, usually associated with **poor socioeconomic conditions, poor maternal health and nutrition**, frequent illness, and/or inappropriate infant and young child feeding and care in early life. Stunting holds children back from reaching their physical and cognitive potential.

## MICRONUTRIENT-RELATED MALNUTRITION

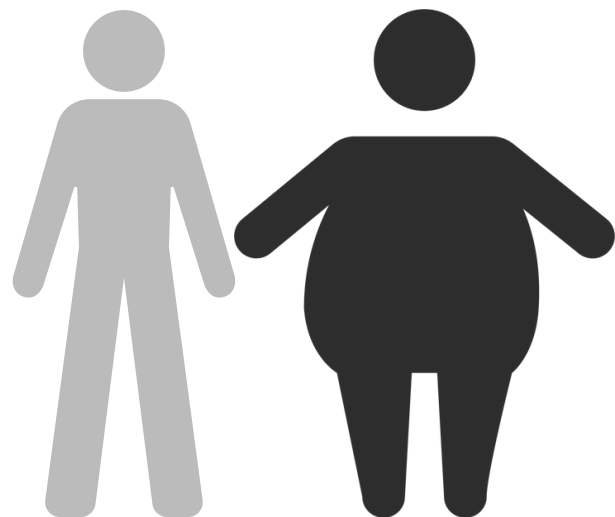
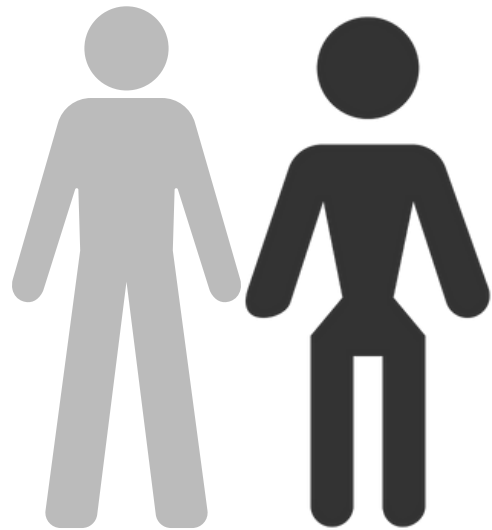
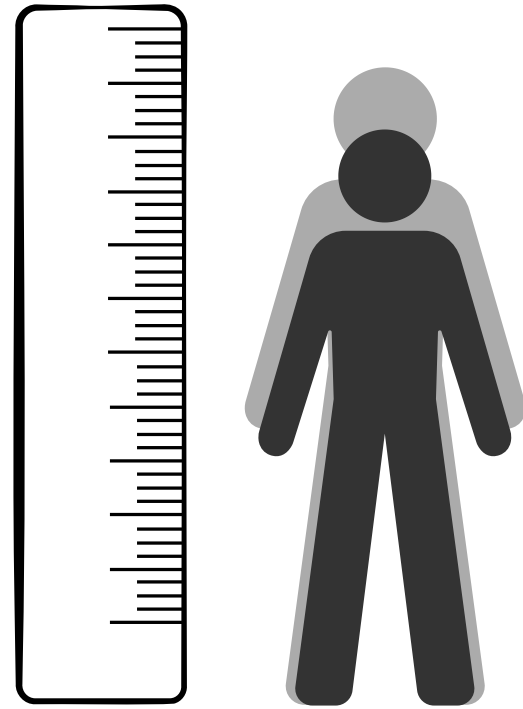
- Micronutrients help the body produce **enzymes, hormones, and other substances essential** for proper growth and development.
- **Iodine, vitamin A, and iron** are the most critical micronutrients from a global public health perspective.
- The deficiency of these micronutrients poses a major health threat, particularly to:

### Children

### Pregnant women

- Low-income countries are especially vulnerable to these deficiencies.





# MALNUTRITION

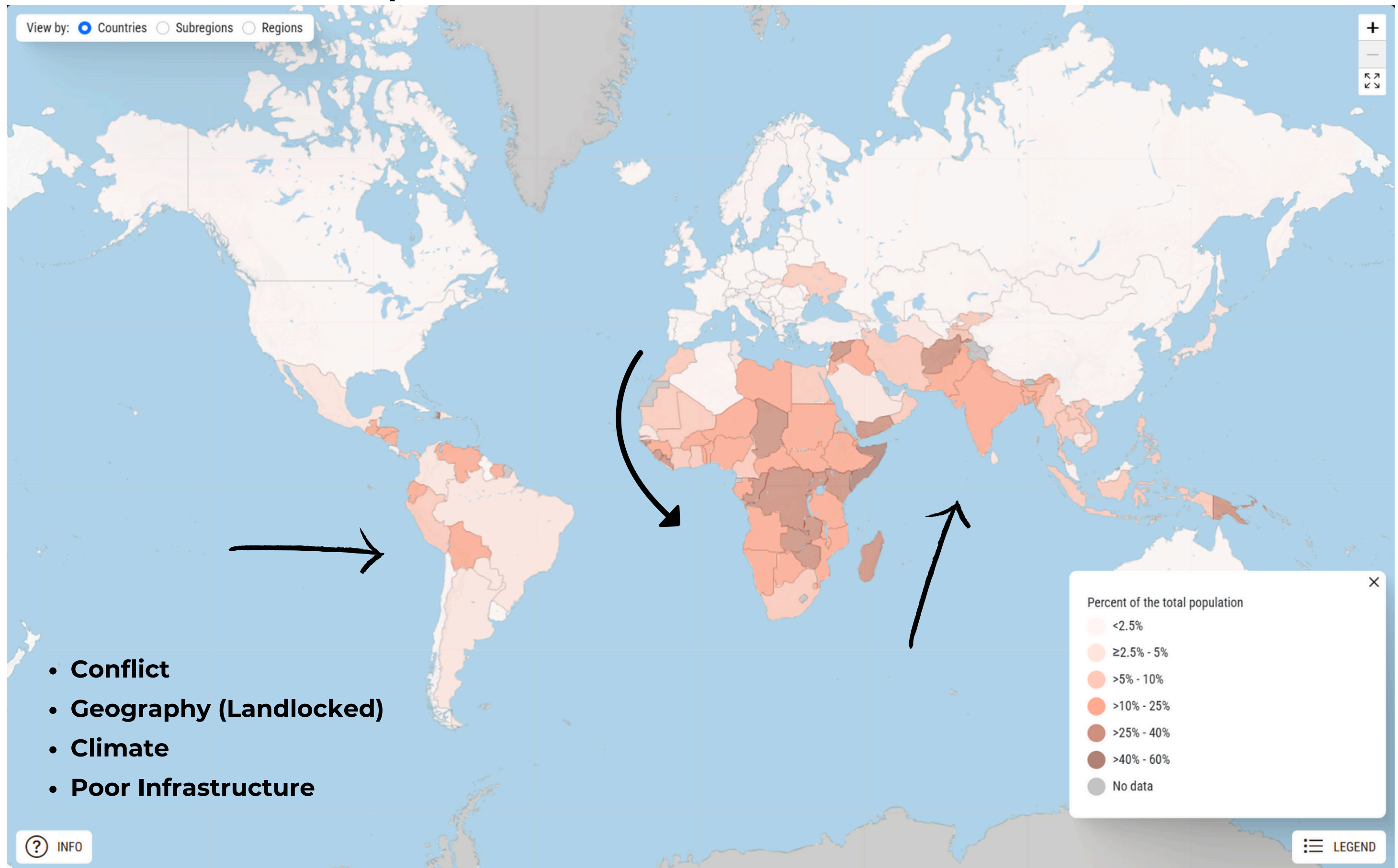
**Malnutrition, in all its forms, includes undernutrition (wasting, stunting, underweight), inadequate vitamins or minerals, overweight, obesity, and resulting diet-related noncommunicable diseases.**

- In **2022, 2.5 billion** adults were overweight, including **890 million** who were living with obesity, while **390 million** were underweight.
- Globally in **2022, 149 million** children under 5 were estimated to be stunted (too short for age), **45 million** were estimated to be wasted (too thin for height), and **37 million** were overweight or living with obesity.
- **Nearly half of deaths among children under 5 years of age** are linked to undernutrition. These mostly occur in low- and middle-income countries.

**The developmental, economic, social and medical impacts of the global burden of malnutrition are serious and lasting, for individuals and their families, for communities and for countries.**



# Global Perspective

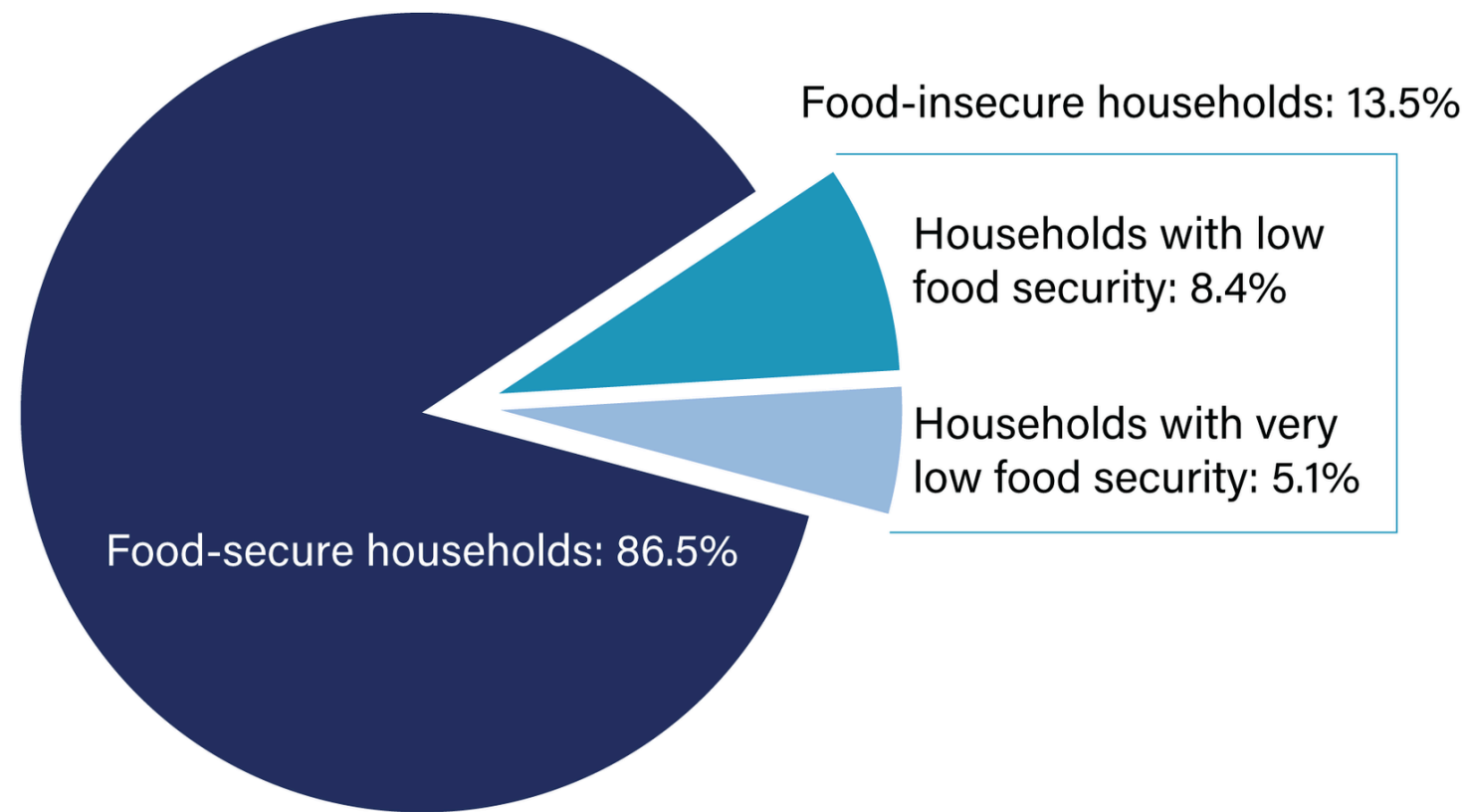


Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). (2024). The state of food security and nutrition in the world 2024. FAO. <https://www.fao.org/interactive/state-of-food-security-nutrition/en/>



# Food Insecurity in the U.S.

U.S. households by food security status, 2023



Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 2023 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement data.

- 86.5 percent (114.6 million) of U.S. households were food secure throughout 2023.

The 2023 prevalence of food security was statistically significantly lower than the 87.2 percent (115.8 million) in 2022.

- 13.5 percent (18.0 million) of U.S. households were food insecure at some time during 2023.

The 2023 prevalence of food insecurity was statistically significantly higher than the 12.8 percent (17.0 million) in 2022.

- 8.4 percent (11.2 million) of U.S. households had low food security in 2023.

The 2023 prevalence of low food security was statistically significantly higher than 7.7 percent (10.2 million) in 2022.

- 5.1 percent (6.8 million) of U.S. households had very low food security at some time during 2023.

The 2023 prevalence of very low food security was unchanged from the 5.1 percent (6.8 million) in 2022.

(U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, 2024)



The seal of Kansas State University is visible in the top left corner, featuring a circular design with the text "KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY" and "FEBRUARY 1863".

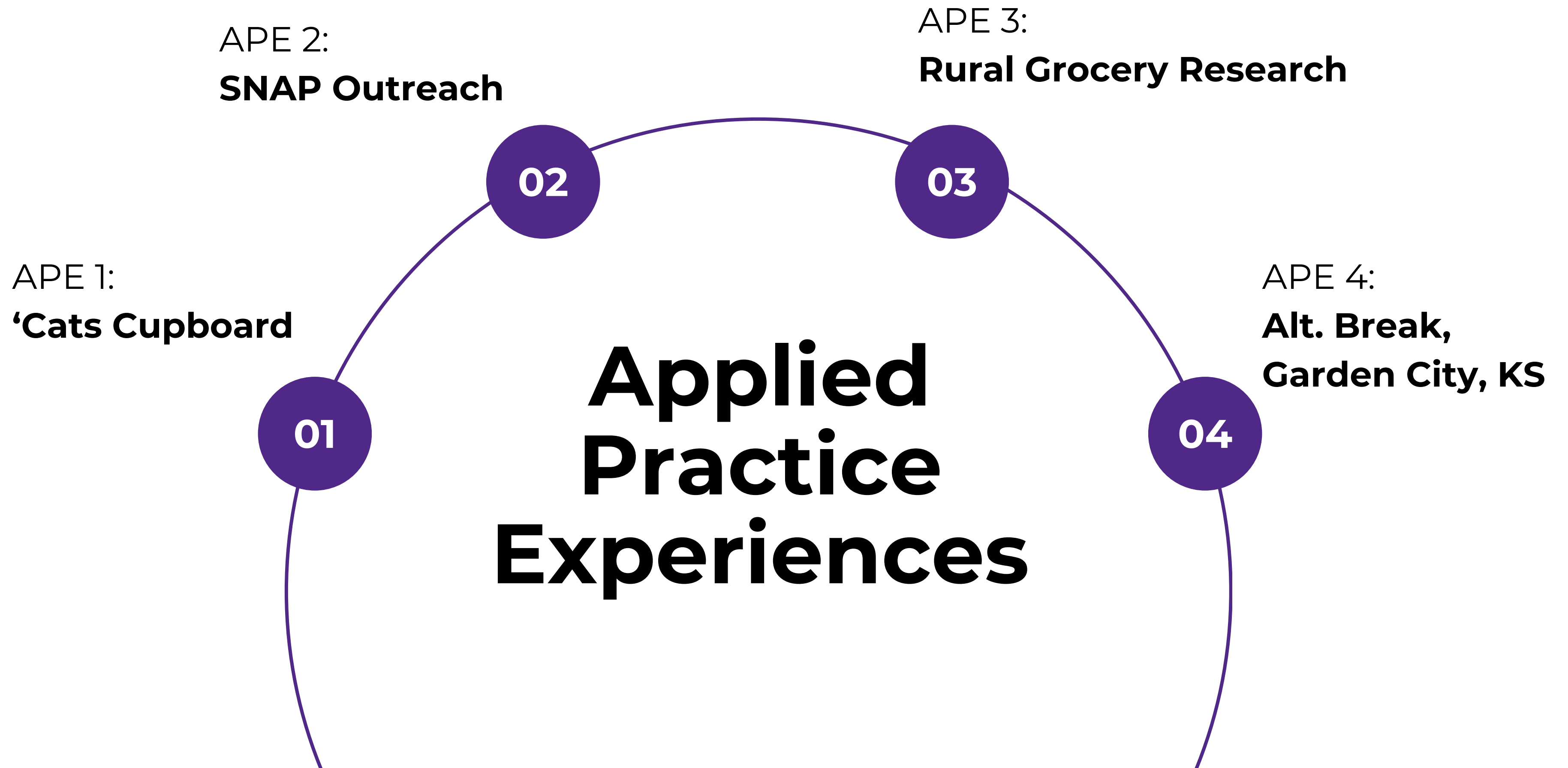
# REGIONAL DIFFERENCES IN FOOD INSECURITY IN THE U.S.

It is **incorrect** to assume that food insecurity looks the same across all regions of the United States.

Diverse experiences of food insecurity exist based on **geographic location, socioeconomic conditions, and other factors.**

Some issues, such as affordability, **may overlap, but unique regional challenges** can exacerbate food insecurity in specific areas.









# MPH FOUNDATIONAL COMPETENCIES

**3**

**ANALYZE QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE DATA USING BIOSTATISTICS, INFORMATICS, COMPUTER-BASED PROGRAMMING, AND SOFTWARE, AS APPROPRIATE.**

**6**

**DISCUSS THE MEANS BY WHICH STRUCTURAL BIAS, SOCIAL INEQUITIES, AND RACISM UNDERMINE HEALTH AND CREATE CHALLENGES TO ACHIEVING HEALTH EQUITY AT ORGANIZATIONAL, COMMUNITY, AND SOCIETAL LEVELS.**

**9**

**DESIGN A POPULATION-BASED POLICY, PROGRAM, PROJECT, OR INTERVENTION.**

**16**

**APPLY PRINCIPLES OF LEADERSHIP, GOVERNANCE, AND MANAGEMENT, WHICH INCLUDE CREATING A VISION, EMPOWERING OTHERS, FOSTERING COLLABORATION, AND GUIDING DECISION-MAKING.**

**22**

**APPLY SYSTEMS THINKING TOOLS TO A PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE.**



APE 1

‘Cats Cupboard



# COLLEGE STUDENTS & FOOD INSECURITY



- College students are increasingly experiencing food insecurity. **36% of U.S. college students experience food insecurity, with higher rates among first-generation students and students of color (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2018).**
- Prevalence at K-State: Approximately **33% of students** at Kansas State University have experienced food insecurity during their time at school.
- **Unseen Vulnerability:** College students often don't exhibit visible signs of food insecurity. The stigma of food insecurity is a barrier to seeking help, as people assume students are doing just fine because they do not show the signs of hunger.
- **Affordability:** Many students, especially first-generation students and students of color, face difficulties with affordable housing and limited access to nutritious food (CUFBA, 2020)



# The Role of Campus Food Pantries in Addressing Food Insecurity

## The Role of the Pantry

- Provide emergency food assistance to students, offering both non-perishable and fresh food items.
- Play a key role in education and advocacy, helping students understand nutrition and manage food insecurity.

## Growing Demand:

- 50% of campus food pantries now offer nutrition education and help students connect with other resources (CUFBA, 2020).
- The demand for food pantry services surged during the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting the increasing need for these resources (Seligman et al., 2019).

## Impact Beyond Food:

- Many pantries provide not just food, but also educational resources to help students build resilience and manage their overall well-being (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2018).





# 'Cats Cupboard

## Eligibility:

- Available to all K-State students (1 or more credit hours), faculty, and staff.
- No income verification required for access.

## Consumer Choice Model:

- Shopping Experience: Organized so individuals can select their own items based on preferences and needs, making it a more personalized and dignified experience.

## Location:

- Located at 1021 Denison Avenue, K-State's new and expanded facility opened in August 2023, offering an enhanced shopping experience.

## How It Works:

- No-cost service—take what you need and use what you take.
- First visit requires a brief survey; subsequent visits only need K-State ID for checkout.

## Community Support:

- Open to everyone: Students can bring guests, but must be physically present.
- Encourages sharing with housemates, roommates, or family members.



## Mission & Purpose:

**'Cats' Cupboard is a food pantry at Kansas State University (K-State), providing free, no-questions-asked access to food and hygiene products for K-State students, faculty, and staff facing food insecurity.**





# Learning Objectives:

## APE 1: 'Cats Cupboard

### **Leadership and Team Management:**

- Applied leadership principles to organize and guide collaborative efforts among board members, faculty, staff, and student representatives.
- Ensured effective team management through clear communication, aligning the goals of diverse stakeholders to address food insecurity across the university.
- Facilitated meetings, set agendas, and maintained open communication among board members, fostering a collaborative environment.

### **Data Analysis:**

- Assessed pantry data (e.g., usage rates, inventory, student satisfaction) to evaluate the effectiveness of services.
- Gathered input from a wide range of stakeholders (students, faculty, staff) to understand the specific food insecurity needs of different campus groups.
- Used this data to advocate for expanded services, including the inclusion of faculty and staff in the pantry's service model.

### **Strategic Planning and Resource Management:**

- Developed strategies to address systemic barriers to food access, ensuring that pantry services are accessible to a broad range of campus members.
- Addressed social inequities by advocating for inclusivity in pantry operations, focusing on historically marginalized groups.
- Assisted in developing long-term strategies to sustain pantry operations and expand services to meet the growing needs of the campus community.

### **Budget and Resource Management:**

- Supported sub-committees in reviewing funding applications for food security initiatives.
- Played a role in determining funding allocations and guiding monetary awards to food security projects across campus.



# Activities and Responsibilities:

## APE 1: 'Cats Cupboard

### **Leadership and Coordination:**

- Co-chaired the advisory board for Cats' Cupboard, helping to organize and lead meetings with faculty, staff, and student representatives.
- Set agendas for board meetings, ensuring that discussions remained focused on goals and outcomes.
- Acted as a liaison between board members, faculty, staff, and students to ensure alignment of ideas and initiatives.

### **Supporting the Expansion of Pantry Services:**

- Advocated for the further inclusion of faculty and staff in the pantry's service model to serve a broader segment of the K-State community with expansion of visiting hours.
- Collaborated with board members to ensure that pantry services were adequately meeting the needs of the entire university, beyond just the student body.

### **Subcommittee Leadership:**

- Facilitated sub-committees focused on funding decisions and the allocation of resources to food security initiatives on campus.
- Worked with sub-committees to review grant applications, ensuring that decisions aligned with pantry goals and priorities.
- Ensured that funding was allocated in a way that maximized the pantry's impact on campus food security.

### **Volunteer and Pantry Operations:**

- Volunteered in the pantry, assisting students with food checkouts and food voucher distribution for those in urgent need.
- Worked in the "front of house" to stock shelves and ensure the pantry was well-organized and welcoming for students in need.
- Contributed to logistical operations, learning about the challenges of managing a large-scale pantry and helping ensure its smooth operation.

### **Reporting and Advocacy:**

- Compiled subcommittee and board reports, summarizing key decisions and providing recommendations for strategic initiatives and funding allocations.
- Contributed to the revision of the pantry's mission and vision, ensuring alignment with the broader campus community's goals regarding food insecurity.
- Helped guide campus-wide efforts to increase awareness of food insecurity, including hosting awareness events and promoting pantry services.



Cats' Cupboard – The K-State Food Pantry

Cats' Cupboard aims to cultivate a transformational experience, where every Wildcat — no matter their background or circumstance — is confident in their ability to feed themselves and their households while obtaining a degree at Kansas State University. – Shelly Williams, 2023

Mission

| Current                                                                                                           | Proposed Revision                                                                                                                                                             |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Providing access to nutritious food and support through initiatives that promote health, success, and well-being. | Providing K-Staters with access to nutritious, culturally appropriate food and support through initiatives that promote health, success, well-being and a food secure future. |

Vision

| Current                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Proposed Revision                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Our vision is to prevent food insecurity from being a barrier to student success. In order to do this, we build awareness and the capacity of our campus community to address this challenge from a holistic perspective. A pantry with healthy and accessible food is essential, but we do not limit our vision to operating the pantry. We strive to create ties with our academic programs as we provide an active learning place for many disciplines that work directly with the issue of food security. This collaborative effort of student life and academia will lead the way for practicing real change and enhancing K-State's land-grant mission. | Food is a basic need for health, success, and well-being. Dedicated to increasing food security and improving the sustainability of our local food system, we aim to learn alongside, collaborate with, and inspire the K-State community to pursue individual and collective health and well-being. |

Cats' Cupboard – The K-State Food Pantry

Core Values

| Current | Proposed Revision               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|---------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| NA      | Health and Well-being*          | We value individual and collective health and well-being as a dynamic and holistic process aimed at increasing ones capacity to make positive choices towards living a quality life.                                                                                       |
|         | Integrity                       | We believe integrity is at the foundation of successful relationships. Through personal practice, we aim to inspire responsibility, trust, generosity, and resilience.                                                                                                     |
|         | Equity, Diversity and Inclusion | We are committed to creating an inclusive and supportive environment that promotes dignity, respect, and equitable opportunity, regardless of background or circumstance.                                                                                                  |
|         | Learning                        | We acknowledge the importance of data driven decisions and recognize the value of individual experience. We believe empathy and respect precede positive change and are committed to growth through innovation and learning.                                               |
|         | Collaboration                   | We strive to cultivate an environment of reciprocity where people feel empowered to make positive change. We believe in the power of collaboration and actively seek partnerships to maximize individual and collective contributions.                                     |
|         | Sustainability                  | We recognize the importance of partaking in practices that promote sustainability of people, place, and planet. We strive to elevate the viability of our local food system by sourcing local products and reducing waste whenever possible to support a healthier planet. |

\*Health and Well-being value was strongly influenced by the definition for Well-being developed in November 2020 by NIRSA: Leaders in Collegiate Recreation, <https://nirsa.net/nirsa/portfolio-items/health-wellbeing-in-higher-education/>

Deliverables

Subcommittee and Board Reports:

- Produced detailed reports that outlined key decisions, funding allocations, and strategic initiatives recommended by the advisory board.
- These reports were used to guide pantry decisions related to expanding its services, revising its mission and vision, and engaging the broader campus community.
- Contributed to increased awareness of food insecurity on campus and greater student engagement with the pantry’s resources.

Cats' Cupboard – The K-State Food Pantry

Guiding Principles

| Current                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Proposed Revision                                                                                                                                                                           |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| WE Believe access to nutritious food is a basic human right.<br>WE respect the dignity of every human being.<br>WE collaborate to effect change and support student success.<br>WE practice good stewardship of knowledge and resources. | We are committed to K-States Principles of Community and support the Division of Student Life's Core Values: Care, Community, and Collaboration and apply each to people, place and planet. |



By Laws – Cats’ Cupboard Advisory Board

The Cats’ Cupboard, Kansas State University’s food pantry, was established in September 2017. The mission of the Cats’ Cupboard is to provide K-Staters with access to nutritious, culturally appropriate food and support through initiatives that promote health, success, well-being and a food secure future.

Article I.  
Purpose

The purpose of this Advisory Board shall be to advise, assist, support and advocate for programs and initiatives to promote food security on the K-State campus. The Advisory Board meets regularly in a collaborative manner and offers its insight and expertise to the Cats’ Cupboard staff on matters such as community engagement, advertising and marketing, service learning activities, client services, strategic planning, volunteerism, and fundraising.

Article II  
Board Members

The Cats’ Cupboard Advisory Board is comprised of members of the K-State community including K-State faculty, staff, students, along with community members at large, who are committed to the ongoing functions and sustainability of the operation. Cats’ Cupboard benefits from the diverse expertise and “points-of-view” offered by its Advisory Board members. The direct beneficiaries of their contributions and efforts are members of the K-State community who experience challenges with food security.

**Composition:** The Advisory Board shall consist of fifteen (15) and no more than twenty-five (25) members. Positions and vacancies are filled as required specifically if there are areas of expertise required to meet the needs of the service population. The composition breakdown follows:

- Student Governing Association (SGA) Representative (1), *voting*
- Students at large (Undergraduate and/or Graduate) (at least 2-4), *voting*
- Faculty/Staff at large (at least 2-4), *voting*
- Community Representatives at large (up to 10), *voting*
- Emeritus board members as appointed by the membership committee
- Cats’ Cupboard Staff
- Morrison Family Associate Vice President for Student Well-being

**Term:** Member terms are three (3) years with a maximum of two (2) consecutive full terms. No member shall serve more than two consecutive terms, but a former member may be re-appointed after a one-year absence from the board.

**Appointment:** The K-State staff member serving as the Cats’ Cupboard Operations Lead will send out a notice regarding seeking Advisory Board applications to the greater K-State community by November 1 of the year for possible appointment for the following calendar year. The application to serve requires the applicant to response to questions developed by a

By Laws – Cats’ Cupboard Advisory Board

Membership Committee. In addition, applicants are surveyed regarding availability for meetings and potential time requirements.

**Vacancies on the Board,** Vacancies that occur during the term of a board member will be filled by appointment of the Advisory Board. Whenever a member is appointed to fill a position that has become vacant because of a resignation, termination, or other occasion, such appointment shall only be for the remainder of the unexpired term

**Emeritus Board Members,** A Cats’ Cupboard emeritus position is filled by a former advisory board member who is invited to stay on board as a nonvoting member. This is an honorific title in recognition of the member’s role in developing the organization, preserving institutional history, and/or strengthening its financial health. Emeritus members are invited to attend the first meeting of the academic year.

Article III.  
Organizational Structure

The Cats’ Cupboard is a unit within Student Life at K-State and as such, the Advisory Board has a key role to advise and provide input on policies and programs pertaining to Cats’ Cupboard. Final authority regarding fiscal affairs, policies, and programing remain the responsibility of the University.

**Officers:** The Advisory Board will have a Faculty/Staff or Community Representative Co-Chair, a Student Co-Chair, and a recording secretary who are elected for one-year terms by the membership of the Advisory Board. Duties of officers shall be those commonly ascribed to these offices as described.

- Co-Chair(s): The co-chairs shall preside at the board meeting and assist the Cats’ Cupboard Operations Lead to develop the meeting agenda.
- Recording Secretary: The secretary shall keep the mimtes of all Cats’ Cupboard Advisory Board meetings and shall be assigned general secretarial duties. Electronic copies of the recorded minutes will be provided to the Board membership including all Cats’ Cupboard Staff within two weeks after a meeting.

Officers shall be elected by simple majority of appointed members. These officers shall be the Executive Committee, in addition to the Cats’ Cupboard Operations Lead who will be an ex officio member of all Boards – standing and ad hoc.

**Elections:** Elections will be held at the first meeting of the new membership year. Vacancies of any officer shall be filled by election of the Cats’ Cupboard Board for the unexpired term.

**Term:** The term for all officers shall be for one (1) year. Members shall serve voluntarily on an annual term.

# Deliverables

## Subcommittee and Board Reports:

- Produced detailed reports that outlined key decisions, funding allocations, and strategic initiatives recommended by the advisory board.
- These reports were used to guide pantry decisions related to expanding its services, revising its mission and vision, and engaging the broader campus community.
- Contributed to increased awareness of food insecurity on campus and greater student engagement with the pantry’s resources.

By Laws – Cats’ Cupboard Advisory Board

**Dismissal:** An executive officer may be removed from their position by a two thirds (2/3) vote by the Cats’ Cupboard Advisory Board.

Article IV.  
Procedural Rules

**By-Laws:** The by-laws govern Advisory Board operation. By-laws may be amended by an affirmative vote of two-thirds (2/3) of the Cats’ Cupboard Advisory Board. Notice of the time, place, and proposed changes (with rationale) shall be provided to the Advisory Board at least one (1) week in advance of the board meeting.

**Meetings:** A quorum shall consist of a simple majority of appointed members. Members attending via web conferencing or phone will count toward quorum. Their votes will count the same as if they were attending in-person. Every member appointed to the Cats’ Cupboard Advisory Board is a voting member. The Cats’ Cupboard staff are not voting members. In the event of a tie, the Cats’ Cupboard Operations Lead will submit the tie-breaking vote.

The Advisory Board will meet quarterly during the Calendar Year (January 1 – December 31) with a break over the summer months. The Advisory Board has the authority to convene additional meetings as necessary and will meet according to its established plan or by call of an officer.

**Minutes:** Minutes of each meeting will be kept. Electronic copies of the recorded minutes will be provided to the Board membership including all Cats’ Cupboard Staff within two weeks after a meeting.

**Attendance Requirements:** Advisory Board members who have not attended any meeting during the calendar year will no longer be listed as a member of the Advisory Board, and the Recording Secretary will notify that member and request a resignation. Vacancies that occur during the term of a board member will be filled as specified in Article II of the By-Laws.

An elected officer who has two (2) consecutive absences from board meetings or an at-large member who has three (3) consecutive absences may be removed from the board by a two-thirds (2/3) vote of Advisory Board members.

Article V.  
Committees

Committees shall be created as needed (e.g., the Membership Committee forms to review advisory board applications and consider emeritus status). Members will serve on a volunteer basis.

Membership Committee

The Membership Committee will be appointed by the Co-Chairs in consultation with the Cats’ Cupboard Director. The Committee will be composed of the elected officers

By Laws – Cats’ Cupboard Advisory Board

(Co-Chairs and Secretary) and one representative from each of the following Advisory Board Categories: Faculty/Staff, Student, and Community. The Committee will be responsible for encouraging nominations, reviewing the nomination packets and voting on Advisory Board membership. When appropriate, the Committee will review the questions in the application and submit recommended changes to the Cats’ Cupboard Director.

Awards Committee

The Awards Committee will be appointed by the Co-Chairs in consultation with the Cats’ Cupboard Director. Membership will include, one Cats’ Cupboard staff familiar with the contributions by volunteers and supporting organizations, three Advisory Board members, and one member of the executive committee. A chair will be appointed to coordinate committee activities and will request nominations from the Advisory Board members no later than February 1st.. Awardees will be submitted to the Vice President of Student Life by the Cats’ Cupboard Director following the nomination and voting process. Nominations will be collected for the following awards:

- Campus Ice-Barrett Champion Award
- Community Ice-Barrett Champion Award
- Individual Friends of Cats’ Cupboard Award
- Group/Organization Friends of Cats’ Cupboard Award

The Campus Ice-Barrett Champion Award will be given to a current K-State student, faculty, or staff member; the Community Ice-Barrett Champion award to an individual with no current work or academic affiliation with K-State and may include but is not limited to volunteers, community members, alumni, and family of students. The Individual and Group/Organization Friends of Cats’ Cupboard Awards are presented to one individual and one group/organization.

Awards are intended to honor K-State affiliated and local community members who have “**championed the mission**” of Cats’ Cupboard with their time, leadership or resources. The mission of Cats’ Cupboard is: *Providing K-Staters with access to nutritious, culturally appropriate food and support through initiatives that promote health, success, well-being and a food secure future.*

Award recipients exemplify one or a combination of the following attributes:

- **Time:** Exemplary length of service and dedication to ongoing efforts of the day-to-day operations of Cats Cupboard
- **Leadership:** Consistent efforts to spearhead the mission of Cats Cupboard, either on campus or in the great Manhattan, KS community through efforts of grant writing, fundraising, planning events, hosting campaigns, and/or sharing expertise through advocacy and education
- **Resources:** Provides major financial contributions and/or in-kind donations, consistent financial support of any kind, and identifies potential corporate gifts and/or partnerships



# Competencies Addressed

## Competency 16:

Apply principles of leadership, governance, and management, which include creating a vision, empowering others, fostering collaboration, and guiding decision-making.

**Addressed through:** Co-chairing the advisory board, coordinating team efforts, and ensuring strategic alignment between board members and campus stakeholders.

## Competency 6:

Discuss the means by which structural bias, social inequities, and racism undermine health and create challenges to achieving health equity at organizational, community, and societal levels.

**Addressed through:** Ensuring that pantry operations were inclusive and accessible to all campus members, with a focus on addressing systemic barriers to food access.

## Competency 3:

Analyze quantitative and qualitative data using biostatistics, informatics, computer-based programming, and software, as appropriate.

**Addressed through:** Assessing pantry data, gathering stakeholder input, and using that data to advocate for expanded services and greater inclusivity in the pantry's operations.



# APE 2

## SNAP OUTREACH





# SNAP Outreach & the Role of SNAP for College Students

## Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP):

- Federal program that assists low-income individuals by providing financial support to purchase food.
- Serves 38 million people in 2020 (USDA, 2020).

## Challenges for College Students:

- 36% of U.S. college students experience food insecurity, with higher rates among first-generation students and students of color (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2018).

## Barriers to SNAP Access:

### Eligibility Requirements:

- Students must meet specific “student criteria” to qualify (USDA, 2020).

### Lack of Awareness:

- Many students are unaware of their eligibility or the application process (Patton-Lopez et al., 2014).

### Stigma:

- The stigma associated with public assistance discourages students from applying (Lott et al., 2017).





# Learning Objectives:

## APE 2: SNAP Outreach



### **Public Health Planning and Program Design:**

- Applied public health planning principles to assess the food insecurity needs of university students and design a targeted SNAP outreach program tailored to meet those needs.
- Focused on ensuring that the program would be effective in connecting students with vital food assistance through strategic planning and analysis.

### **Stakeholder Collaboration and Advocacy:**

- Utilized negotiation and mediation skills to collaborate with a diverse range of stakeholders, including agricultural economists, extension agents, Department of Children and Family Services (DCF), and the Kansas Health Foundation to ensure the success of the program.
- Advocated for resource allocation and support from campus stakeholders, fostering collaboration and building momentum for the program's implementation.

### **Impact Evaluation:**

- Evaluated the potential impact of the SNAP Outreach Program by applying methods to assess its effectiveness in addressing food insecurity on campus.
- Focused on measuring how the program could improve community health, access to food, and long-term food security for students.



# Activities and Responsibilities:

## APE 2: SNAP Outreach



### **Collaboration and Teamwork:**

- Worked with a team of agricultural economists, extension agents, and public health professionals to design the SNAP outreach program tailored for university students experiencing food insecurity.

### **Grant Proposal Development:**

- Contributed to the drafting and refinement of a comprehensive grant proposal for funding from the Kansas Health Foundation.
- Ensured that the proposal included key components such as program goals, timeline, and methods to increase student awareness and participation in SNAP.

### **Gap Analysis:**

- Performed a gap analysis to understand the barriers students face when accessing SNAP benefits, including eligibility requirements, application processes, and stigma associated with the program.
- Used the analysis to inform the development of the outreach program, ensuring it effectively addresses the most significant barriers.

### **Coordination and Stakeholder Engagement:**

- Played an active role in coordinating meetings with university administrators, faculty, and other stakeholders to garner support for the SNAP outreach initiative.
- Ensured that all involved parties understood the program's goals, were aligned with the vision, and were committed to supporting the program's implementation.

### **Social Media and Communication:**

- Developed social media content to promote the SNAP Outreach Program, including posts to increase awareness of the program and educate students about the SNAP application process.



Introduction. Project Title

K-State Food Assistance Outreach Program

FI 1. Primary Extension agent contact for the project:

Lisa Ross

FI 2. Primary Extension Agent Email:

lross@ksu.edu

Q21. Primary Extension Agent phone number:

785-532-2714

FI 3. Name of Local Extension Unit leading the project. This organization will serve as the fiscal agent for the project.

Extension Nutrition Program-Kansas State University Research and Extension

Q20. Please list additional Extension agent partners on this project, including their local unit if from a different unit.

Lean Tsodile, Department of Agriculture Economics Kansas State University

Q22. Which of the categories of work does the project relate to? Select all that apply.

- ☐ Cross-Sector Learning
- ☐ School-Based Nutrition Programs
- ☐ Alternative Food Systems
- ☒ Social Services Access

PD 3. Describe the timeline for implementing your idea throughout 2025. Highlight a few key milestones you expect to accomplish.

The implementation of the K-State Food Assistance Outreach Program will follow a structured and strategic timeline to ensure its success. Below is the detailed plan broken into monthly milestones: Month One (January): Preparation and Initial Setup. Purchasing Equipment: Acquire all necessary technology, including computers, printers, fax machines, and supplies for application processing. Staffing: Open applications for peer navigator positions, focusing on recruiting students who demonstrate a commitment to addressing food insecurity. Conduct interviews and finalize selections. Policy and Procedures Development: Establish a handbook outlining roles, responsibilities, confidentiality guidelines, and step-by-step instructions for peer navigators. Partnership Coordination: Confirm agreements with the Kansas Department for Children and Families (DCF) to establish a secure URL for SNAP applications and direct communication processes. Month Two (February): Location Setup and Training Initiation. Setup Up at Catz' Cupboard: Install equipment and ensure the location is fully functional, with private spaces for one-on-one application assistance. Testing Secure URL: Collaborate with DCF to verify the secure URL is operational and integrated with existing SNAP processing systems. Training Kickoff: Begin peer navigator training, focusing on SNAP eligibility requirements, application processes, and document verification. Developing Marketing Literature: Design and produce educational materials such as flyers, posters, and social media graphics to raise awareness about the program. Month Three (March): Training Refinement and Outreach Preparation. Scenario Practice: Conduct role-playing exercises and mock scenarios to prepare peer navigators for real-world interactions with applicants. Finalizing Marketing Plan: Begin distributing materials across campus, including residence halls, libraries, and other high-traffic areas, while ramping up social media promotion. Community Engagement: Collaborate with campus organizations to spread awareness and host informational sessions about the outreach program. Month Four (April): Launch and Initial Rollout. Program Launch: Officially open the K-State Food Assistance Outreach Program at Catz' Cupboard. Outreach Events: Host a launch event with presentations from campus leadership and community partners to generate interest and establish credibility. Service Delivery: Begin providing step-by-step assistance for SNAP applications, including initial submissions and renewals, and monitor progress. Ongoing Training: Provide continued education and support for peer navigators to address challenges and refine processes as needed. Month Five to Twelve (May to December): Expansion and Evaluation. May to August: Focus on increasing outreach during summer orientation programs to reach new and incoming students. Collect feedback from early users and adjust processes to improve efficiency. September to December: Begin evaluating the program's impact through data collection, tracking the number of students assisted, SNAP application success rates, and feedback from participants. December: Prepare a year-end report summarizing accomplishments, challenges, and goals for the following year. Present findings to K-State leadership and explore opportunities for additional funding to expand the program.

Q23. Explain how your project will advance policy, systems, and environmental change. 250 word limit.

The K-State Food Assistance Outreach Program will advance policy, systems, and environmental change by addressing the root causes of food insecurity among postsecondary students and creating sustainable pathways to equitable food access. Current SNAP eligibility policies, rooted in 1970s assumptions that college students have temporary economic struggles, exclude many students from accessing critical food assistance. These policies have led to the "SNAP Gap," where 69% of eligible students nationwide do not receive benefits, despite widespread food insecurity. With national calls, such as the National Strategy on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health, urging modernization of these rules, our program aligns with and accelerates these policy goals by providing direct enrollment support and demonstrating the need for systemic reforms. This program leverages student peer navigators to streamline SNAP enrollment, bridging the gap created by complex eligibility criteria and an onerous 27-page application process. By assisting students step-by-step, we address barriers at the systems level and improve access to existing resources. The program also establishes a secure application process and data tracking system, enabling precise evaluation of SNAP's impact on food insecurity and academic success. This data will inform future policy adaptations and strengthen eligibility rules. Environmentally, the program transforms food access at K-State by creating a centralized resource hub within Catz' Cupboard, normalizing conversations about food security, and fostering a culture of support. By reducing food insecurity, enhancing retention, and promoting academic success, the program positions itself as a replicable model for other campuses to drive widespread systemic change.

PD 4. Explain how your project will enhance collaboration with others at K-State, especially campus partners, specialists, or other state programs. If you have a specific partner in mind, please provide their name and contact information. If you don't have a specific partner in mind, please explain what areas of your project could benefit from campus support. 250 word limit.

The K-State SNAP Outreach Program will foster meaningful collaborations across campus to amplify its impact. Catz' Cupboard leaders, Shelly Williams and Katie Kehler, have committed to providing space for the Outreach Center during pre-specified classtimes to ensure visibility and accessibility. Anna Weish and Julie Kehr from Housing and Dining have agreed to review and guide the proposal and program development, offering insights that will help tailor outreach efforts for students in on-campus housing. Additionally, establishing connections with the Office of Student Financial Assistance, multicultural student organizations, and other groups serving low-income and marginalized populations will ensure that the program's strategies remain inclusive, culturally responsive, and well-informed. A defining feature of this initiative is its partnership with students as peer navigators who are committed to serving their fellow peers. Any student with an interest in advocacy and support can become a peer navigator, with a focus on those who have firsthand experience of food insecurity. Jossela Ramirez, a PhD student in Leadership Communication and Public Health Nutrition and the student leader spearheading these SNAP efforts, She brings experience from working in the SNAP Outreach Program at California State University, Chico, and personal insights gained as a SNAP recipient. She reflects: "Witnessing another student's life profoundly fulfilled. Having endured the frustration and isolation of the application process myself, I know the powerful impact SNAP can have—it completely changed my life as a student. Being able to say, 'I understand what you're going through,' and truly mean it because I've stood in their shoes, is an experience like no other."

PD 5. Explain how your project will enhance collaboration with other community entity/entities or key partners in your community. Please list the key partners and contacts for each. 500 word limit.

PD 1. Please briefly explain your idea and why it is needed in your community. How will these efforts increase food security in your community? Support your idea with data and/or community-based information. 500 word limit.

The proposed K-State SNAP Outreach Program aims to address the "SNAP Gap" among Kansas State University students by increasing awareness, participation, and retention in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Food insecurity—a condition defined as limited or uncertain access to sufficient nutritious food—affects a significant portion of students nationwide. A 2020 survey by the Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice revealed that over a third of students experience food insecurity, a problem worsened by rising food costs. Despite SNAP's effectiveness in alleviating hunger, 69% of income-eligible students do not receive benefits. This gap is part of a larger issue, as only 62% of all eligible individuals nationwide are enrolled in SNAP, leaving 18% in need. In Kansas, where over 25,000 people—including more than 120,000 children—are affected by food insecurity, the need for effective interventions is critical. Food insecurity among postsecondary students poses a significant public health challenge with far-reaching implications. A 2017 meta-analysis by Bunting found food insecurity rates among college students as high as 42% with financial independence, poor health, and negative academic outcomes are consistently associated with this issue. Food-insecure students are less likely to complete their degrees and addressing these barriers is essential to ensuring students' academic and personal success. One of the primary barriers to SNAP enrollment among students is the complexity of the application process, which includes a 27-page food assistance form. Misconceptions and stigma surrounding SNAP, especially among immigrant and student populations, further complicate outreach efforts. Many fear that applying for SNAP could jeopardize future legal residency, while others view SNAP as something they do not deserve, exacerbating feelings of guilt and shame. These challenges highlight the need for a tailored and student-centered approach to outreach and support. The proposed K-State SNAP Outreach Program addresses these barriers by establishing a one-stop resource center designed to support students throughout the SNAP application and renewal processes. Services will include pre-screening, assistance with completing applications, and help in gathering required verification documents. A dedicated URL for student application submission, streamlining the process and providing metrics for evaluation and continuous improvement. The center will also feature resources, such as trained staff to ensure that students have access to all necessary tools. Outreach efforts will include educational workshops, on-campus booths, partnerships with student organizations, and collaborative initiatives like the Double Up Food Bucks Program, which enhances access to fresh produce for SNAP participants at local Farmers Markets. By addressing misconceptions and providing clear, accurate information, the program will empower students to make informed decisions about SNAP participation. Modeled after successful initiatives, such as California State University Chico's SNAP outreach program and their respective 22 sister campuses, the K-State program reflects a proven approach to tackling food insecurity in higher education. This initiative aligns with the goals of Hunger Free Kansas and the 2024 agreement between the U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Education, which seek to strengthen SNAP access for college students. By reducing enrollment barriers and addressing stigma, the K-State SNAP Outreach Program will play a transformative role in improving food security, academic performance, and overall well-being for students at Kansas State University and beyond.

Q24. Please explain the population of particular need this project will serve, if any. 250 word limit.

The proposed SNAP Outreach Program is designed to serve Kansas State University Manhattan students, a population significantly impacted by food insecurity. A 2024 study (ACHA-NCHA) found that 42.8% of K-State students reported experiencing food insecurity, this percentage is up from 39.9% in 2022. This sharp upward trend emphasizes the critical need for tailored interventions. College students often face unique challenges that contribute to food insecurity, such as limited financial resources, lack of knowledge about available support programs like SNAP, and stigma associated with seeking assistance. These challenges disproportionately affect low-income students, first-generation students, and those juggling academic responsibilities with part-time work or caregiving roles. This program aims to address these barriers through a peer-led outreach initiative. Peer navigators will guide students to help by simplifying the SNAP eligibility, application, and recertification processes, providing support in a manner that is approachable and relatable. By leveraging peer-to-peer interactions, the program can reduce stigma and increase awareness among students who may not realize they qualify for SNAP benefits. The initiative also focuses on dispelling myths about SNAP eligibility, particularly for students who may misunderstand the program's requirements or fear negative repercussions. With a significant portion of the student population experiencing food insecurity, this program offers a critical solution to ensure students can meet their basic needs, ultimately improving their academic success, health, and overall well-being. By addressing these challenges, the K-State Food Assistance Program Outreach initiative has the potential to create lasting change for food-insecure students at Kansas State University.

PD 2. Please describe how your idea advances the goals of both the Next Gen K-State Strategic Plan and Hunger Free Kansas. 250 word limit.

This program directly advances the goals of the Next Gen K-State Strategic Plan and Hunger Free Kansas by fostering innovation, leveraging resources, and addressing critical food security challenges among college students. By focusing on reducing the SNAP Gap, the K-State Food Assistance Outreach Program creates a sustainable support system for students, contributing to long-term progress in combating food insecurity. This initiative will be housed within Catz' Cupboard, the K-State Food Pantry, maximizing existing resources and creating synergistic partnerships that align with K-State's vision of fostering community engagement and well-being. The program also supports accurate data collection, establishing systems to aid in estimating the economic impact and effectiveness of SNAP spending among college students. This shared measurement approach enhances research accuracy, informing policy adaptations at the state and federal levels. The economic benefits of SNAP are clear, generating \$1.50-\$1.80 for every \$1 invested, with additional potential gains from increased retention and graduation rates. By linking students to SNAP and other social benefits, this program strengthens their financial stability, enhancing academic success and degree completion rates. Research, including findings from The Institute for College Access & Success (2024) and Bazeur, Carr and London (2020), underscores the transformative impact of SNAP enrollment for low-income students. Their findings of improved retention rates and reduced food insecurity demonstrate the critical role of public benefits in higher education. This program embodies the innovative, resource-driven strategies essential to achieving both K-State's strategic goals and Hunger Free Kansas' mission of sustainable food security solutions.

The K-State SNAP Outreach Program is being built upon strategic community collaborations aimed at strengthening the safety net for students facing food insecurity. Over the past year, extensive discussions have taken place with administrators at the Kansas Department for Children and Families (DCF), who are integral to implementing this initiative. These ongoing meetings have provided invaluable insights into ensuring that student SNAP applications can be submitted efficiently, accurately, and securely. DCF has already supplied training materials that will be integrated into the peer navigator program, preparing navigators to guide students through complex eligibility requirements and application procedures with confidence and clarity. Beyond DCF, the program seeks to forge alliances with the Kansas Board of Regents, whose endorsement and support would amplify the program's reach and credibility. The initiative will also collaborate closely with local farmers' markets, which serve as vital community touchpoints. By establishing a presence at these markets, the program can connect students not only to SNAP enrollment assistance but also to information on how to maximize their benefits through initiatives like Double Up Food Bucks. These efforts encourage students to purchase more fresh, healthy foods while simultaneously supporting the local agricultural economy. The program will not only assist students in utilizing SNAP benefits but also actively partner with community-based food assistance organizations, local food pantries, and nonprofits dedicated to hunger relief in the Manhattan area and beyond. Establishing a referral network ensures that every student who seeks help—regardless of SNAP eligibility—will leave with information about alternative community resources. This comprehensive approach reflects a commitment to addressing food insecurity holistically, rather than relying solely on one program or benefit.

PD 6. Please upload a letter of support from one key community partner to enhance your application. Additional support letters from other partners are helpful, but not required.

CCS2020rter%20of%20KSU%20Support%20-%20draft%2012-18-24.pdf

236.9KB

application/pdf

PD 7. Please briefly describe any existing efforts, capacity or coalition building, or other activities you have already taken on this idea. 250 word limit.

Over the past year, the project team has engaged in a range of preparatory activities and conversations to lay the groundwork for a successful launch. Multiple meetings with the Kansas Department for Children and Families (DCF) have clarified procedural requirements, and DCF has provided training materials to adapt to a peer-navigator model. This ensures that those assisting students will have the precise tools and information they need. In addition, the team has consulted with California State University, Chico's SNAP Outreach staff, benefiting from their extensive experience implementing a similar program. Their insights have helped the team anticipate potential challenges, identify effective strategies, and plan for scalable outreach. On campus, the team has maintained open communication with Catz' Cupboard leaders, Shelly Williams and Katie Kehler, discussing logistical details for housing the Outreach Center, and integrating services with existing food resources. Discussions regarding statewide nutrition education policy considerations with the EFNP and SNAP-FG programs in Kansas, have helped the team understand the importance of providing alternative food access options for students who may not qualify for SNAP. Collectively, these efforts have provided the team with a clearer picture of the student food insecurity landscape, established a strong network of supportive collaborators, and ensured that the initiative's design is informed by best practices, proven approaches, and a commitment to meeting students' diverse needs.

E 1. How will you measure success of the project? What data points will you report on? What success stories do you hope to capture? Briefly explain your evaluation processes for the project. 500 word limit.

The project's evaluation will be guided by four key Scope of Work (SOW) objectives: (1) the number of SNAP applications submitted, (2) the number of SNAP applications approved, (3) the timely submission of semi-annual reports, and (4) the number of annual recertification applications submitted. These data points will be compiled and analyzed monthly, allowing the team to continuously assess progress and refine outreach strategies. Because current SNAP participation data for the K-State Manhattan campus is limited, the initial phase will emphasize establishing benchmarks. The team will measure success not only by approved applications, but also by the overall foot traffic at the Outreach Center. This includes documenting the number of individuals who visit, whether they ultimately choose to apply or not. By comparing the volume of visitors against the number of submitted and approved applications, the team can gain insight into the application process' accessibility and the effectiveness of marketing and communication efforts. Over time, as the program matures, monthly documentation of both new and renewed applications will guide adjustments to outreach methods. The difference between submitted and approved applications will help identify potential barriers, although reasons for denial will not be shared in reporting, understanding these patterns will help refine assistance approaches. Additionally, tracking renewals will provide valuable insights into the program's sustainability and students' long-term engagement with SNAP. Success stories—such as improved academic focus, reduced financial stress, or stronger overall well-being—will be captured qualitatively. These narratives will complement the quantitative data, offering a more holistic picture of the program's impact on the K-State community.

E 2. As an expectation of this award, please type your name below to acknowledge the following: I agree to complete a final impact report as required by KSRE and KHf.

# Deliverables

## Final Draft of Grant Proposal:

- Contributed to the development of a comprehensive grant proposal that successfully secured \$21,000 in funding for the SNAP Outreach Program at Kansas State University.
- Collaborated with experts to ensure the proposal addressed key needs identified through research, and aligned with funding requirements.

## Social Media Content for SNAP Outreach Program:

- Created social media posts aimed at increasing student awareness of SNAP benefits and the application process.
- Developed content that was designed to engage students, reduce stigma, and provide information on how to access SNAP resources.



# Deliverables

## Struggling to afford groceries?

THERE'S A WAY TO  
SNAP  
OUT OF THAT  
VICIOUS CYCLE!



## What is SNAP?

SNAP stands for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. It's a government program that gives you money each month to help buy groceries — like fruits, veggies, bread, and more.



## How does it work?

If you qualify, you get a card that works like a debit card at most stores. It's meant to make sure you don't have to worry about affording food while in school.



## How do I know if I qualify?

Our SNAP Outreach team can help you determine if you may be eligible. If you'd like to apply for benefits, we can help you with the application process as well!



## Curious to know if you may be eligible?

Reach out to our expert student team! We are here to support you in applying for and maintaining your SNAP benefits.



Link in bio.

### Final Draft of Grant Proposal:

- Contributed to the development of a comprehensive grant proposal that successfully secured \$21,000 in funding for the SNAP Outreach Program at Kansas State University.
- Collaborated with experts to ensure the proposal addressed key needs identified through research, and aligned with funding requirements.

### Social Media Content for SNAP Outreach Program:

- Created social media posts aimed at increasing student awareness of SNAP benefits and the application process.
- Developed content that was designed to engage students, reduce stigma, and provide information on how to access SNAP resources.



# Competencies Addressed

## Competency 16:

Apply principles of leadership, governance, and management, which include creating a vision, empowering others, fostering collaboration, and guiding decision-making.

**Addressed through:** Leading collaborative efforts with stakeholders, organizing meetings, and ensuring the program aligned with the needs of students and the goals of the university.

## Competency 6:

Discuss the means by which structural bias, social inequities, and racism undermine health and create challenges to achieving health equity at organizational, community, and societal levels.

**Addressed through:** Identifying and addressing the barriers to food assistance, particularly for marginalized student populations, and developing a program that promotes equity and accessibility.

## Competency 22:

Apply systems thinking tools to a public health issue.

**Addressed through:** Utilizing systems thinking to analyze the complexities of food insecurity at the university level, including the interplay between eligibility, awareness, and application processes, and designing a program that addresses these systemic issues.





# APE3

RURAL GROCERY RESEARCH



# REGIONAL DIFFERENCES IN FOOD INSECURITY IN THE U.S.

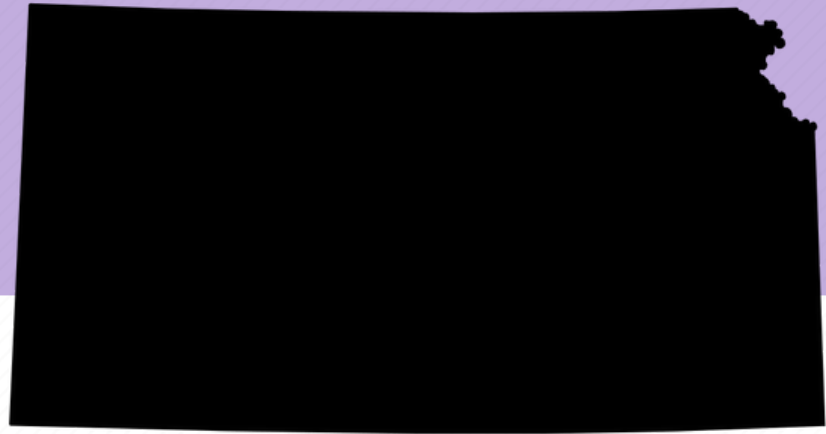
It is **incorrect** to assume that food insecurity looks the same across all regions of the United States.

Diverse experiences of food insecurity exist based on **geographic location, socioeconomic conditions, and other factors.**

Some issues, such as affordability, **may overlap, but unique regional challenges** can exacerbate food insecurity in specific areas.

- 
- In California, a state known for its agricultural productivity, food is abundant. The state is a leader in the production of fruits, vegetables, and other food commodities.
  - Urban Food Insecurity: In more urban areas, like Los Angeles or San Francisco, **the primary issue is not the availability of food—it's affordability.**
  - **Despite the abundance of food, many people cannot afford the healthy, nutritious options available.**
  - Food Deserts in Urban Areas: Even in cities with a wealth of food production, low-income populations may lack access to affordable, nutritious food due to high prices and insufficient income.

(Lichter, Brown, & McCool, 2020)

- 
- In Kansas, while affordability remains a concern, the main issue is access, particularly in rural areas.
  - Kansas experiences what is commonly referred to as **food deserts, areas where residents have limited access to grocery stores and fresh food.**
  - Rural and Low-Income Communities: These communities often face physical barriers to accessing food, as grocery stores may be far away, and transportation can be a significant challenge.
  - Food access becomes even more complex when we recognize that **these food deserts are not natural phenomena but are the result of systemic inequities, including economic, political, and historical factors.**

(Lichter, Brown, & McCool, 2020)



# Kansas: The "Breadbasket" of the World

## Kansas and Agriculture

- Kansas is often referred to as the "Breadbasket of the World" due to its significant agricultural output.
- Top Producing State: Kansas is one of the leading producers of wheat, corn, sorghum, and sunflower seeds in the U.S.

## Statistics:

- Kansas produces about 15% of the nation's wheat (USDA, 2023).
- The state is responsible for nearly half of the U.S. sorghum production.
- Kansas's agricultural sector occupies 90% of the land area in the state (Kansas Department of Agriculture, 2022).
- Global Exporter: A significant portion of Kansas's agricultural products are exported worldwide, contributing to global food security.

We produce mostly **feed**, not **food**.





Despite being one of the largest food producers globally, food insecurity persists in Kansas, particularly in rural areas and communities of color

Food Deserts: Areas with limited access to fresh, healthy food within a reasonable distance, especially affecting marginalized communities

**Food insecurity disproportionately affects rural populations who, despite living in the heart of food production, face limited access to grocery stores and reliable transportation.**

# Food Insecurity in the "Breadbasket"







# Rural Food Security

- Access to food in rural areas is often limited due to factors such as geographic isolation, lack of infrastructure, and limited access to affordable transportation (Huffman, Litchfield, & Ren, 2019).
- Social capital and community resources, including local support networks, can enhance food security in rural communities by providing additional access to food and nutritional support (Caldwell, Cunningham, & Breen, 2020).
- Food deserts are prevalent in rural areas, where the absence of supermarkets or farmers' markets limits access to nutritious food, leading to higher rates of food insecurity (Lichter, Brown, & McCool, 2020).
- Economic factors such as low income and high levels of poverty contribute significantly to food insecurity in rural households (Huffman, Litchfield, & Ren, 2019).
- Rural communities often rely on emergency food programs, like food banks, to meet the needs of food-insecure individuals, but these services can be stretched thin due to increasing demand (Goldrick-Rab, Richardson, & Hernandez, 2018).
- Health disparities in rural areas, such as higher rates of chronic diseases, can be exacerbated by food insecurity, which limits access to healthy food necessary for managing conditions like diabetes and hypertension (Seligman & Schillinger, 2019).

Essential Access to Fresh Food: Grocery stores provide access to fresh produce, dairy, and nutritious foods.

Loss of Stores: Between 2008 and 2018, 105 stores closed, exacerbating food insecurity.

Economic and Social Impact: Rural grocery stores are economic and social anchors:

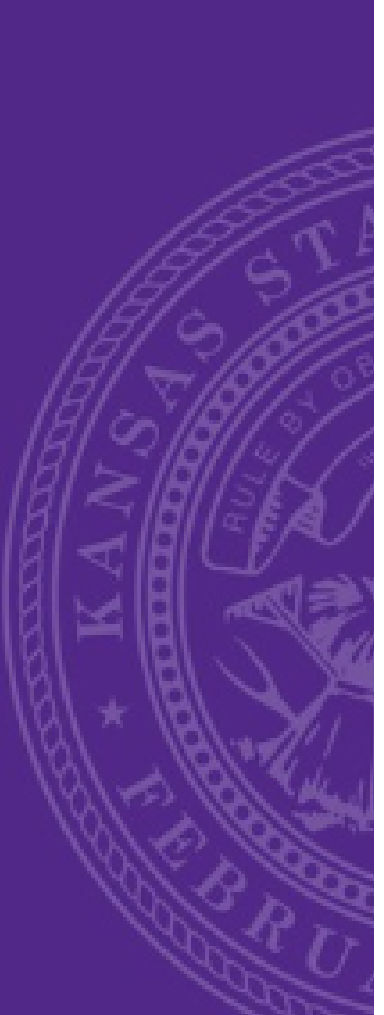
Jobs, tax revenue, and community cohesion.

Social hub where people gather and share information.

- Economic Anchors: Grocers support local economies by creating jobs, generating tax revenue, and stabilizing supply chains for local farmers.
- Impact of Store Closures:
- Job losses, especially in towns with few other employers.
- Increased reliance on convenience stores with less nutritious, processed foods.

(Bauer, Reimer, & Byrd, 2020)





# Learning Objectives: APE 3: Rural Grocery Research

## **Data Collection and Analysis:**

- Analyzed quantitative and qualitative data on rural food access in Kansas, utilizing epidemiological methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of food security challenges in rural communities.

## **Community Assessment and Strategy Design:**

- Designed and implemented strategies based on community needs assessments to improve food access in rural areas, using data collected from the research.

## **Research Communication:**

- Synthesized and communicated research findings through public-facing materials, ensuring that key insights were shared with stakeholders and contributed to policy discussions on rural food access.





# Activities and Responsibilities: APE 3: Rural Grocery Research

## **Data Collection and Analysis:**

- Assisted in collecting data for a statewide survey on rural grocery stores to better understand the challenges they face

## **Creation of Statewide Map:**

- Helped develop a map that identified active rural grocery stores across the state, providing visual insights into food access points and gaps in service.

## **Reporting and Public Presentations:**

- Contributed to quarterly reports on services provided to rural grocers, attended stakeholder meetings, and assisted in preparing public presentations of the findings to share with community organizations and policymakers.

## **Co-Authorship of Non-Academic Article:**

- Co-authored an article that analyzed the 2021 survey data on rural food access and compared it to data from the 2008 survey, highlighting the evolution of food access challenges in rural areas over the past 13 years.



## The 2021 Kansas Rural Grocery Survey: Reevaluating Extension's Role in Rural Grocery Issues

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**Abstract.** Kansas State University's Rural Grocery Initiative, housed under research and extension, surveyed rural Kansas grocery stores in 2021 (N = 48). This is the second RGI survey, following up on the ownership and customer surveys in 2008. This survey broadly assesses owner characteristics, store features, and challenges. Using descriptive and thematic analyses, we identified two top-line conclusions for grocers and their respective Extension services. First, grocers need to identify transition plans earlier and more often. Second, grocers can overcome competition and distribution challenges by diversifying their sourcing, supply, and offerings.

### INTRODUCTION

Independent grocery retailers (IGRs) benefit U.S. rural communities by serving as key sources for food access and healthy food options (Choi & Voth, 2017; Houghaling et al., 2021; Procter, 2015), economic drivers through employment and contribution to the local tax base (Martinez et al., 2010; NGA, 2022), and as gathering places where members build social capital (Miller, 2015; Jones et al., 2018; Yancey, 2017). Single location, non-chain grocery stores comprised 82% of all food stores in rural counties, compared with 70% in large urban nonmetropolitan and 74% in small urban nonmetropolitan counties (Stevens, 2021).

Despite the benefits of IGRs, they declined 15% from 1990 to 2015 in rural nonmetropolitan counties (Stevens et al., 2021, p. 9). Meanwhile, supercenter big box stores and discount retailers, or "chain dollar stores," grew the most in rural nonmetropolitan counties (350% and 150%, respectively), partly because they were almost non-existent in 1990 (Stevens, 2021, p. 2). When more large food retailers move into an area, higher market concentration and fewer IGRs follow (Galar, 2022). Cooperative Extension aims to "promote healthy behaviors" and "create healthy communities" by enhancing food security and nutrition education (Barton et al., 2021, p. 13). Helping retain retailers contributes to these aims by increasing food access and education.

This study contributes a novel, descriptive understanding of rural Kansas IGRs, the contemporary challenges they face, and how Kansas-based Extension services can best help grocers mitigate them. Our findings are also relevant

increasing by 102.9% from 2008 to 2020 (Peng et al., 2023). Their spread is so rapid that there is a strategic guide for communities wishing to stop a dollar store from setting up shop in town (Smith, 2023).

The impacts of these broad, nationwide trends on communities vary based on context: in the Rural Grocery Initiative's case, Kansas. In 2008, the Rural Grocery Initiative (RGI), housed under K-State Research and Extension, administered their first survey of Kansas rural grocers which captured the background and challenges of Kansas rural grocery owners (Clark et al., 2008b) and their customers (Clark et al., 2008a). Given the evolving grocery landscape, as well as COVID-19's effects on the retail industry, RGI conducted a follow-up survey in 2021 to answer this question:

What are the features, characteristics, and challenges of rural Kansas' independent grocery retailers, and how have they changed in the past 15 years?

This is a crucial inquiry for U.S. Extension services because they seek to "help people, businesses, and communities solve problems, develop skills, and build a better future" (AFRC, 2022). Cooperative Extension aims to "promote healthy behaviors" and "create healthy communities" by enhancing food security and nutrition education (Barton et al., 2021, p. 13). Helping retain retailers contributes to these aims by increasing food access and education.

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(73.9%) than rented (26.1%). Privately owned businesses comprised 78.72% of the sample, but there were also those owned cooperatively (n = 5), by corporations (n = 2), by a nonprofit (n = 2), and by a city (n = 1).

Through the survey, the need for more succession planning assistance was identified: thirty percent of grocers are at or above retirement age (66), 23.91% anticipate retiring in the next 1-5 years, and of that amount, 72.72% did not have a transition plan for future store ownership. This ratio is far too low given the aging population of these grocers. The Small Business Development Center (SBDC) advises business owners to begin planning for a transition 5 years prior to transition (Clifton, 2017). Extension systems across the country can play an important role in helping businesses proactively plan their exit strategy, which in turn helps rural communities retain these critical assets. For instance, educational programming around business transition planning has been developed by the University of Minnesota Extension (Hochschild et al., 2017), the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Cooperative Development Center (Tuller, 2022), and the Rural Grocery Initiative (Blair & Carver, 2021).

### STORE INFRASTRUCTURE

The physical structure of the average Kansas rural grocery store was over 30 years old, 9,752.5 square feet, 72% of which was used to display retail (Figure 3). More than half of respondents reported that the age of their major appliances was more than ten years old. Aging infrastructure can be unreliable, which puts the grocery business at greater risk. For instance, as refrigeration equipment breaks down, grocers may be forced to throw out spoiled food or make costly repairs (43.48% of stores underwent renovations within the

last 20 years), and old buildings and equipment tend to be less energy efficient, which can mean higher utility bills (Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs, 2014, p. 7). The most common upgrades were for refrigeration and freezers (66.67%) and heating, cooling, and ventilation systems (47.92%).

The Extension system has great potential to serve as conduits between grocers and funders. For instance, grocers can apply to USDA's Rural Energy for America Program (REAP), which supports them with energy efficiency improvements (Carter, 2021). In addition, the Kansas Energy Program (2023), within the K-State Engineering Extension Department, provides businesses with free energy audits and helps business owners complete and submit their REAP applications; since 2016, REAP has supported 42 Kansas grocers (US Department of Energy, 2022).

### ECONOMICS AND EMPLOYEES

Over 43% of respondents reported that their average weekly gross sales were greater than \$40,000. Based on sales and service level, 60% of the surveyed stores are considered limited assortment supermarkets (limited service) or superettes (full service); for descriptions of all nine grocery types (conventional supermarket, limited assortment supermarket, natural/gourmet supermarket, supercenter, warehouse grocery, conventional club stores, military commissaries, superette, dollar store), see Nielsen TDAs (2022, 209-211).

On average, stores employed nearly seven full-time and eight part-time employees. Grocers had difficulty recruiting and sustaining labor, so 40.91% relied on some amount of volunteer labor. Almost half of grocers (47.8%) worked 60 hours or more per week.

Figure 2. Average store building footprint breakdown.



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for extension personnel working in nutrition, rural development, finance, local food sourcing, and marketing and management. To this end, this report is brief offers methods, findings, discussion, and concluding remarks.

### METHODS

#### DESIGN AND TIMELINE

During Fall 2019, RGI planned the second Kansas rural grocery survey (there was no interim data collected since 2008). RGI updated their 2008 questionnaire and consulted drafts from similar projects conducted by the University of Minnesota Extension and North Dakota Association of Rural Electric Cooperatives (Capomich & Strang, 2017; Olwe et al., 2020). In October 2020, RGI piloted a draft. The final survey (Appendix) contained 75 questions (multiple choice, dichotomous, fill-in-the-blank, qualitative) and took an estimated 20 minutes to complete. It assessed the three broad areas of owner and store characteristics (owner demographics, income, succession planning), store features (infrastructure, economics and employees, sourcing, customers, community impacts), and challenges.

#### DISTRIBUTION

Since the 2008 survey, RGI has maintained a database of rural grocery stores located in Kansas communities with populations of 5,000 or less. Although there are several conceptualizations of "rural" (Nilsson et al., 2021), RGI extends the USDA Economic Research Service's definition of 2,500 people or less (Comarrie, 2011) to less than 5,000 people. In RGI's experience, communities of 5,000 people or less face similar food access challenges to those with populations less than 2,500. Moreover, towns with less than 5,000 people are not as likely to have economic development staff (Finney, 2021, p. 17), so RGI fills those roles with technical assistance. In January 2021, RGI mailed to its list of grocers a postcard announcing the survey's arrival (Figure 1) and asking grocery store owners and/or managers to complete and return the survey. A reminder postcard was mailed two weeks later (Figure 2), and RGI made follow-up phone calls. Of the 192 physical surveys mailed to rural Kansas grocery stores, 48 were returned, making for a 25% response rate. Each store was limited to one attempt. The length of the survey, pandemic, supply chain issues, and limited time are likely the contributing factors to the low response rate.

#### DATA ANALYSES

During June 2021, data entry (Excel and SPSS) was performed. Because missing values were determined to be missing completely at random (Little, 1988), and because univariate, cross-sectional, and descriptive analyses were used due to the small sample size, missing values were pairwise deleted.

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Nearly 30% of stores did not offer employee benefits. Of those that did, the most common was paid vacation leave and the least common was paid sick leave. Thirty-five percent offered health insurance. Although 29.17% of grocers perceived their compensation to be competitive, 22.92% did not. Extension could assist in providing tools and guidance on employee recruitment and retention best practices (Blair et al., 2021; Welch, 2021). Additionally, because employees of municipally-owned grocery stores are considered municipal employees and are eligible for benefits, these stores may be able to offer more competitive compensation and improve employee recruitment and retention (Waters, 2022).

### PRODUCT SOURCING

Grocers utilized a variety of distributors and vendors to keep their shelves stocked. The two most common wholesalers were Associated Wholesale Grocers, Inc. (AWGI) (62.21%) and Affiliated Foods (AF) (17.78%). This was a reversal of the most common wholesalers reported in the 2008 study, when AF was used by 70.6% and AWGI 16.5% (Clark et al., 2008b, p. 3). This shift was a result of the 2016 merger of AWGI with Affiliated Foods Midwest (Progressive Grocer, 2016). One owner said that during COVID, "Certain products were hard to receive, but AWGI did a fantastic job letting us know [which] were available."

Grocers sourced from 'local' suppliers, which 27.08% of grocers defined to mean within Kansas, 31.25% within a multi-county region, and 41.67% within the same county as the grocery store. Only 10.64% of grocers purchased more than 6% of their inventory from local farmers, highlighting their dependence on national and international supply chains. Sourcing from local farmers is difficult in Kansas because the infrastructure to transport grocery commodities and produce is underdeveloped (Melgares, 2022).

Because distributors often implement a minimum ordering requirement, 30 grocers reported having to purchase from big box retail competitors—primarily Costco or Sam's Club (46.17%), Amazon (36.67%), and Walmart (26.67%)—in addition to using a wholesale grocery supplier. This is a competitive disadvantage for small stores because they must travel to pick up the products and markup already marked-up items. However, this disadvantage can be alleviated via shared service cooperative models, such as group ordering with other stores (Berner et al., 2015; University of Wisconsin-Madison Center for Cooperatives, 2019), although only 10% of surveyed stores group ordered.

In 2019, the national average of produce department revenue as a percentage of total store sales was 17% (Flemer, 2019, p. 7). Surveyed stores in the sample fell below this average: 29.79% reported that less than 6% of their sales were fresh produce, and 46.81% reported between 6-10%. In fact, only 4.26% reported that their produce sales exceeded 15% of their total sales. This is significant because access to

fresh, healthy produce at grocery stores has implications for community health (CDC, Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion et al., 2023). Extension systems can partner with grocery stores to help increase customer demand for fresh produce. For instance, Kansas State University Research and Extension's (2021) "Simply Produce" is a produce purchasing incentive program that utilizes local retail venue to increase access to healthy fruits and vegetables for consumers, while stimulating positive economic impacts and building regional food system sustainability. Community residents are provided the opportunity to purchase a generous assortment of fruits and vegetables for \$15 (plus tax) through a local grocery store.

### CUSTOMERS

Two-thirds of stores had a customer base less than 2,500 in size, 85% of which were individuals and families. The remaining 15% of customers included the city, county, restaurants, local businesses, schools, charitable food organizations, hospitals, and nursing home centers. This highlights that rural grocers play a significant role in forming partnerships across a variety of individuals and institutions. Approximately half offered an online shopping option or planned to implement one within the next five years. Doing so will likely benefit both business and community food access given the perceived usefulness of and attitudes toward online grocery shopping are determinants of customers' intentions to shop online (Tyrvainen & Karjalainen, 2022, p. 10). Curbside pick-up was offered by 86.96%, and delivery by 78.26%. Of those that offered delivery, 32.43% charged less than \$5 for delivery and 62.16% had no delivery fee. The most popular online shopping platforms, offered by 30.34% of stores, were built into the store's website (26.83%), rather than through a third party. Two stores had their own app.

Stores offered a wide range of non-food offerings (Figure 3), primarily books, cards, gifts, stamps, postal services, pharmacy, fuel, floral, and even school-made products. These are just a few ways to go beyond grocery stores to fill a community need, pull in customers and drive foot traffic (Dudlick & Ramsey, 2022).

### COMMUNITY IMPACTS

Grocers supported their community in various ways. They sponsored local events and sports teams (89.36%); participated in community events (85.11%); contributed food to causes, such as charitable organizations, civic groups, and schools (76.6%); accommodated special orders (72.34%); and provided physical places for gathering, like communal tables and conference rooms (36.17%), which for one grocer helped "boy and girl scouts and non-profits sell their products." That most stores support the community in more than one way indicates the importance of rural grocery stores for building community identity and cohesion.

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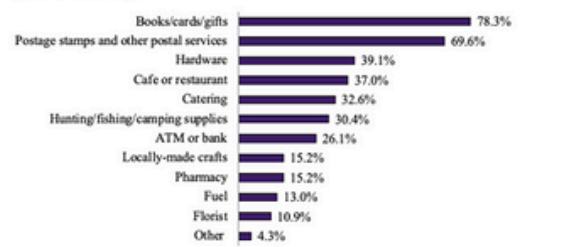
Figure 1. Postcard announcement sent to rural grocers before and after they received their survey.



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Figure 3. Non-food offerings.



The stores generally met the community's nutrition program needs. Most accepted SNAP and WIC benefits (82.61 and 71.11%, respectively). Only one store accepted Double Up Food Bucks (DUFBS), a federally funded nutrition incentive program. However, 37.5% of grocers wished to add DUFBS in the future. Therefore, they may benefit from existing Extension DUFBS informational materials (Deinet, 2018; Rural Grocery Initiative, 2021; Wisniewski et al., 2018). By incorporating these programs, rural grocers provide access to healthy food and capture the programs' stimulus benefits (Christinger, 2015).

### CHALLENGES

Six challenges made the top ten for grocers in both 2008 and 2021 (Table 1): Competing with big box retailers; Labor (un)availability (quality/quantity); Narrow profit margins; High operating costs; Lack of community support; and Low sales volume.

In 2021, of the top four challenges, three were due to competition with dollar stores, big box retailers, and/or online purchasing. One grocer lamented, "It's difficult to stay relevant and compete with Dollar General." Chain dollar stores were not on RGI's radar in 2008, which helps show just how fast they have been able to scale (Meyersohn, 2019). Just over half (54.17%) of 2021 respondents had dollar stores move into the community in the past five years. This is concerning for rural development given that, compared to dollar stores, independently owned grocery stores generate three times as much money per dollar of sales for their local community (American Independent Business Alliance, 2022).

One grocer explained that because many of the families in their rural community work in an adjacent town that has big box stores (that they frequent), they are downsizing their grocery offerings:

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# Deliverable

## Co-Authored Non-Academic Article:

- Contributed to the development of a publication on rural food access, which analyzed grocer challenges and compared survey data from 2008 to 2021. This article played a role in informing policy discussions and rural food system planning.





# Competencies Addressed

## Competency 3:

Analyze quantitative and qualitative data using biostatistics, informatics, computer-based programming, and software, as appropriate.

**Addressed through:** Analyzing qualitative and quantitative data collected from surveys and interviews, and synthesizing insights to inform rural food access strategies.

## Competency 9:

Design a population-based policy, program, project, or intervention.

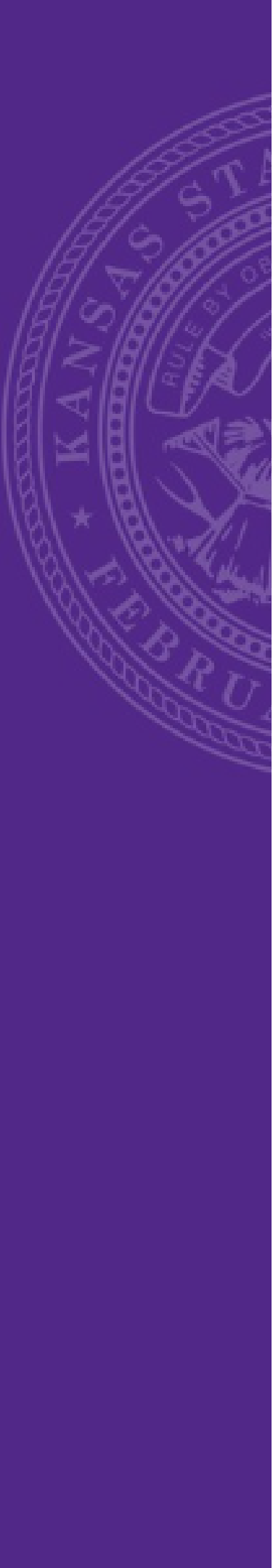
**Addressed through:** Designing strategies for improving food access in rural communities based on data-driven insights.

## Competency 16:

Apply principles of leadership, governance, and management, which include creating a vision, empowering others, fostering collaboration, and guiding decision-making.

**Addressed through:** Coordinating with local stakeholders, presenting data, and engaging with policymakers to drive decisions on food access interventions.





# APE 4



Alternative Break, Garden City, KS.



# GARDEN CITY, KS.



## Site Visits:

- Charles O. Stones Intermediate Center (School visit with refugee students)
- Catholic Charities (Supporting refugees in accessing basic needs)
- Brookover Feedyard (Learning about agriculture and food production)
- Tyson Foods Complex (Tour of the meatpacking plant)
- Kansas Food Bank (Packing food for students in need)

## Garden City's Role:

- Refugee Resettlement Community: Immigrants, primarily from war-torn countries, settle here, often working in the meatpacking industry.
- Food Insecurity: Despite contributing to the global food system, many workers face food insecurity due to low wages and poor working conditions.

### 1. Charles O. Stones Intermediate Center

- Food Security Challenge: Refugee children, unfamiliar with school lunches, prefer cultural foods.
- Language Barriers: Difficulty communicating and navigating systems of support.

### 2. Catholic Charities

- Role in Food Security: Assisting immigrants with SNAP applications, housing, and employment.
- SNAP's Role: Vital for alleviating food insecurity, but many immigrants and refugees face barriers to access.



# GARDEN CITY, KS.



## The Role of Meatpacking in Garden City's Food System

- Meatpacking Industry: Central to Garden City's economy, employing many refugees and immigrants.
- Immigrant Labor: Workers from war-torn countries employed at Tyson Food Plant.
- Paradox: Workers who provide food for the world are often food insecure themselves.

## Challenges:

- Low wages compared to risk of injury, job loss
- Poor working conditions
- Limited access to affordable nutritious food

## Food Insecurity and Refugee Communities

- Immigration: Garden City is a secondary refugee resettlement community.
- Impact on Food Security:
  - Refugees face food insecurity despite working in the food production sector.
  - Difficulties in accessing nutritious food due to low wages and poor working conditions.



# GARDEN CITY, KS.

## Critical Reflection:

This experience highlighted the contradiction within the food system, where those who contribute to feeding the world are unable to access the food they produce.

## Long-term Solutions Needed:

Comprehensive policies addressing both food security and labor rights are essential for creating equitable systems.

## Meatpacking and Food Insecurity:

- Tyson Foods Complex: Major employer in Garden City, predominantly employing refugees.
- Paradox: Workers in the meatpacking industry, essential to the global food supply, are often food insecure.
  - Conditions: Dangerous work, low wages, limited access to nutritious food.
  - Example: Workers like Juan and Rico, who process meat but struggle to afford the same product they produce.

## Challenges:

- Immigration Status: Affects access to benefits like SNAP, exacerbating food insecurity.
- Language Barriers: Lack of English proficiency complicates navigating resources.
- Economic Inequality: Despite essential labor, immigrant workers remain vulnerable to poverty and food insecurity.

## Kansas Food Bank Distribution Center:

- Role: Provides critical food distribution to those in need, including immigrant populations.
- Volunteer Work: Packing backpacks for children experiencing food insecurity.
  - Purpose of Backpacks: Helps reduce stigma associated with receiving food aid.
  - Impact: Students receive backpacks filled with food for the weekend, allowing them to access necessary nutrition without the social stigma of traditional food programs.

The backpack program illustrates how reducing stigma improves food access, especially for immigrant children who may face multiple barriers to food security.





# Learning Objectives:

## APE 4: Alternative Break, Garden City, KS.

### **Community Engagement:**

- Applied community engagement principles to facilitate reflective learning sessions that connected students' service experiences with broader food systems and food insecurity issues in the region.

### **Advocacy and Cultural Awareness:**

- Fostered advocacy and cultural awareness by engaging students in conversations about immigration, labor dynamics, and their role in food production and food systems.

### **Reflective Learning and Service Leadership:**

- Led students in reflective discussions and service work, encouraging them to connect their experiences with broader social issues such as food insecurity and the role of immigrant labor in food production.





# Activities and Responsibilities:

## APE 4: Alternative Break, Garden City, KS.

### **Leading Site Visits:**

- Led student visits to Catholic Charities, Tyson Food Complex, and Kansas Food Bank, helping students understand food insecurity, refugee resettlement efforts, and the role of food assistance programs.

### **Service Activities:**

- Organized service activities with the Kansas Food Bank, where students packed backpacks for migrant families experiencing food insecurity, providing immediate relief and emphasizing the importance of community service.

### **Reflective Sessions:**

- Planned and facilitated pre- and post-departure reflection sessions, guiding students to connect their service activities to larger dynamics in food insecurity and the food system, particularly regarding the role of immigrant labor.

### **Cultural Awareness and Advocacy:**

- Facilitated conversations around the challenges faced by workers and the intersection of immigration, labor, and food production.



Each of us carries a particular vision of Kansas, shaped by our own lived experiences. For many, the state is a vast stretch of farmland and small towns, often overlooked in discussions of diversity, resilience, and systemic complexity. Before this trip, my understanding of Kansas, too, was incomplete. But my time in Garden City shattered my preconceptions and revealed a community that is, in many ways, a microcosm of global migration, economic interdependence, and the deep interweaving of food systems and human stories.

This was my second Alternative Break, and while my first was meaningful, this trip was transformative. Alternative Breaks are not just about traveling to a new place—they are an introduction to new people, new ways of living, and new ways of practicing leadership. Two months after returning, I still find myself reflecting on the experience daily. In fact, I am now in the process of producing a documentary on food access and food systems, with a focus on Garden City, because this journey left me with more questions than answers. But before I get ahead of myself, let me take you back to the beginning.

As we left Manhattan, excitement buzzed among us. Each of us came on this trip having done prior research—whether on the region, the organizations we would visit, or the populations we would meet. Without even knowing it, we had already begun to form connections to the people and places we would soon encounter. And yet, nothing could have truly prepared us for the learning, the stories, and the moments that lay ahead.

That first evening, we shared dinner at the home of Andrew and Amanda Lee, a couple deeply connected to the K-State community. Walking into someone’s home for the first time can bring a sense of nervousness, but their hospitality immediately put us at ease. As we sat together, getting to know one another beyond surface-level conversations, we began to feel a sense of belonging—not just in their home, but within the journey we were about to embark on. As we left that night, Jadhida—a junior in Agronomy and Global Food Systems Leadership, who typically sees herself as shy—turned to us and said, “Well, now I feel at home.” That sentiment would follow us throughout the trip, reinforcing the idea that community is not just about geography—it is about connection, shared experiences, and the ways we choose to show up for one another.

Day one began with a visit to Charles O. Stones Intermediate Center, where we spent time with 5th and 6th graders, many of whom had never met a college student before or even considered higher education as a possibility for themselves. This experience was different from the others on our itinerary; for once, we weren’t the ones asking the questions. Instead, these students wanted to know about us—what college is like, if it’s hard, if it’s fun, and if they, too, could see themselves there one day.

That resilience carried over to the meatpacking industry, the backbone of the region’s economy. Touring Brookover Feed Yard, we saw firsthand the grueling labor required to sustain the state’s beef industry. Later, at the Tyson meatpacking plant, we were overwhelmed by the sheer scale of operations. Thousands of workers—many of them newly arrived immigrants—moved with precision, performing repetitive, physically demanding tasks that kept the country fed.

Then, the paradox hit us. The very people responsible for feeding America were often the same people who struggled with food insecurity themselves. Research shows that refugees are disproportionately vulnerable to food insecurity due to systemic inequities, yet here they were, ensuring others never had to go without. It was impossible to ignore the contradiction.

That night, as we processed everything we had seen, Andrew called his father, who had worked at that very Tyson plant in the 1980s. His father described the dangers of the job, the long hours spent in cold and fast-paced environments, and the camaraderie among workers who all understood what it meant to be ‘the stranger in town.’ He told us how the work was grueling, the pay was just enough to get by, and how there was an ever-present risk of injury. Yet, it was a job, a means of survival, and a steppingstone toward a better future.

Listening to him, we realized the invisible sacrifices made by so many—the laborers who kept the food supply chain intact while struggling to afford the very products they processed. It was a sobering reminder of the contradictions within the food system, where those most essential to production are often those most marginalized.

The weight of these stories stayed with us as we continued our day after touring the Tyson plant with a visit to the local food bank, the first formal food bank in the area, where we volunteered to pack backpacks full of food for children. These backpacks were designed intentionally—no stigma, just a simple bag filled with meals to sustain students through the weekend. While there, we spoke with community organizers who explained how access to food is a persistent challenge, particularly for immigrant and refugee families who face additional barriers to stability.

From there, we met with Matt Allen, the City Manager, to ask deeper questions about the intersection of policy and community engagement in a town where over 30 languages are spoken at the local high school. He spoke about the importance of cultural competence, about how understanding diverse lived experiences is critical to fostering an inclusive and thriving community. ‘The key,’ he told us, ‘is not just welcoming people but making sure they have a voice in shaping the community they now call home.’

In these small groups, we saw parts of ourselves reflected in them. Andrew, whose father sought refuge in Garden City after the fall of Saigon in the 1980s, connected with students whose families had also risked everything for a better life. Jadhida, fluent in Spanish, found herself in a room full of newcomer students, bridging the gap between uncertainty and possibility with her words. At first, they were hesitant, their questions tentative, their voices barely above a whisper. But as she translated, their eyes brightened with recognition—someone who understood them, who spoke their language, who could give them answers without barriers. One boy, his voice laced with both curiosity and doubt, finally asked, “Is college hard?” Jadhida met his gaze, a warm smile spreading across her face. “It is,” she replied in Spanish, “but it’s also an adventure. And one day, you’ll be a college student—maybe even at K-State.” In that moment, the weight of uncertainty lifted, replaced by the possibility of a future he hadn’t dared to imagine before.

For Sunday, a doctoral student in Leadership Communication and an international student from Nigeria, the connection came through food. One sixth-grader, new to the U.S. from Kenya, told us she rarely ate the food served at school because, to her, it simply wasn’t food. It wasn’t a matter of preference but of unfamiliarity—nothing looked, smelled, or tasted like home. She was adjusting, but in a place where everything felt different, she couldn’t help but feel like the outsider. Listening to her, I thought of my own grandfather, who immigrated from Mexico, struggling to navigate a world that felt foreign in every way. In that moment, I saw parts of myself in that child. And when we left the school, we all joked—but sincerely meant—that we had just met little versions of ourselves.

Our next stop was Catholic Charities, where we were welcomed with a home-cooked Haitian meal and an in-depth discussion about refugee services. The warmth of the meal mirrored the warmth of the people—nearly every staff member had their own migration story, and each one was now working to make a difference for others. That theme followed us throughout the trip—stories of people who had come seeking refuge, opportunity, or simply a place to call home.

At the Finney County Historical Museum, Johnetta, a lifelong resident, painted a vivid picture of Garden City’s past. She recounted tales of early settlers and the agricultural boom but did not shy away from the town’s painful racial history. She told us of the community pool her father helped build—a pool her darker-skinned sister was forbidden to swim in. Her words carried both heartbreak and hope, as she explained how the town has reckoned with discrimination and come together to stand against hate.

On our final morning, we met Amanda Lee for coffee at a local café—coincidentally, the same café featured in the ‘A Stranger in Town’ documentary we had watched our first night. Saying goodbye to Amanda felt like leaving a new friend, and leaving Garden City felt like departing from a community we had grown to care for deeply.

Even now, weeks after returning, we continue to reflect on the people we met, the connections we made, and the lessons we learned. Garden City was not just a place we visited—it became a part of us, a lens through which we now see food systems, migration, and leadership in a new light.

Our experience in Garden City was more than a trip—it was an immersion into the interconnected realities of food systems, migration, and leadership in action. It was a reminder that leadership is not about a title but about showing up, listening, and engaging with the complexities of the world around us. This trip challenged us to think critically, to step outside of what we thought we knew, and to build relationships that extend far beyond a single week of service.

But the work does not end here. The stories we heard, the people we met, and the lessons we learned have left a lasting impact, one that continues to shape our perspectives and future actions. This is the power of Alternative Breaks—an opportunity to not just witness change, but to be part of it. For those who seek to grow, to challenge their own perspectives, and to make a tangible impact, there will always be another community, another story, and another opportunity waiting. Maybe it’s your turn to experience an Alternative Break.

# Deliverable

## Blog Post on Systems Thinking:

- Wrote a reflective blog post that used systems thinking to analyze food insecurity in Garden City. The post connected students' experiences with the broader issues of migration, labor dynamics, and the food system.



# Competencies Addressed

## Competency 6:

Discuss the means by which structural bias, social inequities, and racism undermine health and create challenges to achieving health equity at organizational, community, and societal levels.

**Addressed through:** Exploring how immigrant labor intersects with food insecurity and the broader inequities in the food system.

## Competency 22:

Apply systems thinking tools to a public health issue.

**Addressed through:** Using systems thinking to connect the dots between immigration, labor, and food insecurity, providing a holistic view of the issues faced by workers in the food production system.

## Competency 16:

Apply principles of leadership, governance, and management, which include creating a vision, empowering others, fostering collaboration, and guiding decision-making.

**Addressed through:** Leading a group of students in reflective learning sessions and facilitating conversations on food insecurity and immigrant labor, emphasizing leadership and advocacy.



# A common thread

**At the core of each experience lies a common thread: access to nutritious, affordable food. Through each opportunity, I have seen how food insecurity is shaped by both individual and systemic factors, and how community-level solutions and policy advocacy are critical in addressing this issue.**

## Cats' Cupboard Food Pantry

- Hands-on experience in addressing immediate food insecurity for students.
- Highlighted the need for accessible food systems on campuses, particularly for marginalized populations.

## SNAP Outreach Program

- Systemic solution to food insecurity through a long-term, sustainable strategy.
- Addressed barriers like complex application procedures, student financial burdens, and stigma surrounding public assistance.

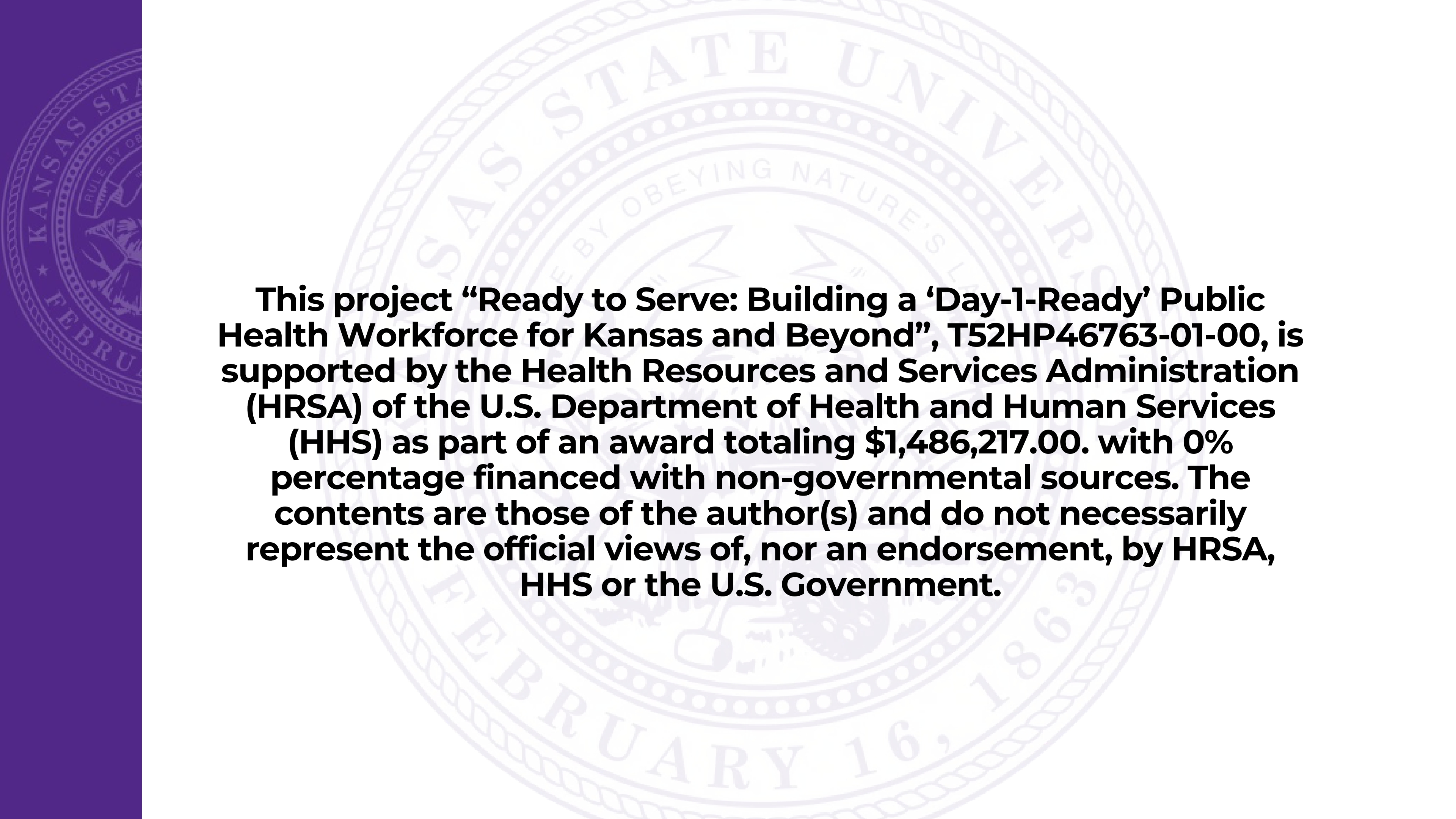
## Rural Grocery Initiative (RGI)

- Focused on rural food insecurity and the loss of critical food infrastructure (grocery store closures).
- Worked to sustain local food systems and increase access to healthy foods for rural populations.

## Experience Garden City - Alternative Breaks

- Explored the intersection of food security, immigration, and labor.
- Gained insights into how global food systems affect local communities, with a focus on immigrant food insecurity in Garden City.





**This project “Ready to Serve: Building a ‘Day-1-Ready’ Public Health Workforce for Kansas and Beyond”, T52HP46763-01-00, is supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of an award totaling \$1,486,217.00. with 0% percentage financed with non-governmental sources. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by HRSA, HHS or the U.S. Government.**





# MPH FOUNDATIONAL COMPETENCIES

**3**

**ANALYZE QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE DATA USING BIOSTATISTICS, INFORMATICS, COMPUTER-BASED PROGRAMMING, AND SOFTWARE, AS APPROPRIATE.**

**6**

**DISCUSS THE MEANS BY WHICH STRUCTURAL BIAS, SOCIAL INEQUITIES, AND RACISM UNDERMINE HEALTH AND CREATE CHALLENGES TO ACHIEVING HEALTH EQUITY AT ORGANIZATIONAL, COMMUNITY, AND SOCIETAL LEVELS.**

**9**

**DESIGN A POPULATION-BASED POLICY, PROGRAM, PROJECT, OR INTERVENTION.**

**16**

**APPLY PRINCIPLES OF LEADERSHIP, GOVERNANCE, AND MANAGEMENT, WHICH INCLUDE CREATING A VISION, EMPOWERING OTHERS, FOSTERING COLLABORATION, AND GUIDING DECISION-MAKING.**

**22**

**APPLY SYSTEMS THINKING TOOLS TO A PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE.**





**Thank you.**

**Questions?**

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