“I Try Not to Eat No Food ’Cause I Don’t Really Have That Much”: Investigating Food System Policies and Institutions That Could Best Address Food Insecurity in Pickens County, SC

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“I TRY NOT TO EAT NO FOOD ’CAUSE I DON’T REALLY HAVE THAT MUCH”:
INVESTIGATING FOOD SYSTEM POLICIES AND INSTITUTIONS THAT COULD
BEST ADDRESS FOOD INSECURITY IN PICKENS COUNTY, SC

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science
Social Science

by
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August 2021

Accepted by:
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Dr. Sarah Griffin
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ABSTRACT

Food insecurity refers to the inability to access enough food, and enough quality food, to live an active and healthy life (USDA 2019a). In 2019, the U.S. food insecurity rate was approximately 10.5% (USDA 2019a). However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic these national rates increased to at least a peak of 13.9% in 2020 (Feeding America 2021). There are national, state, and local policies, programs, and food systems that aim to address food insecurity (each having varying degrees of success). The context of this thesis focuses specifically on Pickens County, SC. A relatively large county in the Upstate and Appalachia regions of South Carolina, Pickens County normally maintains a food insecurity rate just below the national average. This thesis contributes to the food insecurity literature as a qualitative case study of Pickens County, SC between 2019 and 2021. Through forty-five interviews and four focus groups, the food systems characteristics of Pickens County, SC were identified to assess potential improvements to the local food system. The study results revealed that although some food assistance efforts of the Pickens County food system provide food access, there is room for improvement. Data suggest that Pickens County, SC does not have the public transportation necessary to reduce food insecurity. Further, food assistance efforts in the county would benefit from an increased level of centralization. The findings of this thesis should be generalizable enough to be of use for Pickens County, SC; as well as similar middle-income and semi-urban counties throughout the United States.
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the public assistance providers of Pickens County, SC.

Their continued service to the public is priceless.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Special thanks to Dr. Catherine Mobley for providing me with guidance and support between 2019 and 2021. Further, Dr. Mobley is a friend and a leader in this community; as well as a great mentor. I have appreciated her instruction and time. Thank you Dr. Kenneth Robinson for teaching me about community and social class these past two years. Thank you Dr. Sarah Griffin for providing me with data collection training last summer and helping me throughout the thesis process. I appreciate all the time this committee has spent helping to refine this thesis. These individuals have shaped my time at Clemson University.
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I. INTRODUCTION

Food insecurity is undeniably a problem for people throughout the world, and Pickens County, South Carolina is not an exception. Food insecurity is defined as the inability to access healthy and affordable food. It is important to acknowledge that the definition of food security includes the capacity of individuals/households to access food so they can live an active and healthy lifestyle. Thus, when considering an individual's food security, the individual should have access to enough food (quantity) and to healthy, nutritious food (quality). However, for those experiencing food insecurity on a daily basis, it may be difficult to identify with the academic definition. The academic definition of food insecurity is scientific, rigid, and disconnected from the lived experience. To understand the essence of food insecurity, look to the title of this thesis, an example of the words spoken by a food insecure Easley, SC resident.

The goal of this thesis is to identify policies and institutions that can promote food security at the county level, with a focus on Pickens County, South Carolina. The research question for this thesis is: What types of food system policies and programs could best help to promote food security in Pickens County, SC? As suggested by the research question, a central premise to the thesis is that intentionally applying food system policies and programs to address food insecurity can strengthen local food security.

This project investigates and identifies local, regional, and national policies and institutions that can help to address hunger and food insecurity in Pickens County. These
policies and institutions can range from municipal departments of food, food policy councils, county food policy guides designed to integrate community members into food policy decision making for the purpose of increasing food security, government subsidies, and government incentives. The identification of these policies and institutions are informed by an analysis of several projects conducted in Pickens County, an in-depth literature review on the topic, and in-depth interviews with key stakeholders. More specifically, this thesis relies on data from several projects related to food access and food insecurity in the county.

These projects include a study of Pickens County food access and food insecurity, sponsored by the United Way of Pickens County (hereafter referred to as the “UWCP study”) and a qualitative study of Pickens County food access during the COVID-19 pandemic. This latter study, the Food Insecurity Responses, Solutions and Transformation project (hereafter referred to as the “FIRST study”), was sponsored by the National Science Foundation. An additional qualitative data-set includes five interviews with South Carolina food systems stakeholders. These five interviews were conducted specifically for this thesis and were developed using an iterative approach through which the interview protocol was informed by analysis of the two previously mentioned qualitative data-sets. These five interviews will subsequently be referred to as the “SC key informant interviews.”

The projects included interviews and survey data that were analyzed to understand the present needs in Pickens County regarding food security, with the goal of identifying policy initiatives that could best address food insecurity. The thesis also
draws on the analysis of geographic data. Through data from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), as well as data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), statistical research was conducted to determine the housing insecurity status and food insecurity status of each census tract in Pickens County, SC. These data are subsequently referred to as the “census tract ‘insecurity’ indices.

The UWPC study included data collection and the production of a summary report. Survey data on low-income individuals and households were collected at food pantries, government agencies, and schools. Interviews and focus groups were conducted with Pickens County professionals in medicine, education, government, churches, agriculture, and food distribution, as well as with Pickens County residents. These data were primarily collected between May 2019 and August 2019. The FIRST study was conducted in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic and was completed in January 2021. Interviews and survey data were collected from low-income residents of Pickens County to determine whether they were experiencing increased, stable, or decreased food security during the COVID-19 pandemic (and why this change is occurring or not occurring). The SC key informant interviews included five interviews with stakeholders from throughout South Carolina. These interviews ranged between thirty-eight and forty-eight minutes each. These key informant interviews included a discussion with one representative of the state-wide South Carolina food system, and discussions with four representatives of the local “Upstate, SC” food system.

The study results are used to inform recommendations to address food insecurity in Pickens County. Recommendations take into consideration the county’s economic,
social and demographic components. Policy and institutional recommendations, if implemented appropriately, will help address the problem at hand. The problem of food insecurity is be considered within the context of projected future regional population growth, with the goal of ultimately reducing the Pickens County food insecurity rate to an amount as close to 0% as possible. It is anticipated that the study results will also be useful to middle-income, semi-urban counties similar to Pickens County to ensure that citizens have access to healthy, affordable food.
II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review begins by first defining the key terms and concepts for the study. These include the definitions of food security and insecurity, as well as an exploration of why food insecurity is a problem. The literature review will then focus on current food systems policies, institutions, and actions that have been implemented to address food insecurity across the United States. Further, through describing these food system initiatives, this literature review will identify potential solutions to challenges that have arisen as a result of food systems policy, institutions, and actions. The goal of the literature review is to identify food system alternatives and solutions for use by county-level decision makers seeking to develop food policies for their communities. These policy initiatives include food policy councils, the connection of disparate food distributors and food producers through state and local government institutions, and land conservation easement programs. Ultimately, these initiatives will strengthen the state food security infrastructure of the counties that choose to, and have the capacity to, implement these methods.

Definition of Food Security and Food Insecurity

Food security is a relatively common term used when discussing poverty and communities. The term “food security” comes from the 1970’s shift in national and global discourse on food access from the supply side to the demand side (Maxwell and Slater 2003:531-532). As global food demand increased during the rapid population growth period of the middle twentieth century, conversations about food supply (food
policy) shifted to conversations about food demand (food security). This shift paralleled the global trend of urbanization (and a consequent rural/urban divide) as well as the corporatization of food production and food distribution (Maxwell and Slater 2003:534). Food security deals with the concepts of food access and food entitlement (Maxwell and Slater 2003:532). The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines food security as:

access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life, and includes, at a minimum: (1) the ready availability and safe foods and (2) an ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways (e.g. without resorting to emergency food supplies, scavenging, stealing, or other coping strategies) (USDA 2019a).

According to the USDA (2020a), food security is categorized by two measures: high food security (few “food-access problems or limitations”) and marginal food security (some indication “of anxiety over food sufficiency or shortage of food” but no changes in diet or amount of food consumed).

Food insecurity, therefore, occurs when individuals and households do not have the resources or access to enough food quality and/or food quantity to live a healthy and active lifestyle. According to the USDA (2020a), food insecurity is categorized by two measures: low food security (indication of reduced food quality but little indication of change of amount of food consumed) and very low food security (indication “of disrupted eating patterns” and significant changes in amount of food consumed). As
described in the next section, food insecurity can result from inadequate or missing policies and programs at the federal, state and local levels of government.

**National, Regional, and Local Food Insecurity Trends**

As a high-income nation (Global Policy Forum 2005-2020), the United States does not experience a debilitating degree of food insecurity (Roser and Ritchie 2013). According to the USDA (2019a), approximately 10.5% of the U.S. population experienced food insecurity in 2019. In the U.S., food insecurity is most frequently associated with households headed by African Americans and Hispanics, younger people, less educated persons, and those who are divorced, never married, or separated (Nord et al. 2010 as cited by Gundersen, Kreider, and Pepper 2011:286-287). Further, food insecurity has been most frequently associated with households with children, single-mother households, households with income below the poverty line, and households in the South (Gundersen et al. 2011:287; Hager et al. 2010:e27; USDA 2020b). To emphasize the association between food insecurity and households with children, Bartfeld (2013:24) notes that about one-fifth of the average low-income child’s food and non-food resources come from food assistance in the U.S.

The U.S. South Census region\(^1\) experiences some of the highest levels of food insecurity in the nation. Feeding America (2020a) released a report on 2020 food

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\(^1\) The U.S. Census includes the following states/territories within the South region: Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia (U.S. Census Bureau 1995).
insecurity rates by state and county. In 2020, the four states with highest rates of food insecurity were each from the U.S. South Census region. These included Mississippi, Arkansas, Alabama, and Louisiana. Further, this ranking remains unchanged from 2018. Feeding America (2020a:5) notes that each of the five counties with the highest projected food insecurity rates are counties in the U.S. South Census region. These include Jefferson County, MS; Issaquena County, MS; East Carroll Parish, LA; Kusilvak Census Area, AR; and Holmes County, MS (Feeding America 2020a:9). In total, the 2019 U.S. South Census Region food insecurity rate was 11.2%, slightly higher than the overall U.S. rate of 10.5% noted above (USDA 2020c).

Although food insecurity has been a historic and contemporary concern for the U.S. South, food insecurity rates in Pickens County, SC have remained relatively low. According to Feeding America (2020b) the 2018 Pickens County, SC food insecurity rate was approximately 10%. This indicates that about 12,530 people in the county experienced food insecurity in 2018. Thus, the food insecurity rate in Pickens County, SC is not as high as that of the region within which it resides, the U.S. South Census Region, which had a 2019 food insecurity rate of 11.2% (USDA 2020c). Although Pickens County food insecurity rates are lower than those of surrounding areas, it is still useful to conduct a case study of food insecurity at the county level to identify the unique challenges and characteristics of Pickens County, SC.

Feeding America (2020a:2) provides some indicators that expand understanding about the reasons for differences in food insecurity across the South. The first is the unemployment rate. According to the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis (2020), the
December 2018 Pickens County, SC unemployment rate was 3.2%, slightly (and unsubstantially) lower than the 2018 unemployment rate of the South U.S. Census region (3.5%). The second indicator to measure is median household income. The Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis (2020) notes that the 2018 Pickens County, SC estimated median household income was $48,794, well above the 2018 South U.S. Census region estimated median household income of $31,793. However, the 2018 Pickens County median household income was considerably lower than the 2018 U.S. median household income, which was $63,179 (The Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis 2020) The third indicator for measuring food insecurity differences is the homeownership rate. According to the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis (2020), the 2018 Pickens County, SC homeownership rate was approximately 69.5%. This is compared with the 2018 (fiscal quarter 4) South Census region homeownership rate of 66%. These indicators provide a partial explanation as to why Pickens County, SC holds a low food insecurity rate relative to that of the U.S. South at large.

*Food insecurity during the COVID-19 pandemic.*

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the COVID-19 pandemic was declared “a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC)” on January 30, 2020 (WHO 2021). From January 2020 through 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic affected many aspects of daily life in the U.S. and abroad, including food security. Close to the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, Feeding America (2021) suggests that U.S. food insecurity rates were approximately 13.9% in 2020 (marginally below their peak during
the 2008 Recession). This is a three percent increase from one year prior, when the food insecurity rate was 10.9% in 2019 (Feeding America 2021). The one year difference in food insecurity rates suggests the dramatic effect the COVID-19 pandemic had on U.S. society.

Although sufficient data are not yet available on the state-level and local-level increases in food insecurity during the COVID-19 pandemic, additional national-level data suggest discouraging food insecurity trends. Jones (2021:6) suggests that food insecurity likely increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, and these increases may be evidenced by increases in food assistance dollars provided to struggling families. Jones (2021:12) notes that monthly SNAP and P-EBT (pandemic electronic benefit transfer) redemptions increased considerably in 2020 (peak of $9.5 billion) as compared with the 2017-2019 average ($4.9 billion). Although P-EBT was introduced specifically because of the COVID-19 pandemic, Jones (2021:15) notes that much of the P-EBT increases are reflective of substitutions that households likely made in lieu of reduced access to school meals and other food assistance avenues. Increased U.S. food insecurity rates between 2019 and 2020, and increased food assistance dollars provided by the U.S. government between the 2017-2019 average and 2020 are both evidence of the effect that the COVID-19 pandemic had on household food insecurity in the U.S.

**The Negative Effects of Food Insecurity**

Food insecurity has many negative impacts. At the national level, in the United States, food insecurity can lead to increased health care costs, especially for marginalized
populations. Berkowitz, Seligman and Choudhry (2018:1608) note that food insecure individuals pay approximately $1,863 more in health care costs annually than food secure individuals. These disparities in annual health care costs between food insecure and food secure individuals are even higher for individuals also experiencing diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease (Berkowitz et al. 2018:1609) all of which are considered chronic diseases by the World Health Organization (Puska, Mendis and Porter 2003). Individuals who have been diagnosed with chronic illness are frequently prescribed some type of medication. Unfortunately, just as food insecure individuals are more likely to experience chronic illness, food insecure individuals are also more likely to sacrifice prescribed medication purchases in order to save money (Berkowitz et al. 2014:306). Continuing to the next section, it is important to understand that food insecurity can be a significant contributor to the poor health of an individual, typically leading to increased personal health costs.

The connections between food insecurity, poor health, increased health costs, and inability to pay medical support is troubling and emphasizes the difficulty individuals can experience in large part due to food insecurity. More directly, however, the effects of food insecurity can lead to diminished health. Food insecurity is associated with increased child “hyperactivity/inattention” (Melchoir et al. 2019:e52615); increased child anemia (Eicher-Miller et al. 2009 as cited in Gundersen and Ziliak 2015:1833); increased adult “mental health care service” usage (Tarasuk et al. 2018:560); and increased adult “inadequate sleep duration” (Ding et al. 2015:617). Tarasuk et al. (2013:1789) similarly finds that household food insecurity is associated with chronic health problems among
adults. Surprisingly, Tarasuk et al. (2013:1788) do not find evidence for an association between food insecurity and hypertension or heart disease. This finding contrasts with the claim made that hypertension and heart disease are conditions associated with food insecurity (Seligman, Laraia, and Kushel 2010b as cited in Berkowitz et al. 2018:1611). Although the above-mentioned list is not exhaustive, it can be concluded that food insecurity typically has a negative effect on one’s mental and physical health.

Considering the research on the negative effects of food insecurity on one’s health, as well as the research on the costs of food insecurity, the connection between food insecurity and an individual’s experiences becomes clearer. As an individual will experience a loss of earned employment or a decrease in social safety nets, they are no longer able to afford the quantity of food or the quality of food that allows them to live a healthy and active life. As the individual consumes less food and/or less nutritious food, they will begin experiencing health problems (for example, diabetes or sleep deprivation). Further, if one lives within a food desert (areas with limited access to healthy, affordable food) with minimal food surrounding them, or within a food swamp (areas where unhealthy food access is prevalent and affordable) with poor quality fast food surrounding them, these problems will be exacerbated (Cooksey-Stowers, Schwartz and Brownell 2017:1-2). These health problems will lead to increased medical expenditures, which the individual cannot afford. From here, the individual must consistently choose between food costs, health care costs, and likely additional costs researchers cannot estimate.
This is similar to a theoretical model of poverty and food insufficiency that suggests a household’s capacity to be food secure depends primarily on their ability to access “short-term economic factors” such as employment and public assistance (Sawhill 1988 as cited in Ribar and Hamrick 2003:5) as well as the assets a household had at the time prior to becoming food insecure (Ribar and Hamrick 2003:5). If a household has few assets and does not have access to public (social) assistance, the household will be at an increased risk for food insecurity when presented with unemployment. These factors help explain the interconnection of food insecurity with an individual’s health and economic situation. Further evidence suggests that it is vital to design food systems in a way that ensures access to healthy, affordable food. The following section describes some important considerations for designing viable food systems.

**Food System Policies**

To understand what food system policy is most appropriate for a local area, it is important to operationalize what a viable food system is in general. As described by the Oxford Martin Programme on the Future of Food, a food system is a system designed to adapt to the natural environment and the social environment to produce the outcome of feeding populations (Eriksen 2008 as cited in Oxford University n.d.). A food system can include within it farming, economic, social, and agricultural systems to accomplish this task. Further, food systems can range in scale from the global perspective to the local perspective. Fundamentally though, a food system deals with the process of effectively and efficiently getting food from the point of production to the point of consumption. In
the section below, I describe two major policies designed to address food system
challenges: the U.S. Farm Bill and the Department of Food and food entrepreneurialism.

_U.S. Farm Bill_

A national food policy that affects all U.S. counties is the modern U.S. Farm Bill. The U.S. Farm Bill was passed in the 1930’s, however, the _modern_ U.S. Farm Bill developed in the 1970’s as an extension of New Deal policy that encouraged farmers to overproduce using federal “non-recourse loans” (Windham 2007:6-7). Between the 1930’s and 1970’s, U.S. farmers were encouraged to overproduce and could receive loans for produce they were unable to sell at a profitable price, simply storing their unsold product until prices were high enough for profitability. In the 1972 Farm Bill this policy was extended to a deficiency payment (subsidy) (Windham 2007:10). After the 1972 Farm Bill, U.S. farm policies shifted from a supply focus (food policy and higher food prices for farmers) to a demand focus (food security and lower food prices for foreign exports to satisfy global demand).

Subsequently, however, recessions depressed global food demand and global food prices during the 1980’s. During the 1990’s, the U.S. Congress attempted to (and failed to) deregulate the farm industry and when the 2002 Farm Bill was passed, the Agribusiness sector was the “largest corporate welfare recipient” in the U.S. (Windham 2007:12). U.S. Farm Bill subsidies typically benefit larger (industrial) farms and limit the relative productive capacity of smaller farms, as farms are incentivized to produce more regardless of market price. The reason industrial farms benefit more than smaller farms
from federal subsidies is because larger farms can sell their product at a lower price and still receive profit from their subsidies due to the high quantity of product these farms may have produced/sold. Smaller farms cannot produce the same amount as industrial farms and are forced to receive marginal subsidies from the relatively little amount they produce/sell.

The effect that these change to the U.S. Farm Bill have had on food security is a matter of scale. As farms are incentivized to produce more food, large-scale farms develop that can produce large quantities of food and receive large subsidies for this produce. Unfortunately, however, the agricultural production coming from the large-scale farming industry is typically lower quality. Therefore, increased national and global food quantities produced through large-scale agricultural endeavors came at the cost of reduced food quality produced.

Zulauf, Schnitkey, and Barnaby (2013) discuss potential alterations to the modern U.S. Farm Bill, in the hopes of reducing the costs of U.S. Farm Bill expenditures. A first alteration concerns individual farms paying higher premiums on their crop insurance. Much of the U.S. Farm Bill funding is spent on “crop insurance programs”, which are purchased by farmers to ensure their crops (crops are considered in this context to be “commodities”). The primary insurer is the Federal Crop Insurance Program (FCIP), which was established through the original U.S. Farm Bill in 1938 (USDA 2019b). Insurance through the FCIP (and other numerous alternatives) provides farmers with leverage against losses they may endure due to drought, tempests, yield losses, poor quality crops, and additional events. The FCIP follows the logic of the initial U.S. Farm
Bill in that farmers are insured through compensation against losses due to externalities (unfavorable weather, low crop prices). However, between 1990 and 2012, the total share of crop insurance premiums paid by farms decreased from 74% to 37% (Zulauf and Orden as cited in Zulauf et al. 2013:1). Further, it is suggested that farms do not pay any premium on a separate insurance policy: CAT (catastrophic) insurance (Zulauf et al. 2013:1). It is simple to suggest that the less farms pay in insurance premiums, the more expensive it becomes for the FCIP and alternative insurance providers to pay out individual insurance policies (really acting as individual subsidies).

A second alteration to the modern U.S. Farm Bill worth mentioning is that Zulauf et al. (2013:2) note the concept of “conservation compliance”, which requires farms to meet conservation standards to be eligible for crop insurance subsidies. This concept greatly incentivizes farmers to conserve agricultural land and wetlands to continue receiving insurance incomes. Again, farmers typically rely on these insurance incomes because many farmers intentionally overproduce and sell their product at a reduced price. Zulauf et al. (2013:2) suggest that savings in crop insurance (and indirectly in the U.S. Farm Bill) would come through two sources: direct savings through a reduction in crop insurance eligibility (conservation compliance would act as an exclusive criteria, wherein, if a farm does not elect to meet conservation standards they are not eligible for crop insurance) and indirect savings through long-term environmental changes. Long-term savings through environmental changes may come because agricultural land conservation efforts maintain the quality of land for future farming endeavors. These
would not be direct savings collected annually, but rather long-term savings directed toward the common good.

According to the USDA (Glaser 1986:47), conservation compliance and similar concepts have been a part of the U.S. Farm Bill since 1985. In previous iterations of the U.S. Farm Bill, conservation compliance was associated with USDA payments to farmers. However, the 2014 and 2018 U.S. Farm Bills began associating conservation compliance mandates with “crop insurance premium support” (USDA 2014a). As Zulauf et al. (2013:2) provided in their discussion of potential alterations to the U.S. Farm Bill, conservation compliance standards are now a prerequisite to be eligible for crop insurance premium subsidies in the U.S. Farm Bill. This is one example of many that could make the U.S. Farm Bill more useful for reducing legislative expenditures, maintaining the natural environment, and potentially (over time) increasing local food security. Although the relationship between agricultural conservation and food security is debated and at times unclear, there is evidence to suggest that land conservation efforts can help to increase food security (Zabala 2018). Essentially, agricultural conservation is purported to increase food security through increased productive capacity (as there is more land available for agricultural production) and increased local food access (as there is more land available for small-scale, local food production). However, agricultural conservation is purported to not affect food security because any incentives and restrictions against large-scale agriculture ultimately reduce agricultural productive capacity.
State Food Security Infrastructure

The “state food security infrastructure” represents a government's ability to support its population’s access to the healthy and affordable food needed to live an active lifestyle. This means that government food support does not have to come in the form of direct subsidies/payments to households, as is provided through SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) and WIC (Women, Infants, and Children). Government support can be indirect, as is seen through the implementation of municipal departments dedicated to organizing local food access. The role of a “state food security infrastructure” is to support a population’s food access, and this can be accomplished in numerous ways.

Governments can support local and regional households with food assistance through the centralization of food systems. Pothukuchi and Kaufman (1999:218) suggest this can be done through the implementation of a department of food. This institution intentionally centralizes municipal food systems by managing food production, food consumption, food waste disposal, and the analysis of food markets in a municipal area (Pothukuchi and Kaufman 1999:219). Further, the institution will frame local government policy and provide reports on local food security and access (Pothukuchi and Kaufman 1999:219). A department of food could be extended to the county level for a mixed rural/urban county with a manageable population size and the means to substantial agricultural production. Examples of the categories that a department of food could manage include: (1) the preservation of agricultural land; (2) land use and food access zoning, particularly in disenfranchised communities; (3) connecting food issues with
economic development, such as incentivizing community gardens with tax cuts; (4) reporting on and attempting to reduce the “environmental impacts of the food system.” (Pothukuchi and Kaufman 2000:117).

The department of food (typically a government institution) can be a useful organization for connecting piecemeal local food systems distribution operations to build the state food security infrastructure. Further, there is an additional concept within the food system that can build or support an area’s food security infrastructure. Food systems entrepreneurialism, suggested by Chapman (2017), indicates that entrepreneurial endeavors connected to the local food system can provide for that area’s social and economic vitality. An area’s social vitality can be enhanced through the entrepreneurial support of local food systems by making agriculture a more stable business (selling locally), allowing for local farms to sustain themselves and develop community. An area’s economic vitality can be enhanced through the entrepreneurial support of local food systems by directly increasing the economic productivity of an area through local food markets and spending on food produced by local farms. Chapman warns, however, that using entrepreneurial endeavors to enhance an area’s state food security infrastructure can result in neoliberal practices.

The concern with neoliberal practices is that they can allow producers and consumers to become victims of harmful market consequences (monopoly, outsourcing, price gouging) if government intervention is not permitted/encouraged. Chapman suggests the increasing of the economic productivity of an area through local food markets to be neoliberal because the community will frequently begin to adopt “retreat to
“Retreat to charity” tactics (Poppendieck 1998 as cited in Chapman 2017:64). “Retreat to charity” is a term implying that due to limited government intervention in the welfare of local citizens, responsibility for the distribution of healthy food options is placed upon local nonprofits and charities. As these distributors become the most viable source of affordable food for low-income local consumers, it is the responsibility of local producers/local distributors to get affordable healthy foods to low-income residents. Further, as government bodies cease to protect the food security of its citizens, food security becomes the responsibility of consumers (Chapman 2017:67). These arguments made by Chapman are important to warn against believing that local food systems are inherently good, and to consider the importance of national policies that can protect healthy and affordable food options for consumers, particularly to protect low-income consumers.

The commonality between these organization types: department of food and food systems entrepreneurialism, is that they address the food environment collectively. A department of food can work with government while food systems entrepreneurialism attempts to engage the private sector. When combating local issues such as food deserts and food swamps, these institutions are useful because of their abilities to connect seemingly disparate actors.

Many consider local food systems to be a means to increasing local food security. Martinez et al. (2010) note local food can be considered food that is consumed within 400 miles of production or within the same state of production (p. iii). It is suggested that because less time is required for local food to get from the production site to
consumption, local foods are healthier because they are fresher and retain more nutrients (Lea 2005 as cited in Martinez et al. 2010:46). Local foods are suggested to relate to healthier behavior because the markets in which they are bought and sold encourage consumers to eat healthier foods than they would when shopping at a non-local food market (Martinez et al. 2010:46). Local food systems can be supported through policy via incentives (tax breaks on local sales between local producers, local distributors, and consumers), subsidies, and connecting local food producers with local distributors and consumers through a proxy organization (food policy council, farmers’ market, economic development project) (Feast Downeast n.d.).

This is a key benefit of connecting food distributors within a local food system institution: building a state food security infrastructure by connecting local producers with local consumers. Developing local food systems would be an important step given that industrial producers typically have the advantage of large scale (sometimes global) advertising and market access through commercial grocers. This contrasts with local producers who, by definition, sell through local markets. Unfortunately, centralizing local food system institutions would not solve the issue of local producers being able to lower prices to generate the income necessary for both a sustainable lifestyle for themselves and for low-income consumers to purchase local food products. Local food products typically have a higher price because they are produced at smaller production sites which: (1) cannot access enough government subsidies to make a profitable return on sales; (2) produce niche products (Chapman 2017:84) which cannot be sold at a high enough
quantity to make a profit while also selling at a low enough price for low-income consumers.

For numerous reasons, it is difficult for local producers to sell their products at a price low enough for low-income consumers to access it. This often results in low-income consumers shopping for cheap food through the less nutritious non-local food market and higher-income consumers shopping for more expensive food through more nutritious local food markets. It is presumably the role of policy to make locally produced food more affordable for low-income consumers and still profitable enough for producers.

*Developing viable food systems*

Bartfeld and Dunifon (2006) propose that the concept of a “state food security infrastructure” is critical to the ability of households to access food. The state food security infrastructure combines the social, economic, and policy characteristics that affect a household’s ability to access food (Bartfeld and Dunifon 2006:923). These characteristics are juxtaposed with household socioeconomic status; for example, a low-income household that lives in an area with a strong state food security infrastructure is more likely to be food secure than a low-income household that lives in an area with a weak state food security infrastructure. Bartfeld and Dunifon (2006) note that the state food security infrastructure can range from a national to local scale. A primary factor in determining whether a locality has a strong or weak state food security infrastructure is the availability of government (sometimes referred to as public or social) assistance to
food. Further, this government assistance availability must be complemented by ready access to food using government assistance, as individuals can only exercise their ability to use government food assistance if their grocers accept it as a legitimate form of payment.

Bartfeld and Dunifon (2006:923) note that their research question seeks to determine the relationship between the contextual characteristics (household proximity to food outlets, employment, wages, school lunch eligibility, residential mobility) of a household and said household’s chances of being food secure. Bartfeld and Dunifon (2006) use the model of the state food security infrastructure to underlie their research. As defined in their research, the state food security infrastructure includes the “programs, policies, and economic and social attributes” that influence the consumer’s ability to afford and access food resources for their household (Bartfeld and Dunifon 2006:923).

Two important questions may be introduced to study how a viable food system can be developed and how government can develop a viable food security infrastructure. (1) How can a state food security infrastructure be implemented to develop a viable food system? As reviewed above, food policy can take many forms and apply to multiple scales (federal, state, local). But once an appropriate food policy is identified, it is important to understand how this food policy will be implemented effectively in its intended locality. (2) What is a food secure food system? As presented above, a food system is a system that can adapt to social and environmental externalities to effectively feed a population. This is not necessarily a food secure food system. A food secure food system is a system that can adapt to social and environmental externalities to effectively
ensure a population’s food security. The distinction between feeding a population and ensuring a population’s food security is that the definition of food security includes a population’s access to “safe and nutritious” food that allows “for an active and healthy life.” (World Food Summit 1996 as cited in Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO] 2006:1).

It is important for localities to utilize a state food security infrastructure that allows a local food secure food system to develop for all residents. Examples of supporting the “state food security infrastructure” can include, but are not limited to, implementing a department of food or stimulating the economic productivity of an area’s local food market (Pothukuchi and Kaufman 1999:218-219). These endeavors would engage government, nonprofits, citizens, and for-profit businesses with the goal of helping resident’s access healthy and affordable food. Ideally, these endeavors would also help to connect disparate food distributors working within the food systems at a local level. Although local food systems can have negative consequences, such as a tendency toward legitimating neoliberal economic and cultural frameworks (Chapman 2017), local food systems are useful for increasing an area’s food security. The connection of food systems through government and non-government entities helps increase local food security because it allows for more funding, political support, research, and physical resources to be dedicated to supporting an area’s local food system (Conner and Levine 2007:14; Dillon 2007:6-8).
Policies and Programs for Increasing Food Security

Thus far, the literature review has described examples of policy initiatives that can theoretically increase a local area’s food security. This section of the literature review includes a review of additional initiatives in order to gain a clearer picture of which policy and program options can be most useful for a local area. The goal of each of these examples would be to increase local food security by improving the state food security infrastructure.

Dillon (2007) provides examples of four U.S. counties that implement different but useful techniques to increase food security. These techniques include the development of a food policy council; the development of farm-to-school programs; infrastructure development; and the use of agricultural conservation easements. A review of 2018 food insecurity rates for each of these counties revealed that each county had a 2018 food insecurity rate lower (Feeding America 2017) than the national average (11.1%) (USDA 2020b). This may suggest that the implementations made by these counties over a decade ago has had a lasting effect. Each example described by Dillon is presented in the following sections.

Food policy council.

A food policy council typically involves bringing together local, regional, or national stakeholders to comprehensively deal with the five food system sectors. These five food system sectors include: production, processing, distribution, consumption, and waste/recycling (Harper et al. 2009:2). The extent to which a food policy council will
choose to and/or have the capacity to equitably address concerns within each food system sector varies. According to Harper et al. (2009:37), food policy councils most frequently address the production and consumption food system sectors. This means that the issues of processing, distribution, and waste/recycling are left unaddressed most frequently by U.S. food policy councils.

In their discussion of food policy councils, Pothukuchi and Kaufman (1999) suggest that food policy councils typically include members/representatives of the local food system (farmers, retail food workers, nutritionists, agricultural organizations) to work together outside of the government in order to advise on government food system concerns (Pothukuchi and Kaufman 1999:219). Although food policy councils are sometimes designed to work outside of the government, they are effective when working directly with the government in an advisory capacity and receiving support from governmental institutions. Pothukuchi and Kaufman (2000:121) suggest that food policy councils are in many ways community nonprofit organizations related to community food security. This work typically involves engaging with community members through advocacy and programs (introducing potential local consumers to local food producers, developing and supporting the maintenance of a community garden, etc.).

The role of food policy councils is primarily to address the concerns of the five food system sectors (production, processing, distribution, consumption, and waste/recycling) at the local, regional, or national scale. Harper et al. (2009:19-21) find that food policy councils can address these concerns through the following methods: facilitating public discussion on food system problems; coordinating individuals who
work within each food system sector; evaluating/influencing policy; and developing
programs. Again, there is considerable variation between how food policy councils define
and achieve their objectives, but the methods listed above are some of the most frequent
manners in which they do.

Further, food policy councils do not use consistent measures/standards to evaluate
themselves. At the local level, food policy councils have been found to measure their
performance based on listserv size and the number of policies/programs they were able to
develop (Harper et al. 2009:39). At the state level, food policy councils were recorded

Formal evaluation techniques using focus groups, surveys, and interviews are not
frequently implemented by food policy councils. This is confirmed by Sussman and
Bassarab (2017) in their food policy council report (which is regarded as the most
comprehensive report of U.S. food policy councils) (p. 3). In their report, Sussman and
Bassarab (2017:21) note that few of the U.S. food policy councils in their study had
“food plans and methods of evaluation,” or a food charter.

Food policy councils are still under-developed, potentially because food policy
councils are a relatively new and unstructured phenomena in the U.S. The first food
policy councils developed in the 1980’s (Harper et al. 2009). What is unclear is why U.S.
food policy councils still frequently offer poorly developed measurement and evaluation
plans. Again, this could be because there is not a clear formula to develop food policy
councils. Harper et al. (2009:22) emphasize that there is not a correct way to structure a
food policy council, and Sussman and Bassarab (2017:14) suggest that over half of all
Food policy councils are becoming more common in the United States as communities seek to integrate local food systems with the work of local policy makers. Food councils are useful for connecting disparate members of the food system in a formal (Conner and Levine 2007:14) or semi-formal (Pothukuchi and Kaufman 1999:219) capacity to promote community food systems (Harper et al. 2009:16; Neff et al. 2009:299). For example, Dane County, WI has a food council that involves government and local citizens to provide local food access throughout the county (Dillon 2007). This food council is officially recognized by the local government and has “citizen members” who represent backgrounds as diverse as farming, planning, nonprofits, and farmers markets (Dillon 2007:6). The benefit of developing a food council that is supported by local government is that the council has leverage within the community to execute plans and it has the security to make long-term decisions (the added protection that its existence will likely continue into the near future).

The Dane County, WI food council has been functioning with the local government since 2005 and has received government funding as well as utilizing government networks (Dillon 2007:6). However, food councils do not always receive strong government support however, and must sometimes rely on private donations/support, universities, and nonprofit organizations to continue. Dane County, WI food council affiliates emphasize both the importance of a food policy council
receiving organizational support upon its inception and working with universities (particularly land grant and agricultural universities) to enact their goals of increasing local food security (Dillon 2007:8). Food councils typically increase local food security through increasing local food availability.

A current example of the Dane County, WI food council’s ability to work with local government is in the form of a response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Edgar (2020) wrote an article for the University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension suggesting that the Dane County Food Council is going to work with the Madison Food Policy Council to address food insecurity during the COVID-19 pandemic. This collaboration will include individuals from the “policy research, food business, public health nutrition, farming, global health,” sectors and support from the Dane County Community Food Systems Division of Extension office within the University of Wisconsin-Madison (Edgar 2020). Fifteen years after its inception, through the influence of its food policy council, Dane County, WI continues its pursuit of increasing food security with the help of a local government organization and a local land grant university.

The South Carolina region has several food policy councils (and similar organizations) that currently exist to address local and state food systems. These include the state-wide South Carolina Food Policy Council, the Catawba Food and Farm Coalition, the Columbia Food Policy Committee, the Midlands Food Alliance, and the Spartanburg Food System Coalition (South Carolina Food Policy Council 2020). As of 2021, these organizations work together and meet (virtually) on a quarterly basis.
Further, there is a University of South Carolina SNAP-Ed (education) team that works with South Carolina communities to develop food policy councils. This organization provides “training and assistance” to South Carolina communities that are interested in developing food policy councils (South Carolina SNAP-Ed n.d.). Currently, this organization is working with the Oconee County, SC community (a neighboring county to Pickens County, SC) to develop a food policy council. Considering the proximity of Pickens County to Oconee County, if Pickens County were to ever develop a food policy council, it may be helpful to work with the University of South Carolina SNAP-Ed team and identify useful actions taken by the Oconee County community in developing a food policy council.

Farm-to-school programs.

The concept of farm-to-school is broad and can range from farms selling their produce to schools, to schools developing their own system of producing food. The underlying goals, really, are to engage schools and school-aged children with nutritious produce and the process of food production. According to the USDA (2015), farm-to-school activities in the U.S. are relatively popular as approximately 42,587 schools partake to some degree. This amounts to approximately 43% of all U.S. schools during the 2015-2016 school year (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics 2019). These statistics are supported by Turner et al. 2016, as they suggest that the prevalence of school gardens increased from 11.9% to 31.2% between 2006-2007 and 2013-2014.
It is important to emphasize that the inclusion of school gardens is not a prerequisite for schools to engage in farm-to-school activities, as schools purchasing produce from other schools and schools purchasing produce from local farms also qualify as farm-to-school activities. To clarify what exactly constitute “farm-to-school activities”, Prescott et al. (2019:358) provide a list of seventeen farm-to-school activities as defined by the USDA in their 2015 Farm to School Census. These seventeen activities are sorted into five categories: procurement; integrated curriculum; experiential learning; promotion; and global (Prescott et al. 2019:358).

Dillon (2007:9) emphasizes two substantial benefits of U.S. farm-to-school programs. These include the ability of schools to provide nutritious food to students and the opportunity for students to engage with local food production. Prescott et al. (2019:357) note that the USDA began a Farm to School Program in 2012 aimed at supporting local educational efforts through providing federal funding to schools. This federal funding can support the following endeavors: purchasing seeds for a school garden; purchasing physical equipment for a school garden; purchasing food that is produced at a separate school garden; excess food produced in the school garden can be sold to support school funds; and the school can serve self-produced school garden food to the community (USDA 2009a). The USDA also considers farm-to-school activities to include the promotion of local foods and the physical alteration of a lunchroom so that it is organized to increase the likelihood that a child will choose specific (presumably healthier) food items (Prescott et al. 2019:2). Funding for schools is also available at the federal level for local food purchases. These activities and funding opportunities are
examples of how farm-to-school programs can increase the amount of nutritious and local foods children receive in schools.

The previously mentioned state allowances by the USDA also enable schools to bypass the transactional process of purchasing produce from farms to instead allow students the opportunity to engage in the production process themselves. Although, it is unlikely that a school garden has the capacity (either through acreage or labor power) to produce enough food to feed a typical K-12 U.S. school population. This claim is supported by Davies et al.’s (2008:766) finding, from their comprehensive survey of U.K. households, that the average garden size is approximately 190 m². Considering that Gittleman, Jordan, and Brelsford (2012:6) note in their study of New York City community gardens that a total of sixty-seven New York City gardens (1.7 acres) produced a yield of approximately 87,690 pounds of food during a one-year span, one garden that is 190 m² should produce approximately 461 pounds of produce annually. Based on these calculations, assuming the average U.S. K-12 school garden is the same size of the average U.K. garden, school gardens would be much more valuable for their role in engaging children with the process of food production through farm-to-school activities, than producing enough food actually to feed a population.

Instead, children would have the opportunity to engage with and learn about food production from a scientific perspective. Wells et al. (2015:2870) note that children who engage with school gardens indicate an increased understanding of general science and nutritional science. Further, two of the items listed within the USDA’s farm-to-school activities are “field trips to farms or orchards” and “farmer visits to the school” (Prescott
et al. 2019:2), thus providing an opportunity for children to learn about the food production process at a food production site and from a food producer. As emphasized, farm-to-school programs are valuable in part for their capacity to increase a child’s understanding of science and local food production.

In sum, farm-to-school programs can help to increase local food security by supporting local food culture through field trips and the engagement of students with community gardens. Also, schools that participate in farm-to-school programs have a greater capacity to provide students with nutrient dense, healthy food options through local farm produce and/or school garden produce. Farm-to-school programs primarily facilitate this support through private and public funding. Dillon (2007:10-11) notes that Missoula County Public Schools were able to begin their farm-to-school program through private grants, and public legislation has helped to maintain it.

*Agricultural conservation.*

Agricultural conservation is yet another food-systems strategy for addressing food insecurity. Such initiatives aim to protect land for farming and future food production. For example, the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) is useful in this regard (USDA 2014b). This program provides landowners with government compensation (typically tax breaks) in exchange for the rights to unused “cropland, rangeland, grassland, pastureland, and nonindustrial private forest land.” (National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition 2019). As approximately 70% of U.S. land is privately owned (USDA n.d.), it is important to consider preserving much of this unused land for
potential agricultural needs. This can financially incentivize landowners who are not actively using their land, while ensuring (by selling land use rights to government interests) that agriculturally eligible land is conserved. The program is offered through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), which itself is a branch of the USDA.

The ACEP is not the first conservation program of its kind offered by the USDA. The Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP) was offered through USDA until 2014; this program sought to buy development rights from agriculturally suitable land owned by private citizens. A noticeable difference is that the FRPP sought to provide at most 50% of the fair market value for purchasing land for conservation easement purposes (USDA 2009b), while the ACEP seeks to purchase at most 75% of the fair market value for conservation easement purposes. The transaction can be particularly useful for private landowners with unused, but agriculturally eligible, land who are willing to make a financial return on (or simply volunteer without payment) their land for the sale of its development rights.

Dillon (2007:18) describes the role that counties can play to encourage this transaction between landowners and the government. Primarily, county governments can provide legislation that increases the availability of agricultural conservation easements to the local citizenry. In this scenario, county governments receive ACEP funds to purchase local land easements from private landowners. These funds can also be diverted to nonprofits (land trusts) and Indian tribes that are recognized by the USDA (National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition 2019). This ACEP recognition and funding can support
a local food system. The local food system is supported by conserving acres of local land for agricultural use, ensuring that local foods will be available for local markets. This decision is reliant upon the institution managing ACEP funds however, as this institution (county government, state government, nonprofit, Indian tribe) ultimately decides how/when agricultural conservation easement land is used.

Dillon (2007:19) suggests that county involvement can be especially advantageous. For example, Lancaster County, PA developed an entire county department dedicated to managing ACEP funding and using agricultural conservation easement land rights purchased by Lancaster County. This is called the Lancaster County Agricultural Preserve Board and is still functioning as of late 2020 (Lancaster County Pennsylvania 2020). The autonomy Lancaster County, PA has had over their agricultural conservation easement program has potentially influenced the county to maintain a high level of funding for the program and provide substantial political support to the program.

This concept of a locally (county or local government) operated ACEP may be useful for Pickens County, SC based on past strategies developed by the county. The Pickens County, SC Comprehensive Plan (n.d.) was developed by Pickens County at the beginning of the twenty-first century to address county goals and objectives. One of the recommendations provided within this plan was to (through policy) “develop a farmland preservation program.” (Pickens County South Carolina n.d.:160). The policy recommendation collaborating with Upstate Forever, is a regional, nonprofit organization based in Greenville, SC that directly works on conservation easement projects (Upstate Forever 2020). The Pickens County comprehensive plan encouraged the partners to
organize a local farmland conservation initiative and provide Pickens County residents with information on the benefits of farmland conservation.

As stated in the Comprehensive Plan, a proposed Pickens County farmland preservation program would coordinate between the Pickens County Planning Commission, Upstate Forever, the Farm Bureau, and the Department of Agriculture (Pickens County South Carolina n.d.:160). Based on the priorities developed by Pickens County in their Comprehensive Plan, the goals and objectives of this proposed ACEP would parallel those ACEP goals and objectives described by Upstate Forever (Upstate Forever n.d.). Upstate Forever still maintains its status as a legitimate Land Trust Accreditation Commission organization in 2020.

Healthy food retailer policy and programs.

A healthy food retailer program attempts to support small retail stores (corner stores, bodegas, rural markets) with the means to provide healthy food options to consumers (Fry et al. 2013:5). This support can come in the form of providing these small stores with funding for refrigeration, shelving, and installation. Each funding enhancement provided to the store is expected to be used to increase the stores capacity to sell healthy, nutrient-dense foods (vegetables, fruits, whole grains, nuts, seeds, beans, legumes, low-fat dairy products, lean meats, and seafood) (NC Healthy Food Small Retailer/Corner Store Act 2015). Funding support for these endeavors can come from public or private funds.
There are two important steps for developing the capacity of a series of healthy food retailers. The first is the development of policy, while the second is the development of the program itself. The policy is a law that dictates how governments and citizens operate, while the program is a system that is implemented by a government or nongovernmental organization to provide a service (in this case to enact the policy) (Fry et al. 2013:8). The following is an example of state-wide policy enacted to deliver a program to increase the food security of constituents.

In 2015, the North Carolina General Assembly passed House Bill 250 (NC Healthy Food Small Retailer/Corner Store Act 2015) that provided funding for a program that would help “small food” stores with their ability to sell fresh fruits, vegetables, and “nutrient dense foods” in food deserts. Food deserts, as defined by the USDA, are measured using census tracts. Food desert census tracts must be low-income and low access. Low-income refers to a census tract with the following criteria: a census tract where the poverty rate is at least 20% or; a census tract where the median family income is at most 80% of the state’s median family income or; a census tract where the median family income is at most 80% of the metropolitan area’s median family income (USDA 2019c). Low access refers to a census tract with the following criteria: a census tract where either 33% of the population or at least 500 people in the population are at least greater than half a mile “from the nearest supermarket, supercenter, or larger grocery store” in an urban area or are at least greater than 10 miles from said stores in a rural area (USDA 2019c).
This legislation was informally known as the “corner store initiative”, as its goal was to use a one-time, $250,000 funding initiative to fund the infrastructure to supply healthy food to small-scale stores in areas with limited healthy food access. The legislation, which was a one-time funding stream, was successful and generated the proposal of two similar bills in the NC House of Representatives (House Bill 387) (NC Corner Store Initiative 2017a) and the NC Senate (Senate Bill 498) (NC Healthy Food Small Retailer Program 2017b). These bills were developed in 2017 to provide continuous funding for small food stores to support their ability to sell healthy food products in low food access areas, particularly food deserts. The 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 NC General Assembly budgets included an additional $250,000 worth of funds (each) to continue the Healthy Food Small Retailer Program corner store initiative.

This program has been developed within and managed by the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (NCDA&CS). North Carolina retail stores receiving funds diverted from the NCDA&CS must fit the following criteria: located within a food desert; “Maximum 3,000 heated square feet”; for-profit business; the retail store must have not previously received Healthy Food Small Retailer Program funds; the retail store must accept SNAP and WIC benefits during their time as a funding recipient (North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services [NCDA&CS] n.d.).

The North Carolina Healthy Food Store Retail Program is a useful funding stream for retail stores state-wide. Increasing healthy food options for small stores in food deserts is a feasible option at the state level and could be implemented at the county level.
As of 2019, the Program is still in effect and adapting as necessary. For example, for technical reasons, the North Carolina Healthy Food Store Retail Program has recommended the following changes moving forward: allow annual funds allotted to stores to roll over to the next year, instead of reverting unused funds at the end of the fiscal year; and removing the WIC requirement as a prerequisite for each store's program eligibility (North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services 2019:30).

In summary, examples of the alteration of existing food system policy and the implementation of new food system policies to increase national and local food security can include the following: changes to the U.S. Farm Bill (Glaser 1986; Zulauf et al. 2013:2); the development of a county-wide food policy council (Dane County Food Council n.d.); federal support for farm-to-school practices (USDA 2009a); funding for agricultural conservation efforts (Pickens County SC n.d.:160; USDA 2009b; National Sustainable Agricultural Coalition 2019) combined with the development of a county-wide Agricultural Preserve Board (Lancaster County Pennsylvania 2020); and programmatic support for local, healthy food retailer services through state policy (NC Healthy Food Small Retailer/Corner Store Act 2015; NC Corner Store Initiative 2017a; NC Healthy Food Small Retailer Program 2017b). This brief list, and the literature review above, provide evidence of the real changes that can help to increase local, county, state, and national food security.
III. STUDY CONTEXT: PICKENS COUNTY, SC

In order to provide information about the broader context of this study, this section of the thesis will discuss three topics related to Pickens County, SC: general characteristics of the county; the presence of food insecurity in the county; and the current, as well as future, demographic situation of the area.

Pickens County, SC is an urban county in northwest South Carolina (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). Approximately 64% of Pickens County residents live in an urban environment (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). Although Pickens County is classified as urban, there are significant portions of the county that exhibit rural characteristics. These rural areas are specifically located in the northern part of the county, while the southern part of the county contains many of the county’s major population centers. These southern population centers include Easley, Clemson, Central, and Liberty. Pickens County, SC has three primary industrial sectors: agriculture, education, and manufacturing.

Agriculture is an economic driver in Pickens County, as 2017 crop sales totaled $3,728,000 (ranked 2,494 out of 3,073 U.S. counties) (Census of Agriculture 2017). Pickens County, SC also totaled $2,911,000 in livestock, poultry and product sales (ranked 2,636 out of 3,073 U.S. counties) in 2017 (Census of Agriculture 2017). Education is both an economic and cultural driver in Pickens County. This is considering the presence of a major, nationally recognized, research intensive institution in Clemson University. Clemson University, housed in southwest Pickens County, primarily draws student populations from across the east coast of the United States (Clemson University 2020). There are approximately one-hundred and thirty manufacturing plants in Pickens
County, based primarily in Easley, Liberty, and Pickens (Pickens County South Carolina 2020). In 2016, manufacturing jobs comprised 16% of the formal jobs in Pickens County, making the manufacturing sector the third largest employer in the county (Pickens County South Carolina 2020).

With a population of 126,884 (U.S. Census Bureau 2019), Pickens County, SC is a steadily growing urban area with adequate employment opportunities and education services. Three economic indicators to consider for Pickens County, SC include a 4.2% three-year unemployment rate (2016-2018); a $38,344 per capita market income (2017); and a four-year poverty rate of 17.5% (2014-2018) (Appalachian Regional Commission n.d.a). The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) provides a five-tier classification system for the economies of member counties. Counties are classified (in order from lowest economic status to highest economic status) as distressed; at-risk; transitional; competitive; and attainment. As of 2021, Pickens County, SC is classified as transitional with two census tracts within the county identified as distressed (Appalachian Regional Commission 2021). This classification should indicate that Pickens County is a stable, middle status economic county with growth potential.

Before discussing food insecurity in the local area, it should be noted that Pickens County, SC has a disparity in amenity access, specifically regarding public transportation. This is important to consider because access to public transportation can reduce local food insecurity, specifically for low-income and African-American households (Baek 2016:124). Through the Clemson Area Transit (CAT) bus system, the southwestern portion of Pickens County is provided with consistent and easy access to public
transportation. Unfortunately, the areas outside of Clemson, SC are devoid of public transportation access. For example, Easley, which is the largest urban area in Pickens County, has no public transportation system. As stated in the *City of Easley 2018-2020 Strategic Plan* (2018:14), Easley is aware of its “deficiency in alternative transportation modes”. Still, this is problematic when considering the presence of food insecurity in the county, as described in the following section, because public transportation is a useful infrastructure for reducing food insecurity.

**Food Insecurity in Pickens County, SC**

According to Feeding America, Pickens County’s 2018 food insecurity rate was approximately 10% (Feeding America 2020b). This means that about one in ten Pickens County, SC residents did not have access to food that provided for a healthy and active lifestyle. Ultimately, this thesis aims to address this problem. Fortunately, the Pickens County food insecurity rate is lower than that of the 2018 U.S. average (11.5%) (Feeding America 2020b) and the 2018 South Carolina average (11.8%) (Feeding America 2020b). Still, food insecurity is an issue Pickens County should continue to address as changes occur within the region.

**Demographic Changes in Pickens County, SC**

The issue of food insecurity within Pickens County, SC is partially examined within the context of a changing demographic situation in the Appalachian Region of South Carolina over the coming years. The Appalachian Region of South Carolina
includes Oconee, Pickens, Anderson, Greenville, Spartanburg, and Cherokee Counties (Appalachian Regional Commission n.d.b). According to the South Carolina Appalachian Council of Governments (SCACOG), Pickens County and neighboring counties are expected to grow in population size in the coming decades. Between 2015 and 2030, SCACOG projects that Pickens County, SC will increase its population by 9% (SCACOG 2016:13). SCACOG further anticipates that Pickens County’s three South Carolinian neighboring counties will increase their populations between 2015 and 2030 as well. These include Greenville County (30% population increase), Oconee County (15% population increase), and Anderson County (15% population increase) (SCACOG 2016:13).

It will be important to consider the problem of Pickens County, SC food insecurity in the context of continued regional population increases. The Malthusian Perspective postulates that as population increases, greater strains are placed on the capacity to produce (and subsequently equitably distribute) food (Weeks 2008:75). As the Appalachian Region of South Carolina increases its population, the localities within this region will be tasked with more efficiently producing and distributing food to a growing population. Although Pickens County, SC is not expected to grow at the rate of neighboring counties, Pickens County will be susceptible to the infrastructure growth and residual population growth experienced nearby.

The Piedmont ecoregion is a major growth area in the southern U.S., potentially affecting Pickens County, SC. This region includes the I-85 Corridor and the development of the “Charlanta” (i.e. Charlotte-Atlanta) megaregion. Ostensibly, the
Piedmont ecoregion and Charlanta megaregion are the same sources of growth, as they both parallel the U.S. Piedmont ecoregion between Atlanta, GA and Charlotte, NC. The I-85 Corridor is an interstate highway passing just south of Pickens County through Anderson County, SC, and passing east of Pickens County through Greenville, SC and Spartanburg, SC. This highway, developed in the middle of the 20th century, was dubbed “The Boom Belt” by Business Week magazine in 1993 due in part to its support of population and economic growth between Atlanta, GA and Charlotte, NC (U.S. Department of Transportation 2017). The Charlanta megaregion is a growing metropolitan region, with a projected urban expansion of 165% between 2009 and 2060 (Terando et al. 2014). Terando et al. (2014) note that the Charlanta megaregion will experience the “largest absolute change” in urbanicity based on urban change projections within the southeast U.S. between 2010 and 2060.

Considering the projected population growth of neighboring counties, the infrastructure capacity provided by the I-85 corridor, and the projected urban expansion of regional metropolitan areas, it is likely that Pickens County, SC will soon experience considerable population and economic growth. With this expected growth will come the opportunity to readdress local food distribution mechanisms in order to, at best, increase food security, and at a minimum maintain current food insecurity levels.
IV. METHODS

The literature review has provided an overview of programs and policies that have been developed to increase food security at the local, state, and national levels. By integrating the more theoretical components (e.g., local food systems and the state food security infrastructure) with conceptual applications (e.g., food policy councils and agricultural conservation easements) one can begin to understand how real-world policies and institutions can increase food security at the local, county, state, and national levels.

Moving on from the literature review, this section of the thesis describes the qualitative, case study design utilized for this thesis research, with the goal of better understanding and identifying various policies and programs that can potentially increase food security in Pickens County, SC. As described below, the study relied on several secondary data sources from previous studies and utilized primary data collection through in-depth interviews of key stakeholders in the food policy sector. These data sources include a mixed-methods study of hunger and food insecurity conducted in Pickens County, SC in 2019 (i.e., the UWPC study); a mixed-methods study of hunger and food insecurity conducted in Pickens County, SC in 2020 and early 2021 (i.e., the FIRST study); in-depth qualitative interviews conducted with key stakeholders in South Carolina in early 2021 (i.e., key informant interviews), and the construction of indices measuring census tract “insecurity” that include HUD and USDA statistical data. The following section describes how the data collected from these three research endeavors were analyzed in order to determine what institutional policies and programs can most effectively increase food insecurity in Pickens County, SC.
Secondary Data: UWPC Study and Data

This mixed-method study, formally titled *Hunger and Food Insecurity in Pickens County, 2019*, was conducted on behalf of the United Way of Pickens County (UWPC), which was interested in learning more about the extent of hunger and food insecurity in the county. The study was initially approved by the Clemson University Institutional Review Board (IRB) in Spring 2019.

This mixed-method study utilized the following data collection strategies:

- Key informant interviews with five individuals working for agencies that distribute food to residents facing hunger and food insecurity;
- In-depth interviews with seven low-income Pickens County residents who were facing food insecurity;
- Four focus groups with Pickens County residents/professionals working in health, education, agriculture, food distribution, government, and social services;
- Two-hundred surveys with low-income Pickens County residents; and
- Mapping analysis performed to identify Pickens County, SC demographics and socioeconomic data by census tract; low-income housing by census tract; bus routes; and SNAP-authorized vendors by census tract (Mobley et al. 2020:7-8).

Data collection for this project was completed between May 2019 and January 2020. The final report on study findings was presented to the community in February 2020 (Mobley et al. 2020).
Two hundred target population surveys were administered primarily to Pickens County residents. Although the goal was to administer the surveys to Pickens County residents exclusively, several residents from adjacent counties (Anderson, Greenville, and Oconee) also participated in the study. At the beginning of each target population survey, each participant was provided with a copy of the consent form. A copy of the consent form can be found in *Appendix A: UPWC Survey Consent Form*.

The research team administered target population surveys at ten sites (multiple sites were visited more than once; survey data collection was primarily my responsibility on the research team) including a church, a community center, the Pickens County DSS, Family Promise, a farmers’ market, a pharmacy, and two food assistance sites (Mobley et al. 2020). The target population was Pickens County residents over age eighteen. However, due to the nature of the survey administration sites, some demographic groups were over sampled (Females, African Americans, less educated residents, low-income residents). In total, females accounted for 70.9% of the survey population (Mobley et al. 2020:1-1). Whites (Caucasians) accounted for 70.6% of the survey population, and Blacks (African Americans) accounted for 22.7% of the survey population, while other ethnic and racial groups accounted for a combined 6.7% of the survey population (Mobley et al. 2020:1-1). A visual representation of these data is provided in Table 1 below:
Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Participants in the UWPC Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Characteristic</th>
<th>2019 UWPC (n)</th>
<th>2019 UWPC (%)</th>
<th>Pickens County, SC Demographics (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong> (County data from 2017 American Community Survey – ACS)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>70.9</td>
<td>49.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>50.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race/Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White/Caucasian</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>70.6</td>
<td>88.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
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<td>American Indian/Alaskan Native</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<td>Some other race</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more races</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hispanic/Latino Descent</strong></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Native Born</strong></td>
<td>193</td>
<td>96.5</td>
<td>96.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>English Primary Language</strong></td>
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<td>98.5</td>
<td>95.5</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>Education</strong> (County data from 2017 ACS for adults over 25)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Less than high school (no H.S. degree)</td>
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<tr>
<td>High school diploma or GED</td>
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<td>30.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college, no degree</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>20.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associates, 2-year technical school degree</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree and higher</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate or professional degree</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yearly Household Income</strong> (County data from 2017 ACS; income and benefits for 2017 dollars)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than $10,000</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$10,001-$14,999</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$15,000-$24,999</td>
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<td>18.6</td>
<td>12.5</td>
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<td>$25,000-$34,999</td>
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<td>15.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50,000-$74,999</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$75,000-$99,999</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100,000 or more</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>16.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong> (County data from 2017 American Community Survey)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

48
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>25.1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19 years old and younger</td>
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<td>N/A</td>
<td>25.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 to 24 years old</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 to 34 years old</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 to 44 years old</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>10.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44 to 54 years old</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 to 64 years old</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 years or older</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Employment Status (# of people in household, including respondent, working full-time)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment Status</th>
<th># of people in household</th>
<th>Working Full-Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>41.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>32.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 or more</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. N/A – No information is available for this unit of data.*

The target population survey was modeled after the *Mapping the Food Environment* survey (Ohio State University 2018) measuring food access and food insecurity. Survey questions addressed how individuals arrive at food sites, what food sites households frequent, what kitchen items households possess (the list is not exhaustive). Individuals received a $10 Walmart gift card incentive after they completed the survey. The survey can be found in *Appendix B: UWPC Target Population Survey on Hunger and Food Insecurity*.

Key informant interviews were conducted with individuals working to address food insecurity in a variety of capacities (managerial labor and/or manual labor). At the beginning of each key informant interview, focus group, and client interview, each participant was provided with a copy of the consent form. A copy of the consent form can be found in *Appendix C: UWPC Interview and Focus Group Consent Form*. Key informant interviews lasted between seventeen minutes and thirty minutes. One key informant interviewee received a $50 Walmart gift card (donated to their organization) to
honor their time in allowing our research team to administer surveys at their site – all other key informant interviewees did not receive payment. The key informant interview protocol can be found in Appendix D: UWPC Key Informant Interview Protocol.

Focus groups included between seven and fifteen individuals (food assistance agents, health professionals, legislators, Pickens County residents, religious leaders, farmers). Each focus group lasted between forty-five minutes and one hour each. The religious leader who organized the first focus group received a $50 Walmart gift card to honor their time in participating and organizing the first focus group. The focus group protocol can be found in Appendix E: UWPC Focus Group Interview Protocol.

In-depth interviews were conducted with seven individuals who were receiving food assistance or who had received food assistance in the recent past (at the time of the interview) – making them “clients” to food assistance programs (food pantries and government assistance). These study participants were identified through focus group contacts, key informant interview contacts, and the United Way of Pickens County (project funder). Client interviews lasted between seventeen minutes and forty-five minutes, and each interviewee received a $20 Walmart gift card as an incentive to participate. The client interview protocol can be found in Appendix F: UWPC Client Interview Protocol.

Clients, focus group attendees, and key informant interviewees were contacted through a list provided by the UWPC. Approximately fifty-five individuals and/or organizations were contacted and asked to participate in the study, producing seventeen responses and forty-one “clients”, focus group attendees, and “key informant”
interviewees. Attendees at the first focus group were not associated with the contact list and were contacted by a local religious leader. The seventeen individuals who were identified from the first list identified an additional fifty-five participants, because organizations referred multiple individuals (from agencies including: Family Promise of Pickens County; Pickens Adventist Community Center; Pickens County Department of Social Services [DSS]; Salvation Army of Pickens County; South Carolina House of Representatives; and the United Way of Pickens County).

**Secondary Data: FIRST Study and Data**

The second main secondary data source for this thesis was the Food Insecurity: Response, Solutions and Transformation (i.e., FIRST) project. This study, formally entitled, *Understanding How Variations in Policy Responses to COVID-19 and Social Context Influence How Families Prevent or Cope with Food Insecurity*, was conducted in collaboration with colleagues from North Carolina State University (NCSU). Funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF), the project included researchers from five universities from five different states (North Carolina, South Carolina, Mississippi, Michigan, and South Dakota) and included interviews with low-income residents from two counties in each state. Pickens County, SC was one of the two counties selected for the South Carolina portion of the project. A primary goal of this research was to identify the patterns of food insecurity for low-income households during the COVID-19 pandemic. This project was approved by the Clemson University IRB in Summer 2020.
The Pickens County, SC portion of the FIRST project ultimately included twenty-eight separate interviews that I conducted with sixteen low-income Pickens County residents who qualified based on the following criteria: the individual completes a majority of the household food work (food shopping, preparing meals, serving meals, cleaning meal areas/dishes); the individual has at least one child between the ages of five and eighteen years old; the individual’s household income is within 185% of poverty; and the individual lives in Pickens County, SC. Fifteen of the sixteen interviewees were female, with one male interviewee. These data suggest that the female population of Pickens County, SC was oversampled. Further, ten of the sixteen interviewees were White, with two Black interviewees, two biracial interviewees, and one Asian interviewee. These data suggest that the White population of Pickens County, SC was under-sampled and the Black and Asian populations of Pickens County, SC were oversampled. The FIRST respondents’ demographic characteristics are depicted in Table 2 below:
Table 2

Demographic Characteristics of Pickens County Participants in the FIRST Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Characteristic</th>
<th>2020 FIRST (n)</th>
<th>2020 FIRST (%)</th>
<th>Pickens County, SC Demographics (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong> (County data from 2017 American Community Survey – ACS)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>93.8</td>
<td>49.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>50.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race/Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White/Caucasian</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>88.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
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<td>12.5</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Alaskan Native</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some other race</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more races</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino Descent</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Born</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>93.8</td>
<td>96.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Primary Language</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>95.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong> (County data from 2017 ACS for adults over 25)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than high school (no H.S. degree)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school diploma or GED</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>30.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college, no degree</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>31.3</td>
<td>20.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associates, 2-year technical school degree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree and higher</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate or professional degree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* N/A – No information is available for this unit of data.

Once an interviewee was pre-screened, they were interviewed two times with each interview lasting no more than ninety minutes. Each interview had a separate guide associated with it, as interview one included ten open-ended questions on how the household has endured the COVID-19 pandemic. This included a forty-two-question closed-ended background survey at the end (administered by the interviewer). Interview
two included twenty open-ended questions that partially dealt with photos the interviewee had taken during their time between interview one and interview two. These photos add a “photovoice” qualitative element to the research.

Since the Clemson University research team worked in conjunction with NCSU on this project, NCSU funded the research incentives for each interviewee’s participation in the interviews ($25 per participant for each interview). As a member of the Clemson University research team, I was responsible for recruiting interviewees and administering interviews. I received interviewee contact information from Family Promise of Pickens County, two Pickens County food pantries, and the United Way of Pickens County. The mixed-methods protocols and consent form for the FIRST project can be found in the Appendices in the order they were presented to participants. These include Appendix G: FIRST Consent Form; Appendix H: FIRST Client Interview Protocol – Interview #1; Appendix I: FIRST Client Survey; and Appendix J: FIRST Client Interview Protocol – Interview #2.

**Primary Data: South Carolina Key Informant Interviews**

In order to complete a comprehensive case study of Pickens County, SC, it was necessary to learn more about the regional food environment with professionals working in disparate sections of the food system. Therefore, I initiated a data collection effort with key informants in South Carolina who were identified as having knowledge about food systems and food systems policies. I conducted five interviews, four with professionals in the Upstate of South Carolina, and one with a professional representing the entire state of

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South Carolina. I initially referenced four of the interviewees when discussing the context of prior research I had conducted on the South Carolina food system with the thesis committee members. For example, I had previously attended the presentation of one interviewee, and I had spoken with a separate interviewee during a previous focus group session. Through discussions with members of the thesis committee, these four individuals were then selected by the committee as individuals I should interview. An additional interviewee was then recommended by a member of the thesis committee. The inclusion criteria for these five interviewees was that they: (1) represent a formal organization within the South Carolina food system; and (2) are involved with their organization in a capacity so that their work is centered around improving or contributing to the South Carolina food system.

The five institutions represented in these interviews, as well as the names and titles of the interviewees, will remain anonymous. These organizations are briefly discussed below. The first organization is a local online food market dedicated to providing farmers with an online space to sell their products. In addition to food products, consumers are able to purchase locally made toiletries and household items that were produced by farmers and craftspeople in the Pickens County, SC area. The second organization is a state-wide food policy council representing South Carolina. This organization works with the regional and local food policy councils throughout South Carolina, and acts to consolidate food institutions within the state in order to expand state-wide food access. The third organization is an office within Clemson University that seeks to serve the community through research on agribusiness; agronomy; food safety;
horticulture; livestock; wildlife; and similar fields (Clemson Cooperative Extension 2021). The fourth organization was represented by a farm representative who works at a small farm in a neighboring county. The last interviewee represented an organization based in Greenville, SC, which is dedicated to protecting natural land through conservation efforts, such as land conservation easements. This organization primarily works in the Upstate region of South Carolina.

As can be determined by the organizations represented through these interviews, in total these 2021 South Carolina key informant interviews provided a perspective on the South Carolina food system. The first two steps of the food system, production and processing, were represented through discussions with the agribusiness representative, local farmer, and the agricultural conservation representative. The next step, distribution and marketing, was represented through a conversation with the local online food market representative. Further, the entire food system was (comprehensively) addressed through the state-wide food policy council representative, as the organization’s work involves the review of South Carolina legislation and data concerning food policy. These interviews were invaluable as the interviewees provided an essential perspective on different dimensions of the South Carolina food system and a comprehensive overview of the South Carolina food system.

These interviews were completed as an extension of the IRB approval from the FIRST project. However, a separate consent form was provided to participants (see Appendix K: South Carolina Key Informant Interviews Consent Form). The interview protocol contained approximately four major sections specifically pertaining to:
household food security; South Carolina communities; food-related policies; and concluding thoughts. These sections, in total, amounted to approximately eighteen open-ended questions. However, because of the nature of open-ended interviewing, the exact time of these interviews ranged from thirty-eight minutes to forty-nine minutes.

Each interview was tailored to the occupation of the interviewee (as these occupations varied somewhat between interviews). The interview protocol can be found in Appendix L: South Carolina Key Informant Interview Protocol. Because these interviews were guided heavily by the interview protocol, some themes consistently appeared simply because these questions were emphasized. There was not as much variation in substantive topics between interviews in the 2021 SC key informant interviews, as compared with interviews conducted for the UWPC study in 2019 and the FIRST study in 2020. However, the range of discussion on each substantive topic varied widely.

**Census Tract “Insecurity” Indices**

A food insecurity index is relatively simple, as it attempts to measure food insecurity in a given geographic location (typically a census tract) based on direct food insecurity measures and factors that are (theoretically) good predictors of food insecurity. Two studies have provided examples of how to construct a food insecurity index: a study of food insecurity in Detroit, MI (Data Driven Detroit 2017) and a study of food insecurity in Greenville, SC (Furman University 2020).
Although both studies constructed indices based on census tract data, each research endeavor used separate methodologies for defining the indexed factors. For example, the Detroit study sought to determine the likelihood of food insecurity by census tract through the following factors: “count and percentage of households with housing costs greater than 30% of household income”; “households with no vehicle”; “individuals with less than a high school diploma”; “the percentage or count of individuals in a tract with incomes less than $25,000 who moved in the past year”; “the percentage of land area in a tract more than one-quarter mile from a bus stop”; and “single-parent households” (Data Driven Detroit 2017). The Detroit study intentionally did not use direct food insecurity measures as this was a criterion they were tasked with when asked to conduct the research by a local food bank (Data Driven Detroit 2017).

Separately, the Greenville study sought to determine the likelihood of food insecurity by census tract through the following factors: “Number of single parent families”; “Number of households with no vehicle available”; “Number of individuals over the age of 25 with less than a high school diploma”; “Number of individuals with incomes of less than $25,000/year who moved within the last year”; and “Median Income” (Furman University 2020). The Greenville study did not use direct food insecurity measures because these data were not available (Furman University 2020).

Inspired by these two studies, I conducted research to determine the food insecurity status of Pickens County, SC. Although neither the Detroit nor Greenville studies incorporated direct food insecurity measures, I hoped to more accurately determine Pickens County, SC food insecurity by using direct food insecurity measures.
By combining Housing and Urban Development (HUD) data (Office of Policy Development and Research [PD&R] 2020) with Department of Agriculture data (Economic Research Service 2017), indices of food insecure census tracts throughout Pickens County, SC were determined. Using SPSS, indices of food insecurity were determined (by census tract) using one index variable measuring the housing security of each census tract and three index variables measuring the food insecurity of each census tract. The index variable measuring the housing insecurity of each census tract incorporated the following measurements:

- Housing Insecurity Index Variable #1 (possible score ranges from 0 to 3)
  - "percent of census tract that has 1 or more of the 4 housing unit problems (lacks kitchen or plumbing, more than 1 person per room, or cost burden greater than 30%)";
  - "percent of census tract that has 1 or more of the 4 severe housing problems (lacks kitchen or plumbing, more than 1 person per room, or cost burden greater than 50%)"; and
  - "percent of census tract that has household income is less than or equal to 30% of Housing Urban Development Median Family Income (HAMFI)"

The three index variables measuring the food insecurity of each census tract incorporated the following measurements:

- Food Insecurity Index Variable #1 (possible score ranges from 0 to 4)
  - “Low income and low access tract measured at 1 mile [low accessibility] for urban areas and 10 miles [low accessibility] for rural areas”;
o “Low income and low access tract measured at 1/2 mile [low accessibility] for urban areas and 10 miles [low accessibility] for rural areas”; 

o “Low income and low access tract measured at 1 mile [low accessibility] for urban areas and 20 miles [low accessibility] for rural areas”; and 

o “Low income and low access tract using vehicle access or low income and low access tract measured at 20 miles [low accessibility]”

• Food Insecurity Index Variable #2 (possible score ranges from 0 to 8)
  o “Low access, low-income population at 1/2 mile [from supermarket], share”;
  o “Low access, children age 0-17 at 1/2 mile [from supermarket], share”; 
  o “Low access, seniors age 65+ at 1/2 mile [from supermarket], share”; 
  o “Low access, White population at 1/2 mile [from supermarket], share”; 
  o “Low access, Black or African American population at 1/2 mile [from supermarket], share”; 
  o “Vehicle access, housing units without and low access at 1/2 mile [from supermarket], share”; 
  o “Low access, housing units receiving SNAP benefits at 1/2 mile [from supermarket], share”; and
  o “Tract poverty rate”

• Food Insecurity Index Variable #3 (possible score ranges from 0 to 8)
  o “Low access, low-income population at 1 mile [from supermarket], share”;
“Low access, children age 0-17 at 1 mile [from supermarket], share”;
“Low access, seniors age 65+ at 1 mile [from supermarket], share”;
“Low access, White population at 1 mile [from supermarket], share”;
“Low access, Black or African American population at 1 mile [from supermarket], share”;
“Vehicle access, housing units without and low access at 1 mile [from supermarket], share”;
“Low access, housing units receiving SNAP benefits at 1 mile [from supermarket], share”; and
“Tract poverty rate”

Once each variable was indexed to represent the combined effects of each measure (each measure equals “one” arbitrary unit of housing or food insecurity), the value of each variable was measured. The census tract representing each index variable was identified as an “insecure” census tract if it met the following conditions: the housing insecurity index variable was equal to three and at least two out of the three food insecurity index variables were equal to four or greater.

To index the food insecurity of Pickens County, SC by census tract, it seemed useful to incorporate concepts similar to those incorporated by the Detroit and Greenville studies. These concepts include the measurement of housing affordability, income, and access to transportation. The methods for developing a food insecurity index for Pickens County, SC were inspired by the Detroit and Greenville studies, but the methods in this thesis did not exactly replicate those methods used by the Detroit and Greenville studies.
This study expands the analysis conducted for these two studies by incorporating direct food insecurity measures in the indices. The Detroit and Greenville studies did not incorporate direct food insecurity measures because they (respectively) were tasked with not using direct food insecurity measures, or the data were not available.

Further, it should be noted that Detroit, MI and Greenville, SC are cities (urban areas). These are urban areas with many census tracts located within a relatively small geographic region (i.e., higher population density). Pickens County, SC, on the other hand, is a semi-urban county with few census tracts within a relatively large geographic region (i.e., lower population density). Although these separate characteristics may not immediately affect what can be considered as an indirect measure of food insecurity (housing, education, public transportation, and income) or a direct measure of food insecurity (low access to food sites), the experiential differences between food insecurity in an urban setting and a semi-urban (partially rural) setting are significant. For example, walking to food sites is not an option in many rural settings (especially in inclement weather). The understanding that low food access is different between urban and rural areas is reinforced in the definition of food access: “Low access tract at 1 mile for urban areas and 10 miles for rural areas” (Economic Research Service 2017). Therefore, although a food insecurity index was developed for Pickens County based on those developed in Detroit and Greenville, no comparisons should be made between food insecurity in the separate locations.
Qualitative Data Analysis

The primary data analysis method employed to review these multi-year, mixed-methods data was qualitative analysis. All three data-sets included qualitative information. Bhattacharya (2017:19) notes qualitative research methods attempt to address depth, while quantitative research methods attempt to address range. Qualitative research methods incorporate epistemology and theory to “deconstruct” and “interrogate” (Bhattacharya 2017:18-19) and acknowledges research reflexivity and researcher subjectivities (Bhattacharya 2017:36). These attributes contrast with quantitative research method attributes, which incorporate “reliability” and “validity” to “generalize” data (Bhattacharya 2017:18-19) and attempt to maintain researcher objectivity.

The method of grounded theory is often used to analyze qualitative data. The grounded theory method is unique because it integrates data analysis and data collection (Corbin and Strauss 1990:6). The grounded theory methodological approach suggests coding can begin while continuing to collect data. For example, an initial focus group is coded, and the following focus groups are shaped by these codes. This process allows the researcher to construct “emerging” data because codes emerge with data collection, not following data collection. Grounded theory considers three coding types: (1) axial coding – constructing a category and defining this category with subcategories (primary category is axis) (Corbin and Strauss 1990:13); (2) open coding – data develops categories and categories develop subcategories (coding is subjective) (Corbin and Strauss 1990:12); and (3) selective coding – categories develop around a “core” category (categories develop subjectively) (Corbin and Strauss 1990:14).
To review qualitative data (key informant interviews, client interviews, and focus groups), grounded theory methodology was employed to determine what the greatest and most common codes were in each qualitative session. Data were reviewed through a combination of axial coding and open coding, whereas a central code is developed for each concept and this concept is then linked to several other concepts (or subcategories) throughout the analysis process. Further, some data was being coded as some data was being collected. This was intentional and allowed for an iterative learning process through data collection. For example, as some interviews were being coded, a new interview protocol was being developed to conduct additional interviews. The coding from the previously conducted UWPC interviews was used to inform the interview protocol for additional interviews.

Ultimately, five qualitative data collection coding groups were created for further analysis: 2019 UWPC client interview codes; 2019 UWPC focus group codes; 2019 UWPC key informant interview codes; 2020 FIRST interview codes; and 2021 South Carolina key informant interview codes. In each coding group, the audio recording and physical transcripts were reviewed, with important codes being selected at various points throughout each conversation. It should be noted that through the research and analysis process, the terms “code” and “theme” are not used interchangeably. In this thesis, a code refers to the discussion topic identified for its emphasis and frequency (“incarceration”; “mobile market”; “second job”). Codes specifically refer to a concept or discussion topic identified by a word or a phrase. Themes, however, refer to the broader analysis of one or
more codes. For example, whereas “government support” and “financial” are independent
codes, poverty is a theme used to interpret their relationship with one another.

After codes and themes were identified, I calculated the number of times each
code was mentioned in each data collection session to arrive at the frequencies for each.
Each 2019 UWPC qualitative data session was then combined to represent one “2019
UWPC” qualitative data-set. Further, the results for all three data-sets were compiled and
are shown in Table 3 below, listed in descending order of the frequency that they were
mentioned across all three data-sets. I decided to list Table 3 in descending order so as to
easily identify those topics that were discussed the most often throughout the three data-
sets. A corresponding codebook defining each code or providing a context in which the
code is identified can be found in Appendix M: Qualitative Data Codebook.
Table 3

Qualitative Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code (all interpretations within the data)</th>
<th>2019 UWPC Study</th>
<th>2020 FIRST Study</th>
<th>2021 SC KI Interviews</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food Strategies (Eating Habits; Food Preparation)</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistance (Government Support)</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>94</td>
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<td>Income (Financial)</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>88</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>85</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>73</td>
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<tr>
<td>Food Access</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith Based Organization</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Resource (Food)</strong></td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Pantry (Food Bank; Soup Kitchen)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Policy Council (Hunger Coalition)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Production (Food Subsistence)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Area (Service Provision)</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>34</td>
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<tr>
<td>Food Distribution (Golden Harvest)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile Market (Pickens Mobile Market)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Shopping</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Quality</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Routine</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childcare (Daycare)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Criteria for Receiving Agency Resources</strong></td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggestions (Future Contacts; Future Concerns)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Labor</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Support</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Local” Definition</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Zero indicates that the code was not coded for in the corresponding qualitative data (this does not indicate that the topic was not discussed). A zero value likely indicates that the code was not coded for within the specific data-set.

**Note. Italicized rows were considered to be “resource-related codes” (codes pertaining to food and supply resources).

***Note. The codes included in this table only represent those codes that were counted more than ten times. In total, forty-three separate codes were identified.
V. RESULTS

In the context of the research question: “what types of food system policies and programs could best help to promote food security in Pickens County, SC?”, several themes emerged that could provide context for what is important to answer the research question. These themes emerged through the analysis of forty-five separate interviews and four separate focus groups across three distinct data-sets. Due to the amount of qualitative data available, it was necessary to focus on codes that were consistent and emphasized throughout the data. However, the focus on themes was more flexible, as some themes emerged from only one qualitative data session but were emphasized enough to warrant inclusion in the results and discussion of this study. These themes included the centralization of local public assistance efforts and the disparity in the manner in which state-wide actors view food systems as compared with local actors. The sections below discuss the study results, organized by each individual data source.

Results from the UWPC Study

Qualitative research from the 2019 UWPC study garnered substantial information, as data were available from four focus groups, five interviews with key informants, and six interviews with low-income residents. Three noteworthy themes that came from these qualitative data, including the experiences of those food insecure residents and the means they use to access food, the decentralized nature of Pickens County’s food assistance efforts, and the lack of consistent public transportation throughout Pickens County, SC.
These themes are discussed below, with some supporting literature to contextualize their significance.

*The intersection of “food access”, “assistance”, “income”, and “food strategies”.*

The most common codes in the interviews with the community members interviewed as a part of the 2019 UWPC study were “[food] access”, “food strategies”, “assistance”, and “income”. These suggest that food insecure individuals are aware of how they will find their next meal, prepare their next meal, and how they will purchase or receive it. This was the case for individuals who led a household with children and for those who lived alone. If an individual was food insecure, they were acutely aware of the factors that led them to (or led them to not) eat food that day. Typically, these factors were financial, as food pantries and SNAP benefits were a common method of acquiring one’s daily food. An example of one interviewee’s source of food is described as follows: “then there is a 5 Point food bank you go twice a month and usually, that’s, that way usually gets me by”; “I haven’t been able to afford grocery shopping in a while”.

Further, through the 2019 key informant interviews, I learned that low-income Pickens County residents would at times “shop” between food pantries. This means that low-income residents would know when certain food pantries were open, so as to access multiple food pantries in the same week. As expressed by one key informant:

“A lot of it [how long food pantry consumers will linger at a particular food pantry] depends on when the other pantries open. Now we have one there in the area that, they don’t have regular hours like we do. We open right at 8:30 every
Tuesday morning. They may open 9:30 maybe they open at 10 o’clock maybe, yes, whenever, and so the people in line over there, they get their food and then they’ll come rushing to the other one and we’ll get a, a mob of people. Well they may be in the line more than thirty minutes then… But we try to move food just as fast as we possibly can to get them out because we know that, well other people have said ‘I got to get to the next pantry and I’m waiting in line too long here.’ They’ve told me that already.” (Pickens County, SC food pantry management representative)

These comments exemplify a culmination of the access, assistance, income and strategy codes. By theoretically combining these codes, a household’s food situation can be discerned. For example, due to limited income, individuals must use alternative food strategies such as food assistance (a food pantry) to consistently access food.

An additional example of an individual “shopping” through food pantries illustrates the needs of food insecure households:

“this past, past Wednesday I went to United Christian Ministry, then next, then Thursday I went to the food bank down there, you know and whatever they get you know I just try to make do, you know or it's a little bit of this and a little bit of that that I'll mix it up and you know I'll try to, you know allowance it out in small portions you know and just nibble on you know I mean I'll mix, it ain't really nothing like you would have in a restaurant I just mix, as long as I can eat some, some, some stuff you know rice, you know, or, or dried beans and canned, canned goods you know a lot of people just don't even care about canned goods but
canned goods are you know you can live off of it you know I'm not above eating out of a can" (Easley, SC resident)

This individual, who prior to this interview had been homeless, describes their use of food assistance and food strategies to sustain themselves. As was discussed in the interview, this individual will typically walk to the food bank (and as is suggested above they will go to multiple food banks at separate times during the week) and prepare the food in a manner so as to save it for as long as possible. Again, this quote addresses the vulnerabilities that have been identified most frequently through the qualitative data: food access, assistance, income, and food strategies.

When a household is in this situation, where resources (access and income) are limited and strategies such as seeking outside food assistance must be employed, households are at risk of two unfortunate circumstances: poverty and food insufficiency (Ribar and Hamrick 2003:5). Once individuals and households enter into the cycle of poverty and food insufficiency, it is difficult for them to leave the cycle. For example, Ribar and Hamrick (2003:21) note that food insufficient households in 1994 and 1995 were ten times more likely to be food insufficient in 1997 than households that were not previously food insufficient. This is concerning as it is potentially likely that many of these individuals interviewed in 2019 for the UWPC study are still food insecure.

It is important to interpret the context of food insecurity from the lived experience, as was done through qualitative discussions with food insecure households. Interpreting the daily experience of “access”, “assistance”, “income”, and “strategies” is
relevant to the research question because these are the experiences potential answers to the research question would hope to mitigate.

The presence of a decentralized Pickens County, SC food system.

Based on interviews and focus groups with experts working in local food assistance (among other professions), I found that several organizations in Pickens County are dedicated to supporting low-income populations. This support includes, but is not limited to, increasing food security by providing low-income residents with access to food options. This assistance can come in the form of direct food offered to low-income residents, as well as housing and financial support offered to low-income residents.

Direct food assistance (in the form of providing food items and meals to low-income populations) is typically provided by a food pantry. However, locations that refer to themselves as feeding programs and food banks can offer similar services. Through the 2019 UWPC study, I determined that there are approximately twenty-two separate organizations (churches, non-profit organizations, and government organizations) that offer these emergency food services in Pickens County, SC. Services where food is directly transferred from the organization to the individual.

Problematically, however, I found that while these organizations are connected to one another in various ways, the food assistance system is not centralized. This means that numerous Pickens County, SC organizations (food pantries, food banks, feeding sites, Family Promise, United Way, government agencies, churches) address similar, if not the same needs, and will at times even compete to address these needs.
Barman (2002:1194) identifies this process as differentiation. The process of differentiation is evident in the food assistance/low-income assistance fields of Pickens County’s non-profit sector. As Barman suggests, through the differentiation process, these agencies will exert their unique characteristics in relation to similar agencies that perform ostensibly the same function (Barman 2002:1194). In the case of Pickens County, this comes in the form of an agency strictly identifying as a faith-based organization/not a faith-based organization; or determining territorial access to certain populations based on an agency’s physical location (in some cases due to standards imposed upon them by authorities such as government and food banks). For example, the manager of a local soup kitchen expressed the following sentiment:

“[we are] very closely intertwined with 5 Point [food pantry] because we do a lot of sharing of resources we do a lot of sharing of canned goods we donate to each other we actually share a truck that is owned by the Dream Center to pick up certain donations. Whether it be from several grocers in the area. [we have] a good relationship with Publix, Easley Walmart, BI-LO of Easley. So those are good relationships that [we have] cultivated with these other agencies and the majority of the products that we get are donated from local grocery stores.”

(Pickens County, SC soup kitchen management representative)

Although the comments suggest that the soup kitchen consistently shares resources with separate assistance providers (agencies), this soup kitchen considers itself to be independent from local agencies conducting (ostensibly) the same work. It appears that the soup kitchen has differentiated itself from separate local food assistance agencies. As
Pothukuchi and Kaufman (1999:218) note, the “piecemeal” separation of powers between food assistance providers may not be the most effective food system method. As Pickens County, SC continues to urbanize, it may be best for the local area to centralize these disparate food assistance efforts.

This interpretation of study results is not meant to comment on the character of the agencies/professionals working in Pickens County, SC. It is wholly a (selfless) positive act for the representatives of Pickens County’s non-profit sector to choose to come together for interviews and focus groups (engaging in, at a minimum, forty-five-minute discussions on increasing Pickens County, SC food security). Instead, this is a comment on the decentralized organizational model of Pickens County’s non-profit sector, particularly the agencies that work to reduce food insecurity/support low-income populations.

Barman (2002) suggests that non-profit agencies may be likely to perform the differentiation process when faced with competition that could lead to decreased funding. Differentiation occurs in the form of asserting uniqueness so that an agency will have an advantage to claiming increasingly scarce resources (Barman 2002:1214). The manager of a large food pantry suggested this could be the case in Pickens County:

“What I have found in my own experience, pride gets in the way and so on some of the more well-known churches that have larger congregations that really could in my opinion financially and volunteer wise contribute, they don’t because they’re name is not tied to it. So, if you have church ABC, and church ABC is not going to be given some kind of recognition that they’re helping, they won’t
necessarily help. It comes down to pride.” (Pickens County, SC food pantry management representative)

Competition between non-profit service providers is not a factor that Bartfeld and Dunifon (2006) suggested will contribute to the state food security infrastructure. It may be beneficial for these separate organizations to centralize in order to develop a unified resistance to food insecurity.

The notion of territorial differences between public assistance institutions was apparent in the 2019 interviews with key informants. Thematic coding revealed that during the 2019 UWPC key informant interviews, the discussions of a “service area” was the second most common code. Statements made by key informants, typically those affiliated with service provision agencies, described clients using their facilities in a possessive manner. Frequently, the food distribution center that the interviewee managed was referred to as “we” and “us”, the clients being served were referred to as “our”, and separate food distribution centers were referred to as “they” and “them”.

The concept of territoriality was explicitly expressed as some distribution centers have developed artificial service boundaries around political borders. The manager of a large food pantry said: “we have to verify that you live within Pickens County if you live in Oconee County or Greenville County we can’t help you because there are other food pantries there.” The manager of a separate food distribution site stated: “we are located in Easley; we serve all of Pickens County with the exception of Central and Clemson residents”. Although this manager (the individual most recently quoted) suggested that they are consistently in contact with other food distribution sites and that they work well
with other sites throughout the county, the statement suggests that the Pickens County food security infrastructure has not achieved the level of centrality that may be necessary to further reduce local food insecurity.

*The need for public transportation.*

Another significant theme to emerge from the qualitative analysis is related to transportation. As revealed from a “bus audit” conducted as a part of the UWPC study, the southwestern portion of Pickens County (primarily Clemson and Central) has efficient access to public transportation that is free to the public and regularly stops at food sites and housing complexes. Clemson University, and the student housing surrounding Clemson City and Central, are contributors to the development and maintenance of the Clemson Area Transit (CAT) bus system. This is why the southwestern portion of Pickens County has public transportation access and the rest of Pickens County does not.

The issue of a lack of bus access was discussed throughout the 2019 UWPC qualitative research. For example, a participant in a focus group mentioned that without access to “reliable transportation”, individuals are simply more likely to experience poverty and hunger. Similar sentiments were expressed regarding the need for the expansion of public transportation in Pickens County, SC:

“Some people for whatever reason don’t have driver’s license or cars and they still should be allowed to go to church, or go to the park or whatever. We need a
area or county-wide bus which should just run from phone call to phone call.”

(Pickens County, SC resident)

This statement was followed in the focus group by two equally concerning statements. One, suggesting that “there is no transportation in the city limits of Pickens.” The other was a sarcastic quip stating that a report produced by this Clemson University research team would be helpful “If you can get that CAT bus to come up this way.” There was noticeable tension during this focus group surrounding the discussion of public transportation in Pickens County, SC. This is primarily because this focus group took place near Pumpkintown, SC, a region in northern Pickens County that is typically isolated from the southern portion.

Local, low-income residents also discussed the issue of transportation from personal understanding and experience. A resident who had experienced homelessness without transportation, but who had access to their own car at the time of the interview, said:

“I don’t see how people will survive you know like without a car especially here I mean there’s no public transportation here like I honestly I don’t believe they can make it I mean it, it would be extremely hard because I don’t have, I mean I have family but like I don’t have no help it’s just me and my kids.”

(Easley, SC resident)

Unfortunately, the obvious response to a lack of transportation for residents is as follows: "I was without a car in one area and there was no nearby grocery store all we had was like a little gas station and that's so like a little convenient store that sold
Ramen Noodles and what not and I had to walk there and walk back” (Anderson County, SC resident)

The topic of transportation will appear again in this thesis, as the data suggest that increased access to public transportation could be a legitimate method to reduce Pickens County, SC food insecurity. However, before transitioning to the next section, the following quote emphasizes the severity of a lack of transportation access in Pickens County, SC:

“We have a tremendous lack of public transportation in Pickens County and it’s been that way for the thirty years of my career, and I would love to see something done about it before I retire.” (Easley, SC service provider)

**Results from the FIRST Study**

When reviewing data collected from low-income Pickens County households during the COVID-19 pandemic, it was important to consider that this thesis is not focused on the COVID-19 pandemic and the extreme pressures it has placed on society. Having said that, there is really no way to separate out these extreme pressures from one’s daily life between 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

As discussed previously, COVID-19 profoundly affected many aspects of life in the U.S. between 2020 and 2021, including food insecurity. For example, “routine” was the third most common code identified through the 2020 FIRST interviews. This code represented changes to household routines that had occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic forced children to stay at home due to school
closures, which pressured parents to provide childcare constantly. Although this was not a pressure directly related to food insecurity, it emphasized the seriousness with which low-income households suffered during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Because the goal of the FIRST interviews was primarily to understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on low-income households, it is important to again refer to the food insecurity data presented in the literature review. That is, food insecurity rates throughout the U.S. immediately increased following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (Feeding America 2021). As revealed below, the increase in food insecurity was discussed during FIRST interviews as interviewees shared their lived experiences with challenges in obtaining food. The three themes to emerge included: the manner in which respondents experienced poverty through limited income and government support; participant interest in joining a food policy council, if invited; and food access through the Pickens County, SC school district during the COVID-19 pandemic.

*Poverty: Finances and government support.*

Regarding food insecurity, the most common codes that households presented in the 2020 FIRST interviews were financial. Similar to comments made by food insecure individuals through the 2019 UWPC client interviews, Table 3 shows that “government support” and “financial” were two of the most frequently discussed topics in all of the qualitative data. Through interviews with individuals during the COVID-19 pandemic, it was clear that many low-income households, whether they had previously used government assistance or not, were turning to government assistance for financial
support. Individuals discussed unexpected job loss, homelessness, family moving in with them, and an inability to find some food items at their grocers. Although contextually the discussions of “government support” were similar to the discussions of “assistance” from previous interviews, and contextually the discussions of “financial” were similar to the discussions of “income” from previous interviews, the total number of individuals experiencing food insecurity has increased.

Again, these experiences appear to be similar to Ribar and Hamrick’s (2003:5) adaptation of the theoretical model of poverty, to suggest that a household’s food security capacity is really only connected with “short term economic factors”. If a crisis occurs, and an individual in the household loses employment and must wait an undisclosed amount of time for social assistance, they are at an increased risk of immediate food insecurity. This scenario indeed occurred in 2020 with some of the households our research team spoke with:

“I didn’t have money for food. At the time I didn’t even get food. I didn’t have food stamps, so I was trying.... I had to try to get money for food. Even though the shelter said it would help me if I needed help, because that’s how I got in the shelter, because of the pandemic was going on and I needed financial help. Because I had the children, yeah it affected that, because the prices were so much higher. Everything went up.” (Pickens, SC resident)

This individual, although in a stable situation during our interview, was homeless fewer than twelve months prior. Their lack of immediate finances led to short term food insecurity. Again, this situation is confirmed by the literature, as Ribar and Hamrick
(2003:21) suggest that when an impoverished household has access to savings and can borrow money, they can avoid food insufficiency (while remaining in a state of poverty).

Another interviewee discussed their difficulties with short term finances. Again, the following interviewee’s household appeared to be on the brink of poverty and food insecurity, as their household had experienced unemployment, homelessness, and had visited food pantries prior to our conversation:

“before the [COVID-19] pandemic I was cleaning two houses a day. Now I'm barely cleaning any houses a day every day. It turns out that right there was supposed to be money to pay my bills. But when the boys are not in school and trying to find a babysitter that doesn't have kids homeschooling it's very hard because I'm sitting here trying to juggle what bills am I going to pay this month, what groceries am I going to buy this month. Because if you go to Ingles [grocer] you could walk out of Ingles spending $100 and you don't get nothing. Well so right before the pandemic happened I was trying to get my business license. But now that's folding, and I couldn't get my business license. So now I'm trying to get back to work. But once again if I go back to work who's going to watch my children?” (Pickens, SC resident)

The circumstance of short term financial difficulties left these participants in situations where they could not afford immediate needs. Due to these circumstances, the participant’s financial pressures can be seen in their spending habits. All aspects of the participant’s budget are affected by financial pressures, including food, rent, electricity,
and even a babysitter to watch their children. Again, these circumstances have been
directly influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic.

These circumstances were exacerbated by the need for government support. When
reviewing these interviews, it became clear that the reliance on government support was
substantial. In this case, government support ranges from increased SNAP and
unemployment benefits, to summer meals provided by the Pickens County School
District. Government support was referenced in some manner at least once through every
2020 FIRST interview (all twenty-eight). Government support was the most common
code throughout the 2020 FIRST interviews, and the reason was likely in part because
government support provided some of these households with the means to continue as
functioning units. With the means to offset immediate food insecurity through short term
funds (SNAP, unemployment, WIC, disability). Unfortunately, when completing the
interviews, it was not clear how some of these households were to survive as functioning
units without government support.

Again, it is important to contextualize the research question by interpreting the
lived experiences of those food insecure households and individuals. The manner in
which these households experience poverty, and whether poverty leads to or does not
lead to immediate food insecurity, is relevant to the research question because it can help
to identify (based on savings and capacity to borrow) how much time a low-income
household has before food insecurity sets in. For example, the following household
indicated that through savings they can manage with a stipend and relatively low-income:
“It's very tight budget, because we have to pay electricity, apartment rent, and electricity, water, utility, something like that, and some insurance for our kids and our car. So basically, it's very tight… Yeah, we need if I can mention a more appropriate number of stipend who it's break even, we can say like that, maybe $1,600 it's better. But yeah, we have to take our savings from Indonesia. I think at least $100 to $200 per month.” (Clemson, SC resident)

This household includes one adult income earner, one adult receiving a student stipend, and two children. Their budget, as stated, is “very tight”. However, they are able to maintain a food secure lifestyle through savings accumulated from previous employment in their home country.

Inclination of FIRST participants to join a food policy council if invited

Toward the end of the second interview, interviewees from the FIRST project were asked questions about food policy councils. First, they were asked whether they knew what a food policy council was. If an interviewee indicated that they did not know what a food policy council was, or had interest in learning more, they were provided with a brief definition. After reviewing what a food policy council was, interviewees were then asked if they would join a food policy council if invited. Of the eleven interviewees who were directly asked this question, eight indicated that they would be interested in joining a food policy council if invited.

Some affirmative responses to the question were relatively passive, with one individual saying: “Maybe…Yeah [I would join a food policy council if invited]… I
mean I don't see a reason why I should feel uncomfortable.” However, some interviewees seemed encouraged by the prospect of joining a food policy council:

“Because I've seen the importance of it. And especially since I'm a nurse, and I work at the school, I know how important nutrition is for children and adults alike. And just to hear the few stories that I heard about the kids that just were so grateful for the food that the school was providing. I think it would help.”

(Liberty, SC resident)

This interviewee, who was a local nurse, was interested in joining a food policy council because they understand the value of food quality and how it can affect lives. This sentiment was shared by another interviewee who was interested in joining a food policy council if invited:

“Because I think as far as GMI's and stuff that's in the food, some of it can be... I don't think some of it should be in the food. I think the food should be more natural without a lot of the ingredients that they put in it.” (Pickens, SC resident)

Again, this interviewee recognized the value of quality food, and suggested that they are willing to at least join a group dedicated to affecting the availability of quality food.

Of the eleven individuals who were asked whether they would join a food policy council if invited, two indicated they would not, and one did not provide a yes or no response. These individuals each provided a separate reason, but a local nurse provided a reason that may be considered noteworthy:

“Because I don't know if I just don't feel qualified to talk about stuff like that. I mean, I'm not a farmer. I mean, if we're talking about diets as a nurse, well, I've
got patients who have cardiac diets or diabetic diets or things like that. But as far as actually making policies related to those types of things, I'm not sure I'd be very good at it.” (Liberty, SC resident)

This individual indicated they did not feel comfortable discussing these issues with a larger group and making meaningful decisions. Interestingly, this respondent was one of the few interviewees from the FIRST project who was a professional in a specific field, however, they were the only respondent to suggest that they may not be qualified to join a food policy council.

It was important to include this question in the 2020 FIRST interviews, because the question attempts to assess the interest low-income Pickens County residents might have in food policy council participation. The literature on food policy councils does not directly suggest that low-income residents would (or should) join these efforts. For example, Conner and Levine (2007:14) note that food policy councils include “a broad array of stakeholders”. Further, Pothukuchi and Kaufman (1999:220) provide a vague interpretation by stating that food policy councils are “the closest thing” to comprehensive local food efforts. Even though many low-income individuals in the 2020 FIRST interviews showed interest when asked if they would join a food policy council if invited, the literature does not exactly suggest that a typical food policy council would welcome their input.

To address the research question, it is important to consider whether food insecure residents in Pickens County, SC would be interested in joining a food policy council. Further, it may be important to consider whether a local food policy council would be
more effective at reducing food insecurity by including local food insecure residents, or by not including local food insecure residents.

_The Pickens County, SC School District._

Another code to emerge from analysis of the 2020 FIRST interviews (coded in Table 3 under “government support”) was the provision of summer meals to Pickens County residents, through the Pickens County School District. These summer meals were provided by the Pickens County School District throughout Summer 2020, due to anticipation that households would be struggling financially due to the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent economic decline. Based on interview data, it is suggested that these meals were provided to households in two ways: the household would have to drive to the school to pick up their meal; or a bus with meals would drive to each bus stop and provide meals for parents and children waiting at their regular bus stops. These school district feeding efforts continued into Fall 2020 to support the local population.

“The school districts here are doing two meals a day for I think it's everybody under 18, whether you're a ... What's the word? Whether you're a student or not in their district, as long as you're under 18, they'll provide those two meals a day. So, at first, we would do our e-learning, and we would hop in the car, and we would go get their little meals for the day. But we've kind of stopped doing that now… Our district is doing ... They do have school bus drop-off, but the way we were doing it was actually going to the school and picking it up.” (Liberty, SC resident)
Participants varied on their opinion of the food quality, but all participants seemed to appreciate the gesture by the school district:

“Most of the food from the school bus that time, we can eat it. Our children can eat it. Like a burger, like a hotdog, and some breakfast stuff like cereals. But sometimes when there is a kind of food which our children don’t like, sometimes we offer to our neighbor who have kids, yeah, if they like it we just get it.”

(Clemson, SC resident)

This is a direct example of the Pickens County School District supporting the state food security infrastructure, as discussed by Bartfeld and Dunifon (2006). As discussed in the literature review, Bartfeld and Dunifon (2006:924) note that “School Breakfast and Lunch programs, and summer food programs” provided by local schools are important for many students to eat. These programs are an integral part of Federal Nutrition Assistance, and a component of the state food security infrastructure at the community level. This fact is supported by the data, as interview responses suggest that it was important for the county to act in this manner during a crisis. This topic is further discussed in the next section through a separate example of the Oconee County, SC School District responding to the COVID-19 pandemic through a similar feeding program.

Results from 2021 South Carolina Key Informant Interviews

The last data series collected included five interviews with representatives from various sectors of the South Carolina food system. These interviews were coded similarly
to the previous data-sets, with codes selected from a grounded theory approach. Due to the fact that these interviews were the last to be conducted, much of the previous data had been reviewed when the interview protocol for these data were being developed. Through an iterative process, these data were collected with a greater understanding of the food insecurity status within Pickens County, SC. Really, the iterative process allowed these interviews to be quite useful, as interviews could flow more like conversations between comparable experts of separate fields.

*The Potential Role of School Districts in Addressing Food Insecurity.*

Two concepts to begin with when discussing the 2021 SC key informant interviews include both an example of the state food security infrastructure at work (similar to the example above) and the mention of farm-to-school activities in Oconee County, SC:

“[The school district is] a major player in food insecurity right now in the county because of the pandemic and because of what they were able to put together for families over the past year. They are probably the leaders in that, which is so crazy to say. I would put them up there.” (local farmer)

This interviewee is suggesting that because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Oconee County School District has provided food for local residents. As mentioned above, the Pickens County School District conducted similar work during 2020 and based on interviews with low-income residents this was a useful strategy to get food to households. The previously quoted representative followed their comments with the statement:
“I think they [Oconee County School District] have done a fantastic job of stepping up to the plate because they realized no one else was doing it and that the kids are going to go hungry if they weren't at school. I haven't been a participant of those services, but I think it's been pretty cool what they were able to piece together in such a short amount of time and meet the needs of the community for sure. They have tried over the years to do those things. For definitely a good stint, Chattooga Belle Farm was providing the school district with fruit in hand for students. I don't know if that's actually still happening, I believe it is, so I do know that that was one really great partnership that they were able to develop.” (local farmer)

In this comment the representative proceeds to suggest that a local farm has provided food to the Oconee County School District, although the timeline is unclear. During this interview, the representative spoke highly of the Oconee County School District. This is similar to some of the sentiments suggested by the 2020 FIRST interviewees about the 2020 feeding programs provided by the Pickens County School District. Although some of these general comments about the Pickens County School District were unpleasant, these were typically not food related comments.

These are examples of two topics that were discussed in the literature review above. The first topic is the state food security infrastructure, as evidenced by the support the Oconee County School District provided to its citizens. The second topic is represented by the above statements providing evidence of farm-to-school activities in Oconee County, SC. Bartfeld and Dunifon (2006:929) include in their concept of the
state food security infrastructure “the availability and accessibility of… School breakfast, and summer meal programs”. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Pickens County School District and the Oconee County School District provided meal services to households in their respective jurisdictions. Local residents and experts both suggested that these were helpful actions provided by the counties. Simply getting food to citizens during a crisis. Bartfeld and Dunifon (2006:924) suggest an additional component of the state food security infrastructure that they were not able to include in their research was the use of emergency food assistance systems. Again, there is evidence that the Oconee County School District and Pickens County School District were able to satisfy multiple aspects of the state food security infrastructure at the local level. It is important to discuss the Oconee County School District’s involvement in feeding programs and farm-to-school activities because these actions could provide a replicable model for the Pickens County School District (due to the proximity of the two counties between each other).

This is especially important considering the number of children in the area likely relying on school meals. As suggested in the literature, Bartfeld (2013:2) notes that approximately 39% of all school-aged children in the U.S. receive free breakfast and approximately 19% of all school-aged children in the U.S. receive reduced price lunch. These statistics should emphasize the responsibility that school districts have to their constituents, and the increased pressure school districts were placed under during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Based on Prescott et al.’s (2020:358) criteria of five “farm-to-school” activities, the Oconee County School District and the farm in the previously listed quote were
engaged in “Procurement”. This is where children have access, through the schools, to local food for consumption. As stated in the literature, Dillon (2007:10) notes that Missoula County, MT was able to purchase 16,000 pounds of local food during the 2006-2007 school year. Although the example in Oconee County is likely not close to this level of farm-to-school engagement, the interviewee who provided the example was optimistic that the Oconee County School District has been attempting to increase local food access for some time.

These examples of food access (food provided by the school districts and farm-to-school initiatives) directly address the research question because they are potential solutions to reducing local food insecurity. Both the literature and the data indicate that increased school district feeding programs and increased farm-to-school initiatives can increase food access. Farm-to-school initiatives are specifically beneficial for their role in increasing local food access.

The cause of food insecurity: Systemic inequality or lack of local infrastructure?

In response to the question: “Please describe the factors that you think contribute to food insecurity in general”, one of the 2021 SC key informant interviewees answered the question in one manner, while four of the 2021 SC key informant interviewees answered the question in a separate manner. The SC key informant interviewee who answered the question separately from the rest was the only interviewee who conducted state-wide work on food insecurity. This individual, a representative from a state-wide food policy council in South Carolina, suggested that some of the leading causes of food
insecurity in South Carolina are wage inequality and racial discrimination. Considering their state-wide perspective, this individual immediately suggested that addressing the systemic causes of inequality in society would be the most efficient path to reducing food insecurity:

“Some primary factors is definitely poverty, which is caused by a lack of employment and especially employment opportunities that provide a living wage for people. Racism plays into that a lot. At the end of the day, it's about people having enough monetary resources to be able to purchase food. A main reason for why so many people, including people who are employed are food-insecure is because we have a lot of jobs-- especially jobs ironically that are front-line food worker jobs that are helping most of us have access to food every day and supporting that. They themselves make extremely low wages. It's just absolutely impossible for them to have enough money to support all their basic needs.” (food policy council representative)

This individual, representing the state-wide perspective of South Carolina, consistently emphasized the systemic factors that they believe contribute to food insecurity:

“It has to be a system's approach. There is never going to be an approach where you can address food insecurity from the charitable emergency food system alone. In my opinion, especially the social worker, I do not want to live in a world where that would be the case because that is not fair to people.” (food policy council representative)
The framework of these opinions appeared to vary from the assertions made by 2021 SC key informants providing a more local perspective. The perspectives of those 2021 SC key informants representing the local area focused primarily on the infrastructure of the local area. Does the infrastructure of the local area provide transportation access? Does the infrastructure of the local area maximize food production? For example, an interviewee representing an Oconee County, SC farm suggested transportation infrastructure supporting greater access to public transportation as a path to reducing food insecurity:

“We [Oconee County, SC] have some far out there mountain towns like Long Creek. They're almost easier for them to get over to Georgia just by a few minutes than it is for them to come down to Seneca. A lot of that community ends up getting their food from Georgia, but even for them to get to Georgia, we're talking about a pretty decent track mileage and time-wise because it is in the mountains. There's that kind of piece, it's actually geographic distance. Then, yes, even I can do live ‘in town’, you have to live in, I don't even know what the number is off the top of my head, but to have access to free public transportation only is a small circle in terms of what the county actually looks like.” (local farmer)

This is a specific and practical account of how Oconee County, SC operates. A 2021 SC key informant that manages an online food market similarly suggested that a primary contributor to Pickens County, SC food insecurity is “The distance between sources and being able to get quality food, transportation, if needed.” This interviewee continued to emphasize the role of transportation infrastructure in determining one’s access to food:
“Depending on where you are in Pickens County will depend on how accessible things are. If you're in Clemson, no problem. There's transportation, there's CCC, there's a lot of opportunities. I believe there's at least one where we were doing the in-person focus group. There was one organization up in Pickens. Outside of that I'm not sure. Transportation is not county-wide, so the public transportation, so I think that would be a limiting factor if that was something that they needed to rely on. Things are just spread out, they're not super far away for us who are used to having the vehicle that they can depend on but for those that might need a different transportation method is a problem, I would think.” (online food market management representative)

These comments begin to emphasize the disparity in analysis. The individual working at the broad, state-wide level considers food insecurity to be caused by an unequal system. While racial and wage inequalities can provide some populations with food resources, those same inequalities prevent some populations from similar food resources. Those working at the local level, however, typically considered food insecurity to be caused by immediate infrastructure limitations.

Further, an interviewee representing the agribusiness perspective suggested that food insecurity is intrinsically linked to local food production capacity, and that Pickens County, SC does not have the capacity to feed itself but instead must rely on importing (presumably) lower quality cheap foods:

“We're [Pickens County, SC] not in New York City where we don't produce anything, but my point earlier, our level of population growth. Land is a finite
resource and once you put a subdivision on a track of land, you're not going to be able to produce food on that track of land. If it was even producing food before, but the opportunity to produce food is no longer even there. We bring in a substantial amount of food import from outside the Upstate, and we export some outside the Upstate too. I'm not trying to paint a bleak picture, but I would say, summarizing everything. If food insecurity is what you're studying, I would say, the level of population with respect to the level of production, at the end of the day, is something to look at.” (agribusiness representative)

Again, this comment is specific, and focused on a single issue to address food insecurity. As was discussed with the notion of increased transportation, increased food production would be an active (physical) way to reduce local food insecurity. This is in contrast to the more passive (policy oriented, systemic) approach suggested by the food policy council representative.

When considering the causes of food insecurity, it appeared that the representative providing a state-wide perspective sought to address food insecurity through policy, by addressing social and economic inequalities. The state-wide perspective suggested addressing racial and income inequalities in a structural manner (through policy and culture change). This is while the representatives providing local perspectives sought to address food insecurity actively, by addressing the physical capacity of the local area to support its population. The physical capacity includes the area’s ability to increase public transportation access and increase food production. Neither frame of thought (broad vs. specific; passive vs. active; intellectual vs. physical) is superior to the other, but it may be
useful to recognize the difference in thought between separate actors. This is because when developing policies and programs to reduce Pickens County, SC local food insecurity, one can ask the question: will this policy or program address the physical (productive, infrastructure) needs of the county, or the systemic (cultural, intellectual) needs of the county?

Food policy council.

An additional theme that was noteworthy from the South Carolina key informant interviews was the response to the interview protocol question: “If tasked with reducing food insecurity in the community within which you work, would you choose to develop an institution other than a food policy council?” If the respondent answered yes, they would subsequently be asked what institution they would choose. Interestingly, all participants suggested that they would select a food policy council as their choice, with some respondents indicating a lack of knowledge about alternatives. This might suggest a dearth of intellectual progress in combating food insecurity. Again, the comment made by Pothukuchi and Kaufman (1999:220) comes to mind when they suggest that food policy councils are “the closest thing” to comprehensive local food efforts. A representative from a food policy council stated:

“To really solve the issue of food insecurity there has to be political will to implement significant policy that makes, that really changes these other systems that directly impact people’s food insecurity. There also has to be a will to strengthen the SNAP program.” (food policy council representative)
In some ways, this is a similarly expressed sentiment as the following statement from an agribusiness representative:

“Any kind of organization or counselor or advisory board or whatever you want to call it type of thing, it’s only as good as the constitution it’s written on. A lot of that, anything else is just a group by name because that’s, if that’s fair to say, because the mission statement that would matter.” (agribusiness representative)

Ultimately, what these statements appear to suggest is that creating a food policy council for the sake of it is not useful. However, based on discussions with professionals working within the South Carolina food environment, it does not appear that there is much awareness of suitable alternative institutions that could reduce food insecurity. This may be concerning if it is found that food policy councils are not the best option to support a community’s food security infrastructure and reduce food security. Further, if food policy councils are not the best option, why is it that other options are not more widely known in the South Carolina food environment?

*Agricultural conservation.*

Despite the research on the importance of agricultural conservation easements as a remedy for food insecurity, this was not a substantive theme discussed in the data. However, interviews with 2021 SC key informants did produce conversations on agricultural conservation easements, with one statement being particularly striking. When asked about their perspective on whether agricultural conservation could affect local food insecurity, an agribusiness representative responded:
“No, in terms of land conservation. To bring up another point now, when I think land conservation, I think from a production standpoint. Meaning, you're not out there plowing a field before you plant, let's say, corn. You're going out there and no-tilling corn, so you're not disrupting. That's where I was talking about the disruption of the surrounding ecosystem. Conversely, land conservation can also be defined as keeping land from being developed. I don't approach it that way, but land conservation-- Some of these NGO's [non-governmental organizations] that you brought up, Upstate Forever and some other ones where they're conserving land, and they're taking care of the soil as well as my corn reference, don't get me wrong. I'm just looking at it from two different lenses. From my ag-production background, I view land conservation that way. Now maybe from a sociology standpoint or from a rural development standpoint, land conservation can be defined maybe as perfecting development ‘permitization’ of rural areas.”

(agribusiness representative)

From this perspective, agricultural conservation does not do much to decrease food insecurity. On the contrary, this perspective suggests that agricultural conservation can prevent the development of the large-scale agriculture needed to produce enough food to feed large populations. Land that is unused, or only used for small-scale agriculture, ultimately reduces total food production.

This sentiment contrasts with some of the agricultural conservation literature. As discussed in the literature review, Zabala (2018) notes that a common discourse (like that provided in the previous quote) on land conservation topics is that increases in
agricultural land increase food production at the cost of environmental degradation. However, Zabala (2018) ultimately notes that Galeana-Pizaña (n.d.) found that in Mexico between 1976 and 2011, increases in agricultural land cover did not associate with increases in food security (except for self-sufficiency in maize). A representative from a regional agricultural conservation organization provides additional justification for the efficacy of conservation efforts to increase food security:

“By protecting farmland, specifically, you're able to minimize fragmentation of those properties. You're able to ideally keep them as a working farm. You have less likelihood of a need to export products from all over the world really, and then I think by default if the food is grown locally it's probably healthier for you than say processed food that's been processed, exported and whatnot. I think that would be a big way how it helps.” (agricultural conservation representative)

As mentioned previously, Dillon (2007:17) provides a useful example of agricultural conservation supporting agricultural production. In their example, a Pennsylvania county is able to limit urbanization through legally determining that some land will remain agricultural. This may be a useful option for Pickens County, SC considering population projections in the next several decades.

Again, however, it is important to reconcile the fact that local food products tend to have high prices because small-scale agriculture cannot access enough government subsidies to make a profitable return on sales and niche products (Chapman 2017:84). A 2021 SC key informant interviewee who manages an online food market (and consistently works with local farmers while listing food prices) supported this concept:
“[we are] a different demographic [from food insecure populations], we definitely try to provide the variety and we do offer delivery, but we do realize that it doesn’t necessarily serve the…So it can be a bit pricey and so it’s hard for us to be able to serve an audience that’s more price-conscious.” (online food market management representative)

This individual works at an organization that effectively mediates the distribution of local foods to consumers through an online market. However, they understand that low-income consumers cannot afford their products. Regarding agricultural conservation, conserving land for local food production will not necessarily increase food security, as those food insecure populations will likely not have the means to purchase higher priced local foods.

Again, to refer to the striking statement on the relationship between agricultural conservation and food insecurity made by the agribusiness representative, they similarly express the following statement:

“No [agricultural conservation cannot affect local food insecurity], I think land conservation at its core is critical for sustainable food production, and if anything, I would say that the lack thereof, conservation practices would cause worse or more food insecurity by the nature of increased level of production due to overusing resources.” (agribusiness representative)

To address the research question, as Pickens County, SC continues to urbanize, decisions will need to be made on how to feed an increasing population. As mentioned in the literature review and supported through qualitative research, there is a complex (and not perfectly understood) relationship between agricultural conservation efforts and food
insecurity. It appears that some suggest agricultural conservation efforts are sufficient. This is while others suggest that increased food imports are required, potentially at the cost of food production and subsequently food exports.

**Results from the Census Tract “Insecurity” Indices**

Out of Pickens County’s twenty-eight census tracts, six census tracts met the qualifications listed: the housing insecurity index variable was equal to three and at least two out of the three food insecurity index variables were equal to four or greater. These six census tracts are shown in Figure 1 below (as shaded pink and grey):  

**Figure 1**

*Census Tracts 45077010700 and 45077011001*

*Note. Census tracts shaded grey are: 45077010200, 45077010803, 45077011003, and 45077011103. These census tracts fit the same index conditions as census tracts 45077010700 and 45077011001.*

The areas shaded pink and grey in Figure 1 represent the six census tracts in Pickens County, SC that are defined as both housing insecure and food insecure, as measured above. The most notable region is the central portion with two separate census tracts shaded as pink. This area shaded pink, comprising two bordering census tracts, is
shaded pink to identify its unique characteristics. These two bordering census tracts are 45077010700 and 45077011001, connecting northwest of the population centers Easley, SC and Liberty, SC. The median household incomes of these census tracts are relatively low, as compared with Pickens County. Census tract 45077010700 had a 2015 median household income of $41,734, and census tract 45077011001 had a 2015 median household income of $40,810 (Federal Financial Institutions Council [FFIEC] 2020). The demographic characteristics of this region in Figure 1 shaded pink includes a population that is 88.2% White and 2.3% African American (FFIEC 2020). Figure 2, as shown below, is a map of the same six shaded census tracts. However, a separate census tract has been shaded pink to identify its unique characteristics.

**Figure 2**

*Census Tract 45077010803*

*Note.* Census tracts shaded grey are: 45077010200, 45077010700, 45077011001, 45077011003, and 45077011103. These census tracts fit the same index conditions as census tract 45077010803.

The census tract (45077010803) shaded in pink has been classified by the Appalachian Regional Commission as one of the two distressed census tracks in the county (Appalachian Regional Commission 2021). Interestingly, the other census tract
identified by ARC as distressed was found to be food insecure but not housing insecure, as defined by the measures stated above. The median household income of census tract 45077010803 is considerably lower than census tract 45077010700 and 45077011001, with a 2015 median household income of $34,817 (FFIEC 2020). The demographic characteristics of this region in Figure 2 shaded in pink include a population that is 72.8% White and 14.5% African American (FFIEC 2020).

Figure 3 includes a census tract that was not previously shown. To show the extent of concentrated poverty in this region of Pickens County, SC, Figure 3 includes a final census tract (45077010801) which has been found to be food insecure but not housing insecure, as defined by the measures stated above. Census tract 45077010801 has a 2015 median household income of $34,368 (FFIEC 2020). To emphasize the concentration of poverty, as measured through food insecurity and housing insecurity, Figure 3 shows a specific geographic region shaded in pink that the data suggest is consistently impoverished.
Figure 3

*Census Tracts 45077010700, 45077011001, 45077010801, and 45077010803*

*Note.* Census tracts shaded pink are: 45077010700, 45077010801, 45077010803, and 45077011001. The census tracts shaded pink represent a geographic cluster of census tracts with high rates of food insecurity and housing insecurity.

Figure 3 shows an area shaded in pink in Pickens County, SC that is consistently food insecure, inconsistently housing insecure, and the southeastern portion of this region has been identified by the Appalachian Regional Commission as distressed (Appalachian Regional Commission 2021). The demographic characteristics of this region in Figure 3 shaded in pink include a population that is 80.1% White and 11.3% African American (FFIEC 2020). This region (shaded pink) of Pickens County, SC will be factored into the recommendations to follow.

Table 4 provides a summary of how each census tract scored on housing insecurity measures and food insecurity measures. The more “points” a census tract has, the greater the indicator that the area is experiencing housing and food access issues. The rows shaded pink represent the four census tracts shaded pink in Figure 3. As suggested, these census tracts represent some of the most economically vulnerable regions of Pickens County. To address the research question, it is important to identify which areas
in Pickens County, SC may be vulnerable to food insecurity. This is because if policies and programs are established in the county to address food insecurity, these are the areas that should be targeted.
Table 4

Cumulative “Insecurity” Index by Census Tract

<table>
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<th>Census Tract</th>
<th>Housing Insecurity Variable #1</th>
<th>Food Insecurity Variable #1</th>
<th>Food Insecurity Variable #2</th>
<th>Food Insecurity Variable #3</th>
<th>Cumulative “Insecurity” Index</th>
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</table>

Note. The rows shaded in pink indicate the “insecurity” cluster northwest of Easley, SC and northwest of Liberty, SC.
VI. DISCUSSION

To review the themes found through the previous section, the following section provides two broad recommendations to reduce Pickens County food insecurity. These recommendations specifically address the themes of public transportation, centralized food assistance efforts, and food policy councils. The interpretation of at-risk census tracts in Pickens County is also incorporated to suggest specifically targeting a few geographic areas within Pickens County, SC. Additionally, this section includes a discussion of the differences between addressing food insecurity and systemic inequalities. This portion of the Discussion section is included to identify the limitations of specific food insecurity measures. Further, this section is included to emphasize the value that the recommendations, policies, programs, and food system examples listed throughout this thesis may have on specifically addressing food insecurity. This section closes with a discussion of the research limitations for this study as well as suggestions on the future research of Pickens County, SC food insecurity.

Recommendations for Pickens County, SC

The study results lead to two recommendations for reducing Pickens County, SC food insecurity. These results are also framed within the literature review on the varying local, regional, and national perspectives of food insecurity in the U.S., as well as reviewing data-sets collected between 2019 and 2021 studying food insecurity in Pickens County, SC. The first recommendation combines comments made in focus groups, comments made by food insecure residents of Pickens County, comments made by food
distributors and food producers in the local area, and observations from the census tract data. The second recommendation combines comments made in focus groups, comments made by food distributors in the local area, comments made by 2021 SC key informants, and literature review. These data are combined to determine recommendations for Pickens County, SC that, if implemented, would likely reduce food insecurity in specific high-need areas or throughout the county as a whole.

Recommendation #1: Provide greater access to public transportation immediately northwest of Easley, SC and Liberty, SC

The first recommendation, based on literature review and qualitative research, includes increasing the infrastructure capacity of Pickens County through greater transportation access. Some of the pink shaded area in Figure 3 includes the city limits of Easley, SC. As mentioned previously, Easley is the largest city in Pickens County, with considerable job opportunities. However, Easley, and its surrounding locations, do not have consistent access to public transportation, as noted in the quote below:

“And the CAT bus only stops at the Lowes in Easley and no one I mean they can’t, they can’t get to Lowes and they get to Lowes and the only place they can go is to get to Clemson. And they need to get to places within Easley.” (Pickens County, SC professional)

Table 3 suggests that transportation was consistently a topic of conversation during qualitative research on Pickens County. Comments made throughout the discussions with professionals in Pickens County focused on a lack of access to transportation, particularly
public transportation, and how this negatively affects the food access of local residents. This sentiment was supported by low-income residents as well:

“Plus, I lost my food stamps. I mean, I guess I could say those were like a staple. I mean, they're a really, really, really big help and not having them, I've been struggling. I've been struggling pretty bad since I don't have a vehicle, to be honest, because I can't even make it to a food bank, and I don't really have anybody to take me to a food bank.” (Easley, SC resident)

Considering Easley is the largest city in Pickens County, SC, it would make sense to prioritize the development of public transportation throughout the city and its surrounding areas.

The area’s immediately northwest of Easley, SC and Liberty, SC (shaded pink in Figure 3) include four census tracts: 45077010700, 45077010801, 45077010803, and 45077011001. Again, the data suggest that these census tracts comprise an area with a high concentration of poverty within Pickens County. Predominantly concentrated northwest of Easley and northwest of Liberty, this area shaded pink in Figure 3 is the most consistently economically distressed geographic region of Pickens County. This concentrated region would benefit from public transportation access that could connect residents, at a minimum, to Easley and back. Again, this is because the Easley area does not provide substantial public transportation:

“And then in the Easley area there is no mass transportation like you have in the Clemson area with the CAT busses and for many people the most convenient place is a convenient store. And so, they go and use their EBT bucks that way
rather than looking for wholesome foods. They don’t have the transportation to get there.” (Pickens County School Board representative)

The literature similarly indicates that public transportation can potentially benefit the population. Sanchez (2008:839) suggests that in 1999 the Government Accounting Office (GAO) found that coordination between federal transportation agencies (the Department of Health and Human Services [DHHS] and the Federal Transit Authority [FTA]) with “state and local transportation planning” reduced the average cost per passenger trip and the average cost per vehicle hour. Further, public transportation can support poverty alleviation. Pathak et al. (2017:211) similarly find that better access to public transportation in Atlanta, GA resulted in the decentralization of poverty. As evidenced in the above maps, economic savings and poverty alleviation are prospects that would benefit Easley’s northwestern communities.

Considering these suggestions from the literature and data, the first recommendation of this thesis is to expand public transportation to these areas’ northwest of Easley and northwest of Liberty so as to provide residents living in these areas with increased opportunity to work and shop in Easley, SC, the largest population center of Pickens County. Due to the fact that these areas northwest of Easley and Liberty (the census tracts shaded pink in Figure 3) are close to the center of Pickens County, SC, this would imply greater opportunity for Pickens County residents living in low population density areas to commute to a higher population density area. Further, census tracts 45077010700, 45077010801, 45077010803, and 45077011001 include within them the following public assistance agencies that provide food services: The Dream Center;
SHINE Soup Kitchen; Easley Church of God; Easley First United Methodist Church; Easley Bible Methodist Church; and Jones Avenue Baptist Church. For food insecure residents, being able to more easily access these services through public transportation would contribute to short-term food security through assistance. However, this recommendation could provide for long-term food security for the affected residents because those residents northwest of Easley and Liberty would have greater access to the healthy food sites within Easley.

Recommendation #2: Initiate a county-wide “hunger coalition”

A “hunger coalition” typically refers to an informal group dedicated to reducing hunger (Pothukuchi and Kaufman 1999:219). From these hunger coalitions, more formal organizations can be organized that address food insecurity, such as a municipal department of food or a food policy council. Ultimately, the goal would be for Pickens County, SC to develop a formal department of food or food policy council, however the efforts of a hunger coalition are required to begin this process. Therefore, to begin this process, I am recommending that Pickens County, SC develop a hunger coalition that will comprehensively address (through each stage of the food system) local food insecurity.

In 2011, the United Way of Pickens County conducted a hunger study to review the demographic characteristics of food insecurity in Pickens County, SC (United Way of Pickens County 2011). In their study, the UWPC provided the following recommendation: “develop a coalition of interested partners from this forum, including
all service providers, to function as a hunger coalition;” (United Way of Pickens County 2011:3). For at least a decade now, there has been a recommendation to develop a hunger coalition in Pickens County, SC, specifically one designed to include the local service providers and food distributors. The sentiment of developing a hunger coalition was similarly suggested during 2019 UWPC focus groups:

“Greenville [SC] used to have a hunger coalition this just, I’m just rattling as I think of it, that you’d get everyone involved in food insecurity together on a quarterly basis or whatever and to establish a point of public interest that collects this information that we’re learning about each other right now that would be of high value in my opinion.” (Pickens County, SC professional)

As suggested by the willingness of thirty Pickens County, SC working professionals to attend focus groups on county-wide food insecurity, there is seemingly a demand for a collaborative approach toward addressing local food insecurity.

Considering “hunger coalition” is a broad term, the literature provides a specific collaborative example to address local food insecurity. Food policy councils have grown considerably in popularity over the past four decades in Canada and the U.S. Harper et al. (2009:5) notes that the first food policy council in the U.S. was established in 1982. In 2016, Sussman and Bassarab (2016:7) noted that there were likely between 324 and 411 food policy councils in the U.S. Food policy councils, as suggested above, can be useful for organizing an area’s service providers and food distributors to effectively allocate resources to a large population. Further, food policy councils encourage a more centralized local food system, something Pickens County, SC currently lacks.
As mentioned previously, although Pickens County has numerous food assistance providers that directly transfer food to the individual (i.e., food pantries, food banks, feeding programs), these organizations provide these resources through a “piecemeal” approach. This means that although these organizations frequently share resources with one another, they are not required to do so. Further, these organizations are separate entities, which means they have independent funding and operational goals that may make them competitive with one another to stay open. Although the literature does not discuss “mandates” put in place that require organizations to share resources, there are solutions that could incentivize these organizations to work together in a collective fashion to address food insecurity in Pickens County.

For example, Dillon (2007:6) notes that the Dane County Food Council has four subcommittees that meet more regularly (more often than once a month) than the entire food council. If Pickens County, SC were to develop a hunger coalition, it may be useful to develop an “emergency food system subcommittee” that meets more frequently than the entire hunger coalition. This subcommittee would include representatives from all twenty-two of the food service providers in the county (as well as additional food service providers that have potentially not been accounted for). Again, a mandate for these organizations to share resources may not be necessary as long as there is a structure that encourages (through incentives or bureaucratic efforts) the coordination of the Pickens County’s food system.

However, if Pickens County were to develop a food policy council (or any form of hunger coalition), the following concerns should be considered. For example, when
interviewing a representative from a food policy council, they suggested the following concern that their food policy council is not active enough in understanding current legislative food systems efforts:

“it’s been a frustration, ironic that we’re called a State Food Policy Council, because we truly have not been doing state policy. That’s something we definitely want to do. Now, with having more capacity and having membership, we would like to do that and develop a strong food-related platform. It’s very rare that there are things going through the legislature that I’m aware of that is food-related.”

(South Carolina State Food Policy Council representative)

Harper et al. (2009) find similar issues with food policy councils, as they suggest that the goals of food policy councils are not consistent, and the methods used to measure the efficacy of food policy councils are not consistent. As stated above, this can be concerning when developing a food policy council because if the organization is not addressing food policy, this means the council may not be accomplishing what it was designed to achieve.

The 2021 SC key informant interviews revealed a second concern, which was related to the development of local food policy councils:

“I think the [food] policy council is the way forward. I think that the thing that I am most wary of, from a policy council perspective, is that I think it needs to be community-based and community-run. I think it’s really important who starts that food policy council and where it’s seeded, and in the community, and that it’s not a part of the government, and the county, and those players. Those players are
important and are a critical part to establishing a thriving and sustainable food
policy council, but I’m really concerned and think that the food policy council
needs to be thoroughly seeded in the community.” (local farmer)

This statement contrasts with recommendations provided in the food policy council
literature, suggesting that working with local organizations (including non-governmental
authorities such as universities) can be beneficial (Dillon 2007:6-8; Pothukuchi and
councils “typically exist outside government structures,” they acknowledge that food
policy councils are frequently government sanctioned. Further, Bassarab, Santo, and
Palmer 2018:15) note that 83% of U.S. food policy councils report sharing a relationship
with the government. Referring back to the Dane County Food Council, Dillon (2007:6-
7) suggests that food policy council involvement with the local government has provided
financial and political opportunities that would have not otherwise existed. Again, citing
the interviewee who expressed concern about government involvement with local food
policy councils:

“Again, local government officials will have to be a part of this. I think if we seed
it in local government, I don’t think it’ll be sustainable. I don’t think it’ll address
the real issues happening in the community.” (local farmer)

Based on this interviewee’s perspective, and in some ways similarly to what is suggested
in the literature, government involvement should be accomplished with consideration of
the community when developing food policy council initiatives. Of course, this is
assuming that the local government is involved in the process of food policy council formation at all (which is not a prerequisite for food policy council formation).

Further, this discussion does not address the reverse perspective: whether food insecure individuals in the community should be active in food policy councils. The literature suggests that food policy councils should broadly include government officials, non-government officials, and local food system stakeholders (Dillon 2007:5; Neff et al. 2009:299; Pothukuchi and Kaufman 1999:219). Although the literature suggests that all citizens should be active in food policy councils (Burgan and Winne 2012:14; Mutuma n.d.:15; Pothukuchi 2007:10); Clancy, Hammer, and Lippoldt (2007:126) note that most food policy council members are in that position through some organizational affiliation. However, as the above quoted “local farmer” suggests, it is ethically important to consider those food insecure populations as involved stakeholders in the food policy council membership.

Considering these suggestions from the literature and data, the second recommendation being presented in this thesis is that if a hunger coalition were to be formed in Pickens County (as a food policy council or otherwise), the most active members should be those local agency representatives and service providers that consistently act as mediators between the government and population. These include representatives from the Clemson Area Food Exchange, Clemson Community Care, the Dream Center, Family Promise of Pickens County, the Salvation Army of Pickens County, United Christian Ministries, the United Way of Pickens County, and similar organizations. Individuals from these organizations understand the needs of food insecure
residents and the implications of state policy on Pickens County residents. Further, individuals from these organizations also understand the necessity of centralized funding and policy that come from state government. As the representative from a food policy council stated, it is difficult to engage with the state government so as to even be aware of food related policy. This is why those Pickens County, SC actors who know how to consistently work with government officials and food insecure populations are those best suited to lead a local hunger coalition.

As evidenced by the qualitative results, it seems a centralized Pickens County hunger coalition (as a food policy council or otherwise) that is led by local service providers could most efficiently ensure that local food insecure residents have access to healthy food. This recommendation is supported by Neff et al. (2009:299) who argue that the development of a local governmental/non-governmental authority (singular) on local food policy can be considered an “effective strategy for addressing food systems more comprehensively”. However, this coalition would most benefit from leadership generated by those food assistance providers throughout the county. If local food insecure residents or government officials were to join these efforts, it would likely be beneficial that they remain on the fringe.

Fortunately, the Pickens County community can learn from several local and regional hunger coalitions. As mentioned previously, the South Carolina food system includes several food policy councils and hunger coalitions, including a state-wide food policy council. Further, these separate organizations meet on a quarterly basis to discuss the South Carolina food system. The South Carolina food systems community is further
supported by a University of South Carolina SNAP-Ed team that provides food policy council training to South Carolina communities. Currently, Oconee County, SC is one of these communities receiving food policy council training and assistance. If Pickens County, SC were to develop a hunger coalition, an important first step would be to gain recognition from this state-wide food policy council and send at least one representative from the newly formed hunger coalition to the quarterly South Carolina food system meetings. At these meetings, information can be gained on how to develop a coalition so as to properly and effectively coordinate and manage the Pickens County, SC food system. Further, a Pickens County hunger coalition would benefit from the food policy council training offered by the University of South Carolina SNAP-Ed team as well as coordination with the Oconee County community currently developing a food policy council.

Contextualizing these recommendations within the framework of broader systemic inequalities.

As discussed in the Results section, only one of the five SC key informant interviewees suggested that the key to addressing food insecurity is through addressing the systemic inequalities experienced in South Carolina (and elsewhere). In order to address the immediate problems this county experiences, the previous recommendations will not address the systemic inequalities that are experienced by the low-income local population. As suggested throughout the qualitative data, increased public transportation will provide greater food access to those in certain areas of Pickens County, SC. Further,
a centralization of the food assistance efforts throughout the county will develop a more efficient food system in Pickens County. However, as suggested by the food policy council representative through the SC key informant interviews, “It has to be a system’s approach”. Simply identifying and addressing one inadequacy within one county, while useful, leaves additional issues to be resolved later.

The effects of policies, programs, and food systems on food environments have been cited throughout this thesis. Examples include the U.S. Farm Bill, the proposed municipal department of food, food policy councils, food systems entrepreneurialism, farm-to-school methods, state-wide food retail policy, and agricultural conservation. Each of these policies, programs, and food systems (for better or worse) has real effects on the food environment by contributing to or detracting from the “state food security infrastructure”. Again, the state food security infrastructure in this context, and described throughout this thesis, represents the “set of programs, policies, and economic and social attributes that affect the availability, accessibility, and affordability of food and the extent to which resources are available to households to meet their food-related needs.” (Bartfeld and Dunifon 2006:923). Each of the policies, programs, and food system examples (as well as the recommendations that have arisen as a result of this research) will have an effect on the state food security infrastructure and food environment.

However, like the recommendations above, these policies, programs and food system examples are each a specific approach to changing the food environment without comprehensively addressing systemic inequalities. For example, during the last half of the 20th century the U.S. Farm Bill (the most comprehensive U.S. food policy initiative)
incentivized the increased agricultural production of specific crops (Windham 2007:14). This was an effective approach at increasing agricultural exports and reducing global food insecurity (at the cost of nutritious food production). However, during this same time, the emergence of industrial level agriculture decreased the number of small-scale agricultural producers in the U.S. (Windham 2007:10). Additionally, the wealthiest 1% increased their share of income both domestically and globally (Stone et al. 2020; United Nations 2020). Reducing food insecurity in the short-term (through food quantity) did not necessarily address systemic inequalities through the long-term.

Still, the recommendations, policies, programs, and food systems efforts listed above are useful for reducing food insecurity (save for the U.S. Farm Bill after 1973, as it is unclear as to how much these documents have contributed to or mitigated food insecurity after 1973 considering the external costs placed on society) (Windham 2007:22). However, deeper structural changes to the domestic and global social system must be made to address systemic inequalities (class, gender, racial, and more) that contribute to the persistence of food insecurity. This disparity between changing small-scale (specific, local, and physical attributes) with changing the structural social relations that contribute to inequalities may be why the SC key informant food policy council representative said that South Carolina’s food system is: “A work in progress.”

**Study Limitations**

The policy that is created from researching local, national, or international solutions to various issues is called evidence-based policy (Evans et al. 2013). A benefit
of implementing evidence-based policy is that the policy is more likely to produce consistent results across localities if designed and implemented outwardly from a central institution. A disadvantage to implementing evidence-based policy, however, is the potential gap between the design of evidenced-based policy and “the practice of commissioning, implementing, and evaluation” of local services (Evans et al. 2013:7). Also, evidenced-based policy is prone to the assumption that research and policy share a “linear relationship” (Evans et al. 2013:7).

Considering that the literature review above describes prior and current initiatives, any policy recommendations that are proposed or developed through the literature review of this thesis will in part be considered as evidenced-based recommendations or policy. Due to the limitations of this method (evidenced-based policy), as discussed above, the recommendations provided in this thesis must actually be implemented to produce an effect. Further, any recommendations that are implemented from this thesis should be considered within the specific context (cultural, geographic, economic, and political) of Pickens County, SC between 2019 and 2021.

The data for this thesis were also collected over the span of three years (between 2019 and 2021). This is not a limitation, in the sense that it reduces the generalizability or validity of the research. However, the fact that these data were collected in different calendar years may indicate some inconsistency between responses. For example, the 2020 FIRST interviews were conducted specifically focusing on the COVID-19 pandemic. Discussions on the economic and social effects of the COVID-19 pandemic were prevalent throughout the 2020 FIRST interviews and appeared through the 2021 SC
key informant interviews as well. However (as previously mentioned), the food insecurity status of Pickens County, SC was considerably different prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and many of the responses on food insecurity were directly affected by this occurrence.

As is the case with most case study research, the primary limitation of this study is its lack of generalizability. Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2001:10) suggest that the nature of a case study causes the research to be atypical. The case study of Pickens County, SC for this thesis was conducted to understand the needs of Pickens County, as well as some surrounding areas. Although some results found here are generalizable to the broader public, a majority of the findings are specific to the Pickens County, SC region. Although the recommendations made in this thesis that seek to reduce food insecurity may not be directly transferable to other locations, the general ideas and recommendations may be useful for similar communities.

Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2001:8) provide another example of a case study limitation that likely applies to the current research: “There is too much data for easy analysis.” This was indeed the case with the three data-sets included in this research: 2019 UWPC research; 2020 FIRST research; and 2021 SC key informant interviews. With forty-five interviews and four focus groups available for review, the data was extensive. At times during the research process, it felt as though saturation was reached. Further, this was a factor in deciding to limit the number of 2021 SC key informant interviews to five interviews.
Guest et al. (2020:13) make the assertion that through their research on saturation in qualitative studies, saturation should occur between the eleventh and thirteenth interview in most qualitative data-sets. When applying (crudely) similar methods to the three data-sets analyzed for this thesis, it appears saturation likely occurred. While Guest et al. (2020:10) assume in their study that “interview questions, sample characteristics, and other study parameters” remain consistent, this consistency did not exist between the three data-sets used for the current study. Still, by crudely applying the methods defined by Guest et al. (2020), it can be concluded that prior to beginning the 2021 SC key informant interviews, a degree of saturation of 83% had been achieved. Based on the research conducted by Guest et al. (2020), this figure suggests that prior to beginning the 2021 SC key informant interviews, approximately 83% of the codes directly related to the research question of this thesis had been identified.

**Future Research**

Additional research on the topic of food insecurity may seek to address the question stated above: if food policy councils are not the best option, why is it that other options are not more widely known in the South Carolina food environment? Although the key informant size was small (only four of the five 2019 South Carolina key informants were asked about alternatives to food policy councils), no alternatives to food policy councils were suggested. Future research targeting food sector experts (and those experts of related fields) may benefit by posing the question: are you aware of suitable
alternatives to food policy councils for coordinating food-related efforts in a particular region?

Although the 2021 SC key informant interviews were (intentionally) limited to five interviews, because saturation had been achieved, future research would also benefit from a continuation of these interviews, using the previously stated inclusion criteria. This is because these interviews were with representatives from separate stages within the South Carolina food system, as well as one interviewee who reviewed the South Carolina food system comprehensively. These interviews sought to interpret each interviewee’s perspective on the local or state food system, from their unique vantage point. Future research could focus on collecting a larger and broader sample, so as to engage at least two representatives from every stage of the food system, as well as at least one representative who can interpret the South Carolina food system comprehensively.

Future research on Pickens County, SC food insecurity should include the following two dimensions: (1) a discussion on the concentrated poverty in census tracts 45077010700, 45077011001, 45077010803, and 45077010801 (these are the areas directly northwest of Liberty and Easley); and (2) a discussion on developing a hunger coalition in Pickens County, SC that includes existing food distributors and service providers working in the county. Coincidentally, there are numerous food distributors (food pantries, soup kitchens) and service providers working within the census tracts stated above. As mentioned above, these include: The Dream Center; SHINE Soup Kitchen; Easley Church of God; Easley First United Methodist Church; Easley Bible Methodist Church; and Jones Avenue Baptist Church. Future research on food insecurity
in Pickens County, SC would benefit from contacting these organizations to learn more about the community needs related to food and hunger. Further, representatives from each of these organizations may be suitable leaders to develop a Pickens County, SC hunger coalition.
VII. CONCLUSION

Pickens County, SC is not abnormal in its experience with food insecurity. In fact, in 2017, the food insecurity rate in Pickens County, SC was about on par with the U.S. food insecurity rate (Feeding America 2020a). Although this is the case, reducing food insecurity is a goal that all communities should constantly strive to achieve. Pickens County is a part of a region that is expanding, both economically and in population. Projections suggest that the population in the region between Atlanta, GA and Charlotte, NC will continue to increase during the next century, and Pickens County is near the center of these two locations. Food-related infrastructure, such as a strong network of separate food distribution agencies and individuals, benefits the low-income population of the county. Further, based on focus groups and interviews, non-food related service providers (such as the Salvation Army and Family Promise) in the county appear to maintain good relations with food agencies dedicated to providing low-income residents with food. Although the food system network in Pickens County, SC is strong, there is not a centralized effort. As population continues to grow in the region, this could be a limiting factor for reducing food insecurity.

This thesis has provided two substantive recommendations to address food insecurity in Pickens County, SC. The first recommendation is to provide increased public transportation access within census tracts 45077010700, 45077011001, 45077010803, and 45077010801. These are the census tracts northwest of Liberty, SC and Easley, SC (with a bit of census tracts 45077010801 and 45077010803 actually in Easley, SC). Increased public transportation access within these areas would provide the
low-income residents of these communities that do not have vehicles a means to go to the grocery store, go to work, or simply to leave the area freely. Pickens County, SC is a relatively expansive county, so even if one lives on the outskirts of a city, if they do not have access to a vehicle then grocery shopping could be an all-day event.

The second recommendation for addressing food insecurity in Pickens County, SC is to develop a local hunger coalition. The literature provides structure and some measures on developing a food policy council, but simply connecting the already existing food distributors and service providers in the county through an official institution would allow these organizations to more efficiently support the low-income population. As evidenced by focus group attendance and the willingness of experts to provide thoughts on how to manage the community, the means exist in Pickens County, SC to reduce food insecurity through collaboration and coordination.

The good news is that efforts to develop a food policy council within Pickens County, SC have begun. In Spring 2021, the United Way of Pickens County coordinated a meeting with the service providers of Pickens County in order to begin the conversation about developing a hunger coalition. Considering the continued involvement of non-government service providers in the Pickens County community, it may be presumed that following the establishment of a hunger coalition, the county would be more likely to develop a food policy council. However, developing a municipal or county-wide department of food may be useful as well. While the details are not yet determined, it is encouraging that these efforts are in discussion. Pickens County, SC may be comprehensively addressing food insecurity in the near future.
REFERENCES


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APPENDICES
Appendix A: UWPC Survey Consent Form

Information about Being in a Research Study - Clemson University

Hunger and Food Insecurity in Pickens County, South Carolina: A Needs Assessment and Asset Inventory

Survey of Community Members

KEY INFORMATION ABOUT THE RESEARCH STUDY

Voluntary Consent: Dr. Catherine Mobley, is inviting you to volunteer for a research study. Dr. Mobley is a Professor of Sociology at Clemson University and is conducting the study with Dr. Leslie Hossfeld, Michelle Eichinger, and Cassius Hossfeld.

You may choose not to take part and you may choose to stop taking part at any time. You will not be punished in any way if you decide not to be in the study or to stop taking part in the study.

Study Purpose: The purpose of this research is to better understand the nature and context of hunger and food insecurity in Pickens County, South Carolina and to identify the resources for addressing hunger and food insecurity in the county. The study results will be used to improve access to food throughout the community.

Activities and Procedures: You will complete a survey that will take approximately 20 minutes to complete.

Participation Time: It will take you approximately 20 minutes to complete the survey.

Risks and Discomforts: We do not know of any risks or discomforts to you in this research study.

Possible Benefits: You may benefit from talking about your knowledge about and experiences with hunger and food insecurity. The results of the research will inform community-based efforts to address hunger and food insecurity in Pickens County.

Incentives: You will be paid $10 in the form of a gift card upon completion of the survey. That is, you are receiving the incentive card is conditional upon completing the survey.

PROTECTION OF PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

The results of this study may be shared through community forums, technical reports, journal articles, and educational presentations.

Identifiable information collected during the study will be removed and the de-identified information could be used for future research studies or distributed to another investigator
for future research studies without additional informed consent from the participants or legally authorized representative.

CONTACT INFORMATION
If you have any questions or concerns about your rights in this research study, please contact the Clemson University Office of Research Compliance (ORC) at 864-656-0636 or irb@clemson.edu. If you are outside of the Upstate South Carolina area, please use the ORC’s toll-free number, 866-297-3071. The Clemson IRB will not be able to answer some study-specific questions. However, you may contact the Clemson IRB if the research staff cannot be reached or if you wish to speak with someone other than the research staff.

If you have any study-related questions or if any problems arise, please contact Dr. Catherine Mobley at Clemson University at 864-656-3815 or camoble@clemson.edu.

CONSENT
By participating in the study, you indicate that you have read the information written above, been allowed to ask any questions, and you are voluntarily choosing to take part in this research. You do not give up any legal rights by taking part in this research study.

A copy of this form will be given to you.
Appendix B: UWPC Target Population Survey on Hunger and Food Insecurity

Community Member Survey

**Basic Information**
Are you at least 18 years of age?
- Yes
- No

Do you agree to participate in this survey?
- Yes
- No

Date: ________________
What county do you live in? ________________
What is your Zip Code?
- 29611 - Greenville
- 29630
- 29631
- 29632
- 29633
- 29634
- 29635
- 29640
- 29641
- 29642
- 29657
- 29661
- 29667
- 29670
- 29671
- 29682
- 29685
- Other (If other, what is your Zip Code? ________________)

What is your physical address? ______________________________________
If you are unwilling to provide your physical address what is your cross street identification?

**Main Survey Questions**
Over the last year what store did members of your household buy food from the most often?

Where is the store located?
Please indicate how often you or members of your household shopped for food during the last 12 months at the following different types of food stores. Possible responses are: I
never buy food here; I buy some of my food here; I buy most of my food here; do not know; refuse to answer.

- Supermarket or Grocery Store (Aldi, Ingles, Bi-Lo, Publix, etc.)
- Partial Market (Walgreens, Dollar Store, CVS, etc.)
- Specialty Store (Asian food market, Mexican food market)
- Convenience Store, Carryout, Corner Store (gas station)
- Fast Food Restaurant, Food Truck (counter service)
- Restaurant with Wait Staff (sit and order)

Over the last year how often did you travel to go food shopping using the following types of transportation? Possible responses are: never; some of the time; most of the time; do not know; refuse to answer.

- My own car
- Getting a ride with someone I know
- Public transportation (for example, the CAT Bus)
- Taxi service (for example, Uber, Lyft, taxi, etc.)
- Bike
- Walking
- Senior bus

Are you usually able to buy the food that you want to eat?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

If no, what prevents you from buying the food you want to eat? Check all that apply

- Transportation
- Food price
- Travel time
- Food store distance
- Personal safety (crossing street)
- Fear of crime
- Other (If other, what is the reason?
__________________________________________)

- Do not know
- Refuse to answer
- Not applicable

In the past 12 months how often has your household depended on any of the following food sources? Possible responses are: never; 1-3 times during the year; 4-6 times during the year; one or more times each month; do not know; refuse to answer.

- Food pantry
- Free meal (Salvation Army, Community Center)
- Federal School Lunch or Breakfast Program
- Farmers market or produce stand
- Hunting/fishing
- Friends, co-workers, neighbors
- Relatives outside of the home
- Community or personal garden
Please rate how important the following items are in your decisions about what food to buy. Possible responses are: not at all important; slightly important; important; very important; do not know; refuse to answer.

- Nutritional value
- Appearance
- Price
- Locally grown
- Organically grown or grown without the use of chemicals

I have a kitchen with the following items (check all that apply):

- Refrigerator
- Chest freezer or upright freezer (separate from refrigerator)
- Stove
- Adequate cabinet/storage space
- Pots and pans
- Microwave
- Measuring cups
- Knives
- I do not have access to any of these items
- I do not have a kitchen or easy access to one
- Do not know
- Refuse to answer
- Not applicable

Do you have access to your own garden, a neighbor’s garden, or a community garden?

- Yes
- No

In the past 12 months have you or anyone in your household had to choose between buying the food you need or paying for any of the following? Check all that apply

- Medicine or medical care
- Utilities (electricity or cell phone)
- Rent or mortgage
- Gas/fuel for vehicle
- Other bills (childcare)
- Do not know
- Refuse to answer
- Not applicable

Who usually prepares meals in your household?

- Respondent
- Respondent spouse or respondent partner
- Respondent parent or respondent grandparent
- Respondent child
- Other household member
- Do not know
- Refuse to answer
What kind of cooking do you do on a regular basis? Check all that apply

- Cook convenience foods and ready-meals (frozen or microwaveable meals)
- Put together ready-made ingredients to make complete meals (boxed macaroni and cheese)
- Prepare dishes from basic ingredients or from scratch
- Other
- Do not know
- Refuse to answer

If other, what kind of cooking do you do on a regular basis?

Please state how easy it is to find the following items in your neighborhood. Possible responses include: not easy; somewhat easy; very easy; do not know; refuse to answer.

- Fresh fruits and vegetables
- Locally grown or locally made food items
- Food support services (food pantry, free meals)
- Farmers market of produce stand
- Cheap food

How satisfied are you with the ease of which you can access the food you want to eat in your neighborhood?

- Not at all satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Very satisfied
- Do not know
- Refuse to answer

How much do you agree with each of the following statements about your neighborhood? Possible responses are: strongly disagree; disagree; not sure; agree; strongly agree; refuse to answer; not applicable

- My friends in the neighborhood are part of my everyday activities.
- People here know they can get help from others in the neighborhood if they are in trouble.
- I have no friends in the neighborhood on whom I could depend

Please indicate how often you ate at the following types of restaurants in the last seven days. Possible responses include: none; 1-2 times; 3-5 times; 6 or more times; do not know; refuse to answer

- Fast food or restaurant with walk-up counter service (McDonalds, Deli Counter, Subway)
- Food truck
- Restaurant with wait staff (sit and order)

Would you buy fresh vegetables or fruit from a food truck or Mobile Market if there was one that came to your neighborhood, community?

- Yes
- No
Description: A mobile market is like a refrigerated truck or bus that travels from neighborhood to neighborhood selling fresh fruit and produce. It can have an EBT/SNAP card swipe that you could use to pay for the fruits and vegetables.

**Health Questions**
In the last 12 months have you seen a doctor, nurse practitioner, health professional?
- Yes
- No
- Do not know
- Refuse to answer
- Not applicable
Has a doctor, health professional ever informed you that you have any of the following? Check all that apply.
- High blood pressure
- High cholesterol
- Pre-diabetes
- Type II diabetes
- Gout
- Cancer
- Do not know
- Refuse to answer
- Not applicable
If yes to Pre-Diabetes, was the condition pregnancy related?
- Yes
- No
If yes to type II Diabetes, was the condition pregnancy related?
- Yes
- No
What is your height? _________________________________________
What is your weight? _________________________________________
In a typical week how many days do you do at least 30 minutes of exercise like brisk walking, gardening, bicycling? _____________________
Are you limited in any activities because of physical, mental, emotional problems?
- Yes
- No
Do you have any health problems that require you to use special equipment like a cane, wheelchair, special bed, special telephone?
- Yes
- No

**Food Insecurity Questions**
"The food that I bought just didn't last, and I didn't have enough money to get more." Is this statement often, sometimes, never true for your household in the last 12 months?
- Often true
- Sometimes true
"I couldn't afford to eat balanced meals." Is this statement often, sometimes, never true for your situation in the last 12 months?

- Often true
- Sometimes true
- Never true
- Do not know
- Refuse to answer
- Not applicable

In the last 12 months did your household ever cut the size of your meals, skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food?

- Yes
- No
- Do not know
- Refuse to answer
- Not applicable

If yes, how often did this happen?

- Almost every month
- Some months but not every month
- Only 1 or 2 months
- Do not know
- Refuse to answer
- Not applicable

In the last 12 months did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn't enough money for food?

- Yes
- No
- Do not know
- Refuse to answer
- Not applicable

If yes, how often did this happen?

- Almost every month
- Some months but not every month
- Only 1 or 2 months
- Do not know
- Refuse to answer
- Not applicable

In the last 12 months were you ever hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food?

- Yes
No
• Do not know
• Refuse to answer
• Not applicable
If yes, how often did this happen?
• Almost every month
• Some months but not every month
• Only 1 or 2 months
• Do not know
• Refuse to answer
• Not applicable

**Demographic Questions**
Which do you feel most closely describes your gender?
• Female
• Male
• Transgender or other
• Do not know
• Refuse to answer
• Not applicable
Are you of Hispanic or Latino descent?
• Yes
• No
• Do not know
• Refuse to answer
• Not applicable
The U.S. Census uses several categories for race. How would you best describe your race?
• White/Caucasian
• Black or African-American
• Asian
• American Indian/Alaskan Native
• Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander
• Two or more races
• Other
• Do not know
• Refuse to answer
• Not applicable
If two or more races, please specify.
If other, please specify.
Were you born in the United States?
• Yes
• No. If no, what is your origin country and how long have you lived in the US?
• Do not know
Is English the primary language spoken in your home?
- Yes
- No (If no, what is the primary language spoken in your home? __________________)

What is the highest level of education you have completed?
- Less than high school (did not earn a high school degree)
- High school diploma or GED
- Some college, no degree
- Associates, two-year, or technical school degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Ph.D., MD, etc.
- Do not know
- Refuse to answer
- Not applicable

What is your age? ____________________________

Not including yourself, how many adults (18 or older) live in your household? ______
Not including yourself, how many adults (65 or older) live in your household? ______
How many children (0-17) live in your household? ______
How many are between the ages of 0 and 5? ______
How many are between the ages of 6 and 17? ______
In the past month, including yourself, how many members of your household were working full-time (at least 35 hours each week)? ______
In the past month, including yourself, how many members of your household were working part-time (at most 34 hours each week)? ______
In the past month, including yourself, did members of your household receive income, benefits from any of the following sources? Check all that apply.
- Temporary, seasonal, or cash-based work
- Unemployment or worker's compensation insurance
- TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families)
- Child support payments
- SSI (Supplemental Security Income), Disability, or Veterans Benefits
- Social Security Insurance, private pension, retirement benefits, government or military pension
- SNAP/EBT/Food stamps
- Public Housing or Section 8 Housing
- Other
- Do not know
- Refuse to answer
- Not applicable
If SNAP/EBT/Food Stamps was selected: How much SNAP benefit ($) did your household receive last month? ______

If Public Housing or Section 8 Housing was selected: How much is your total rent? ______

If Public Housing or Section 8 Housing was selected: How much do you pay out-of-pocket for these expenses: ______

Please choose the range that best matches your yearly household income

- Less than $10,000
- $10,001-$14,999
- $15,000-$24,999
- $25,000-$34,999
- $35,000-$49,999
- $50,000-$74,999
- $75,000-$99,999
- $100,000 or more
- Do not know
- Refuse to answer
- Not applicable

Comments: Thank you for completing our survey. If there is anything else you would like to tell us about the issues covered in this survey and how they impact you and your family, please use the space below.
Appendix C: UWPC Interview and Focus Group Consent Form

Information about Being in a Research Study - Clemson University
Hunger and Food Insecurity in Pickens County, South Carolina:
A Needs Assessment and Asset Inventory

Focus Groups with Key Informants and/or Community Members

KEY INFORMATION ABOUT THE RESEARCH STUDY

Voluntary Consent: Dr. Catherine Mobley, is inviting you to volunteer for a research study. Dr. Mobley is a Professor of Sociology at Clemson University and is conducting the study with Leslie Hossfeld, Michelle Eichinger and Cassius Hossfeld.

You may choose not to take part and you may choose to stop taking part at any time. You will not be punished in any way if you decide not to be in the study or to stop taking part in the study.

Study Purpose: The purpose of this research is to better understand the nature and context of hunger and food insecurity in Pickens County, South Carolina and to identify the resources for addressing hunger and food insecurity in the county. The study results will be used to improve access to food throughout the community.

Activities and Procedures: Your part in the study will be to participate in a 1 to 1 ½ hour focus group.

Some of the information shared during the group discussion may be personal, we ask that you respect others in the group and keep the information shared confidential. Please do not share any information that may be sensitive or make you uncomfortable. You may refuse to answer or leave the discussion at any time if you become uncomfortable.

Participation Time: It will take you about 1 to 1 ½ hours to participate in the focus group.

Risks and Discomforts: We do not know of any risks or discomforts to you in this research study.

Possible Benefits: You may benefit from talking about your knowledge about and experiences with hunger and food insecurity. The results of the research will inform community-based efforts to address hunger and food insecurity in Pickens County.

Incentives: You will be paid $10 in the form of a gift card upon completion of the focus group. That is, you are receiving the incentive card is conditional upon participating in the focus group.
AUDIO/VIDEO RECORDING AND PHOTOGRAPHS

Focus groups will be audio-recorded. The transcripts and recordings will be available to the team members only and will be stored in a secure fashion. Audiotapes will be retained for one year after the study is completed.

PROTECTION OF PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

The results of this study may be shared through community forums, technical reports, journal articles, and educational presentations. Your name, title and organizational affiliation will be listed as a participant in the study. Your individual responses will not be attributed to you in the final reports.

Identifiable information collected during the study will be removed from the transcripts and the de-identified information could be used for future research studies or distributed to another investigator for future research studies without additional informed consent from the participants or legally authorized representative.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights in this research study, please contact the Clemson University Office of Research Compliance (ORC) at 864-656-0636 or irb@clemson.edu. If you are outside of the Upstate South Carolina area, please use the ORC’s toll-free number, 866-297-3071. The Clemson IRB will not be able to answer some study-specific questions. However, you may contact the Clemson IRB if the research staff cannot be reached or if you wish to speak with someone other than the research staff.

If you have any study-related questions or if any problems arise, please contact Dr. Catherine Mobley at Clemson University at 864-656-3815 or camoble@clemson.edu.

CONSENT

By participating in the study, you indicate that you have read the information written above, been allowed to ask any questions, and you are voluntarily choosing to take part in this research. You do not give up any legal rights by taking part in this research study.

A copy of this form will be given to you.
Appendix D: UWPC Key Informant Interview Protocol

Key Informant Interview Protocol

1. Please provide general information on your food provision service. General information may include how your food provision service began or how your food provision service functions.
2. Please describe how community members become "clients" of your food provision service. Qualification criteria may include income level, residency.
3. Please describe the typical intake process. Do clients have to complete paperwork just once? Or, each time they visit? Is there a limit to the number of visits?
4. Please describe what additional resources could help your food provision service staff and volunteers to be more effective in delivering services to community members.
5. Has the number of your food provision service clients increased over time? Are there particular common patterns in client characteristics and life circumstances?
6. Are there any factors that make Pickens County particularly unique in terms of poverty, hunger, and food insecurity and ways that agencies address those needs (i.e., community assets and the pattern of service delivery)? For example, as compared to neighboring counties such as Greenville, Anderson, or Oconee?
7. Please let us know if you have anything else to add about the issues we have covered in our discussion, pertaining to hunger and food insecurity, service provision in the county, and meeting the needs of your community members.
8. Is there anyone else in the community that you think we should speak with to gain a more comprehensive picture of what is happening in Pickens County pertaining to these issues?
Appendix E: UWPC Focus Group Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol for Key Informant Focus Group

Source Document:

Thank you for your willingness to take part in this group discussion. The purpose of the discussion is to explore each of your perceptions regarding the presence of food security in this community.

I’d like to begin by defining food security. Although they are integrally connected, they are also quite separate situations. For example, a household may be food insecure—household members may not be able to afford to purchase food from normal retail food outlets and they may have had to take several different actions to stretch their food or may have gone without food on numerous occasions. However, in the community, food may be affordable, available, and accessible through normal markets. That is, community food security may not be a problem, but some households in the community may be food insecure.

Let’s try to discuss these two issues separately. First, let’s talk about household food security:
1. Do you think that many households in the community have a problem with food security? What is the extent of the problem?
2. Why do you think that household food security is a problem? (That is, how do you see the problem manifest itself?)
3. How do people cope with the problem of food insecurity?
4. What are the contributing factors?

Now, let’s talk about the community at large:
1. Do you think that food is accessible, available, and affordable in the community? (Probe to explain how it is or is not.)
2. Are there differences in different parts of the community?
3. What do you think are the biggest problems related to food security at the community level? Why do you think these exist?
4. How does the community address food insecurity? What resources are in place to avoid the problem if it doesn’t exist?
5. What else could be done to improve the community’s problems with food insecurity?
6. Who are the key players?
7. Are alternative food sources easily accessible and used in the community? What are they? Who organizes them? How could things be improved?
Now, I would like to focus on local food-related policies:

1. Are there any local ordinances or other policies that affect food production, distribution, and consumption? (e.g., zoning rules that affect supermarket development, food purchasing regulations for local schools or institutions, policies on the use of city-owned land for community gardens)

2. Are there any transportation policies that affect food access?

3. Are there any farmland preservation efforts?

4. Are there local funding sources for community food security-related activities?

5. Are food-related issues integrated into the community planning process?

Is there anything else you would like to add about hunger and food insecurity in Pickens County?

Thank you for your time.
Appendix F: UWPC Client Interview Protocol

Community Member Interview Protocol

Source Document:

NOTE: These questions are a starting point for each interview. We will not necessarily ask every participant every single question listed below. Rather, the interview will be tailored to each participant’s specific situation.

First I would like to thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. I really appreciate it. [GIVE CONSENT FORM TO RESPONDENT]

The interview will take about 45-60 minutes, and your cooperation is completely voluntary. As a token of appreciation, we will be giving you a $20 gift card when the interview is complete. Do you have any questions about the study or your participation in the study before we get started?

[PROVIDE RESPONDENT WITH THE USDA FOOD INSECURITY SCALE AND ASK THEM TO COMPLETE IT.]
Use the interview protocol below as a guide, selecting questions, or groups of questions, based on the interviewee’s experiences.

Making Ends Meet
1. These days, a lot of people are struggling to make ends meet each month. Tell me, how is your family?
2. Let’s talk specifically about your big monthly expenses. Let’s take last month, for example. What were your five biggest expenses? How did you make ends meet? Did you have any challenges paying any of your bills (e.g., rent/mortgage; utilities—heat, light, water and sewer; cell phone/land line/cable/internet; credit payments; education loans; medical debt; childcare; transportation).
3. So tell me, how do you cover all these expenses?
4. A lot of people say there is a lot of month left at the end of the money. How about for you? Over the last year, how have you coped during time where money was tight? Tell me all about the last time that happened? What about the time before that? How do you typically cope when the money gets tight?

Food Hardship
1. We’re especially interested in food. Tell me about the last time you ran short of what you needed to pay for food. How did you cope? How about the time before that? What do you typically do when the food budget gets tight?
2. People have all kinds of ways to make do when the food budget gets tight. Some skip meals. Others eat at a relative’s house. Others go to food pantries or soup
kitchens, that kind of thing. How about for you? (FOR EACH STRATEGY: Tell me all about that last time that happened.). Tell me a story that can illustrate your challenges and how you overcame obstacles.

3. Some times of the year are easier on the food budget than others. For example, some families tell us it’s a lot easier in months when their kids are getting free breakfast and lunch at school. Others say it’s easier during the summer, when kids are off visiting relatives. How about for you?

4. For you, what are the toughest times to get by food-wise? How do you cope then? Tell me all about the last time that happened.

5. Sometimes, our strategies just aren’t enough. Tell me all about the last time you ran out of food. How did you cope? Tell me the whole story from start to finish. What about the time before that? How did you cope? Tell me the whole story from start to finish.

6. Tell me about the last time you or someone in your household had to skip a meal because there wasn’t enough food. Tell me the whole story from start to finish. What about the time before that? Tell me the whole story from start to finish.

7. Tell me about the last time you or someone in your household actually went hungry. Tell me the whole story from start to finish. What about the time before that?

8. Sometimes unexpected events can make it difficult to make ends meet and provide food for your family—an eviction or foreclosure, a job loss, a new baby, a divorce…even something small like a bunch of bank overdraft fees. Has something like that ever happened to you in the last few years? How did you cope? Tell me the whole story from start to finish.

9. So let’s get even more specific. Think back to yesterday. Who ate breakfast, lunch and dinner at your house? What did they have?

10. Who cooked yesterday? Who was responsible for getting the food from the grocery store and planning the meals? Who paid for the groceries?

11. So how typical is yesterday of other days during the week/on the weekend (depending on whether yesterday was a weekday or a weekend). Tell me more about that.

12. Now I’m going to use your imagination. Okay, typically you do your big shopping at what store? Alright, we’ve just arrived at that store. You are going to shop just the way you always shop—nothing fancy. Where do you head first? What do you buy? Where do you head after that? What’s next? What’s after that? Let’s make sure we didn’t miss anything.
   Fruits and Vegetables?
   Meats/Fish?
   Dairy?
   Cereals, pasta, beans, rice, other dry goods?
   The frozen section?
   Canned goods?
   Chips and soda?
   Other snacks?
13. On this imaginary trip, where you are shopping just like you usually shop, is there anything you want to buy that you just can’t afford?
14. What do you buy that you think you shouldn’t be buying?
15. In general, how do you decide what to buy and what not to buy?
16. What do you put in your cart that you find yourself taking out and putting back later? Tell me all about the last time that happened.
17. Where else besides Big Store X do you shop? What do you buy there? Take me through that store, and tell me what you usually buy and what you usually don’t buy and why
18. Do you shop anywhere else? Take me through that other store, and tell me what you usually buy and what you usually don’t buy and why.
19. Any other stores I’ve missed? What food do you buy at the drug store, the Dollar Store, the farmers market, and so on?
20. Families eat out or get carry out for all kinds of reasons—sometimes they need a break from cooking or have no time to cook, sometimes it’s just a treat for the kids, sometimes there’s no place to store your food or to cook, and sometimes it’s just too hot to turn on the stove. What about for you?

SNAP, WIC or Other Food Programs (if participants mentions receiving benefits)
1. Tell me how you first learned about [Food program: SNAP, WIC or other program]? Tell me how you first learned about XX. When did you first apply? Tell me the whole story of that experience from start to finish. What has been your experience with the program since then? Tell me the whole story from start to finish. What do you like best about [the program]? What do you like least?
2. Now think back to when you weren’t receiving assistance from this/these program(s). Was your budget situation the same, better, worse? Was your food situation the same, better, worse?
3. How do you pay for food when you don’t/can’t use [XXX program]?
4. A lot of families these days are coping by doubling up. A lot of other families are helping out by offering struggling friends and families a place to stay for a while. Sometimes people just stay for a few nights, sometimes it’s a permanent thing, and sometimes it’s somewhere in between. What about for you?

Self-Assessed Heath Issues
1. How would you describe your health? What about the other members of the household?
2. Describe the most recent health problem you’ve faced. What about other members of the household?
3. When was the last time you went to the doctor? What about other members of the household?
4. Which of your health problems are related to diet? What about other members of the household?
5. People have a lot of different ideas about what healthy eating means for them. What about for you? What are your healthiest habits? What prevents you from having more health habits?
6. If you could afford to purchase the food you really wanted, how would your eating habits change?

7. Some parents tell us that they want to feed their kids healthier foods, but their kids refuse what’s given to them. How about for you?

**Family Expenses**

1. When your income falls short of your expenses, what do you do? Tell me more about that.

2. For example, how do you prioritize things and how do you decide what to pay first, second, and so on?

3. In the last year, what hardships has your household faced as you’ve struggled to make ends meet? Tell me about how you coped with these hardships.

**Concluding Questions**

1. What do you think can/should be done to help your family make ends meet in these tough economic times?

2. What do you think can/should be done to help families struggling to feed their families?
Appendix G: FIRST Consent Form

Information about Being in a Research Study
Clemson University

Effects of Responses to COVID-19 and Social Context on Food Insecurity in the United States

KEY INFORMATION ABOUT THE RESEARCH STUDY
Dr. Catherine Mobley is inviting you to volunteer for a research study. Dr. Mobley is a Professor of Sociology at Clemson University conducting the study with Dr. Sarah Griffin, Cassius Hossfeld, and Dr. Leslie Hossfeld at Clemson University.

Study Purpose: The purpose of this research is to understand how families' food practices have shifted as a result of COVID-19 and identify the processes that shield some families from food insecurity but not others.

Voluntary Consent: Participation is voluntary, and the only alternative is to not participate. You will not be punished in any way if you decide not to be in the study or to stop taking part in the study.

Activities and Procedures: Your part in the study will be to participate in two interviews. We will conduct two interviews over the phone or by video (Zoom) about how you shop for, prepare, and eat food and how this has changed since the COVID-19 pandemic began. We will also collect between 10 and 15 photos of your “foodscape”—the places where you shop, prepare, and consume food.

Participation Time: It will take you about 90 minutes to 2 ½ hours to be in this study.

Risks and Discomforts: You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in this study. Research studies also may pose risks to those who participate. You may not want to participate in this research because you feel uncomfortable answering questions about food beliefs and practices.

Possible Benefits: You may want to participate in this research because some people find it enjoyable to share their experiences with others. Your participation will also add to the understanding of challenges related to food insecurity during COVID-19.

EXCLUSION/INCLUSION REQUIREMENTS
There will be approximately 40 participants in this study, 20 in Pickens County, South Carolina and 20 in Lee County, South Carolina.

In order to be a participant in this study, you must agree to be in the study, live in one of the two counties (Pickens County or Lee County), be responsible at least 50% of the
“food work” (work shopping for, preparing, and planning meals) in your household, and have a child between ages 5 and 18. You must also have a 2019 household income within 185% of the federal policy program or have qualified for free or reduced schools meals in the 2019-2020 school year (before the pandemic began).

You cannot participate in this study if you do not want to be in the study or you don’t live in one of the five states. You cannot participate if you are not responsible for at least 50% of household food work, if you do not have a child between ages 5 and 18, or if you had a 2019 household income that was more than 185% of the federal poverty line.

INCENTIVES
Participants will receive $75 for completing all study activities. You will receive $50 for completing the background interview and submitting your photos and doing an interview about them, and you will receive $25 for submitting additional photos and doing another interview six months later. You will have an option to receive these payments as a cash transfer. We are going to give the option of cash transfer (through Venmo, PayPal, or CashApp), or as a gift card (electronic, through gyft.com, or actual plastic gift card).

AUDIO/VIDEO RECORDING AND PHOTOGRAPHS
If you want to participate in this research, you must agree to be audio recorded. If you do not agree to be audio recorded, you cannot participate in this research. If you want to participate in this research, you agree to share your digital “foodscape” photos with us. We will not share any images with identifying details with others. If you do not agree to share your photos, you cannot participate in this research.

EQUIPMENT AND DEVICES THAT WILL BE USED IN RESEARCH STUDY
All interviews will be recorded through the Zoom conference software, a regular electronic recorder, or through a recording app.

PROTECTION OF PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY
The results of this study may be published in scientific journals, professional publications, or educational presentations.

Trust is the foundation of the participant/researcher relationship. Much of that principle of trust is tied to keeping your information private and in the manner that we have described to you in this form. The information that you share with us will be held in confidence to the fullest extent allowed by law.

Protecting your privacy as related to this research is of utmost importance to us. However, there are very rare circumstances related to confidentiality where us may have to share information about you. These are limited to instances in which imminent harm could come to you or others.
How we manage, protect, and share your data are the principal ways that we protect your personal privacy. Data generated about you in this study will be de-identified. Data that will be shared with others about you will be de-identified.

**De-identified.** De-identified data is information that at one time could directly identify you, but that we have recorded this data so that your identity is separated from the data. We will have a master list with your code and real name that we can use to link to your data. When the research concludes, there will be no way your real identity will be linked to the data we publish.

To help maximize the benefits of your participation in this project, by further contributing to science and our community, your de-identified data will be stored for future research and may be shared with other people without additional consent from you or legally authorized representative.

**CONTACT INFORMATION**
If you have any questions or concerns about your rights in this research study, please contact the Clemson University Office of Research Compliance (ORC) at 864-656-0636 or irb@clemson.edu. If you are outside of the Upstate South Carolina area, please use the ORC’s toll-free number, 866-297-3071. The Clemson IRB will not be able to answer some study-specific questions. However, you may contact the Clemson IRB if the research staff cannot be reached or if you wish to speak with someone other than the research staff.

If you have any study related questions or if any problems arise, please contact Dr. Catherine Mobley at Clemson University at camoble@clemson.edu

**CONSENT**
By participating in the study, you indicate that you have read the information written above, been allowed to ask any questions, and you are voluntarily choosing to take part in this research. You do not give up any legal rights by taking part in this research study.
Appendix H: FIRST Client Interview Protocol – Interview #1

INTERVIEW GUIDE – SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW #1

Introduction/transition: Now that we've completed the survey and collected some background information, I have some more open-ended questions about your life and how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected you and your family.

1. How have you/your family been doing lately?

2. Can you give me a sense of what a typical day is like in your household? (For example, when you usually get up, when kids get up and go to bed, when you eat meals, how you navigate work/child activities, daily routines).

3. Do you have a favorite part of the day? Can you tell me about that?
   - What is the most challenging part of your day? Can you tell me about it?
   - How has this changed since the pandemic began? (What was your favorite/most challenging part of the day prior to the pandemic?).

4. In general, how have things changed for your family since the COVID-19 pandemic began? (Clarify that we are defining the start of the pandemic as March 13, 2020, when the president declared COVID-19 to be a national emergency. However, timing for specific events may vary by participant—in discussion, try to get participants to give approximate dates/timelines, i.e., “Schools closed in the middle of March and that's when everything changed”).
   - How has your schedule/routine changed since the COVID-19 pandemic began? (Thinking about your typical day again-- from the time you get up to the time you go to bed-- what are all of the ways that your routine has changed since the COVID-19 pandemic began?)
     - Please describe the most significant change to your schedule/routine since the COVID-19 pandemic began.

5. Have you or anyone you know contracted COVID-19 or shown symptoms? (either they tested positive or had symptoms but were not tested; or they believed they had a false negative test)?
   - If yes, what was that experience like for you?
   - If no, are you worried that you or your loved ones could contract the virus? What worries you the most?

6. How has your job/work changed since the COVID-19 pandemic began? What about for other people in your family?
• Examples/potential probes: losing a job or having hours cut/being furloughed, getting a new job, taking leave to care for children or others, receiving unemployment, working more or less than before, working on different tasks

7. How have your finances changed?

• Examples/potential probes: changes in income/wages, increases or decreases in spending (higher or lower food costs, cutting costs in certain areas, spending on rent), changes in social assistance

8. How have things changed at home (caregiving/domestic work)?

• Probes: amount of work/types of work, division of labor, “invisible labor” (planning, making decisions), having kids home all day
• SCHOOL: What are you and your family doing about school (and work) this fall?
  o Probe for whether children are attending in person, virtually, or a mix of both
  o How is that going? How do you feel about it?

9. How is your health these days? How is your family’s health? How have your health/your family’s health changed during the pandemic?

• Follow-up: What does it mean to be healthy? Have your ideas about this changed during the pandemic? What are some of the challenges you/your family have faced related to staying healthy during this time?
• Probes: aspects of health that have been most affected -- physical, mental, emotional health; resources (or lack of resources) to address health issues

10. Is there anything else that you want to tell us about what life has been like for your family during the pandemic?

Closing: Thank you for sharing your experiences with us. We will talk more about how the pandemic has affected your life -- especially how you cook and eat-- during our next interview. Now, I’m going to briefly explain the photos we’re asking you to take over the next week. (Transition to discuss photovoice instructions).
Appendix I: FIRST Client Survey

FIRST PROJECT SURVEY

Default Question Block

1) Participant Code and Interviewer Initials (e.g., PRU01 SKB)
2) What is the zip code of the place where you're living today?
3) What is your age in years, today?
4) What is your current relationship status? (Please select one.)
   • Married;
   • Living with partner but not married;
   • Single;
   • Dating (not living with anyone);
   • Prefer not to answer
5) How many people live in your household, including you?
6) Please list the first names, ages, and relationship (e.g., self, spouse, child, parent) of all people that are currently living in your house:
7) What is your gender?
8) What is your sexual orientation?
9) Which categories describe you? Select all the boxes that apply. You may select more than one.
   • White (for example: German, Irish, English, Italian, Polish, French, etc.). Please specify below.;
   • Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish (for example: Mexican or Mexican American, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Salvadoran, Dominican, Colombian, etc.). Please specify below.;
   • Black or African American (for example: African American, Jamaican, Haitian, Nigerian, Ethiopian, Somali, etc.). Please specify below.;
   • Asian (for example: Chinese, Filipino, Asian Indian, Vietnamese, Korean, Japanese, etc.). Please specify below.;
   • American Indian or Alaska Native (for example: Navajo Nation, Blackfeet Tribe, Mayan, Aztec, Native Village of Barrow Inupiat Traditional Government, Nome Eskimo Community, etc.). Please specify below.;
   • Middle Eastern or North African (for example: Lebanese, Iranian, Egyptian, Syrian, Moroccan, Algerian, etc.). Please specify below.;
   • Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (for example: Native Hawaiian, Samoan, Chamorro, Tongan, Fijian, Marshallese, etc.). Please specify below.;
   • Some other race, ethnicity, or origin. Please specify below.; Prefer not to answer
10) Were you born in the United States?
   • Yes;
   • No;
   • Prefer not to answer
11) If born outside the United States, where were you born?
12) How many years have you lived in the United States?
13) What languages do people who live in your house speak? Please list all, starting with most frequently spoken.

14) What is the highest level of education you have completed?
   - Less than 8th grade/less than 8 years of education;
   - At least 8th grade/at least 8 years of education, but less than high school or high school equivalent (GED);
   - Completed high school or high school equivalent (GED);
   - Some college, but no degree;
   - Completed 2-year junior or community college or trade school degree;
   - Completed 4-year college or university degree or higher;
   - Prefer not to answer

15) Below is a list of income ranges **before taxes are taken out. Which range best represents your household's total combined income in 2019?** This includes money from jobs, net income from a business, pensions, social security payments, and other money received by anyone in the household. You should include cash transfers from social assistance programs (like disability) but don't include SNAP or WIC benefits or other forms of food assistance.
   - $5,000 or less per year (or less than $417 per month);
   - $5,001 - 15,000 per year (or $417 – 1,250 per month);
   - $15,001 - 25,000 per year (or $1,251 – 2,084 per month);
   - $25,001 - 35,000 per year (or $2,085 - 2,917 per month);
   - $35,001 - 45,000 per year (or $2,918 - 3,750 per month);
   - $45,001 - 50,000 per year (or $3,751 - 4,167 per month);
   - More than $50,000 per year (or more than $4,167 per month);
   - Prefer not to answer

16) Do you think the combined income of your household will change during the next year as a result of COVID-19?
   - Yes, our household income will change. We will make MORE money because of COVID-19.;
   - Yes, our household income will change. We will make LESS money because of COVID-19.;
   - No, our household income will not change. We will make the same amount of money and will not be financially impacted by COVID-19.;
   - Our household income will change, but not as a result of COVID-19.;
   - Don't know;
   - Prefer not to answer

17) Were you employed or working for pay prior to the start of COVID-19 in early March?
   - No, I was not employed and was not looking for work.;
   - No, I was not employed, but I was looking for a job.;
   - No, I was retired, disabled, a full-time homemaker/stay-at-home parent, or a full-time student.;
• Yes, I was employed in a temporary or seasonal job.;
• Yes, I was employed year-round (at least 9 months out of the year) in a job for 1-
  10 hours per week.;
• Yes, I was employed year-round (at least 9 months out of the year) in a job for 11-
  29 hours per week.;
• Yes, I was employed year-round (at least 9 months out of the year) in a job for
  more than 30 hours per week.;
• Other (please specify);
• I don't know;
• Prefer not to answer

18) IF APPLICABLE: Was your spouse/partner employed before COVID-19 in early
March?
• No, they were not employed and were not looking for work.;
• No, they were not employed, but were looking for a job.;
• No, they are retired, disabled, a full-time homemaker/stay-at-home parent, or a
  full-time student.;
• Yes, they were employed in a temporary or seasonal job.;
• Yes, they were employed year-round (at least 9 months out of the year) in a job
  for 1- 10 hours per week.;
• Yes, they were employed year-round (at least 9 months out of the year) in a job
  for 11- 29 hours per week.;
• Yes, they were employed year-round (at least 9 months out of the year) in a job
  for more than 30 hours per week.;
• Other (please specify);
• Don't know;
• Prefer not to answer;
• Not applicable

19) Have you or has anyone in your household experienced any economic hardship as a
result of COVID-19? Select all that apply.
• I was laid off.;
• I was furloughed or my work hours were reduced.;
• I was on work leave status to care for children or other family members.;
• My partner was laid off.;
• My partner was furloughed, or their work hours were reduced.;
• My partner was on work leave status to care for family members, including
  children.;
• Someone else in my household (besides me or my partner) was laid off.;
• Someone else in my household (besides me or my partner) was furloughed or
  their work hours were reduced.;
• Someone else in my household (besides me or my partner) was on work leave
  status to care for family members, including children.;
• I or someone else in my household had to temporarily close a business I/they own.;
• I or someone in my household had to shut down, for good, a business I/they own.;
• I/we had to default on a loan payment and/or mortgage payment.;
• I/we missed paying one or more bills (includes utility bill and/or credit card).;
• I or someone in my household had to lay off employees.;
• I/we experienced a change in housing.;
• No, I/we have not experienced any of these hardships.;
• Other, please describe;
• Don't know;
• Prefer not to answer
20) Where are you living or staying right now?
• My own apartment/house, which I own;
• My own apartment/house, which I rent;
• Someone else's apartment/house (for example: a friend's or relative's apartment or house);
• A rooming/boarding/halfway house;
• A shelter;
• A hotel;
• Outside (e.g., on the street or in a tent);
• Other (please specify);
• Prefer not to answer
21) List the first names of all children living in household between ages 4 and 19. Please include their age and school grade today and choose the option that most accurately represents each child's school situation TODAY.
22) After entering all children's names, enter N/A under name of child all remaining rows.
• Child is currently attending school full-time, in-person.;
• Child is currently attending hybrid (combined in-person and virtual) school.;
• Child is attending 100% virtual/online school.;
• Child is on a summer, holiday, or other break.;
• Child is being homeschooled (outside of formal school arrangement);
• Child has graduated or dropped out of high school.;
• Other (please specify);
• Option 1-7 (select & write one from above per child)
23) Did you or anyone in your household receive any of the following sources of income or benefits in the 3 months before COVID-19? Select all that apply.
• SNAP or Food Stamps; IF YOU WERE RECEIVING SNAP, how much did you/your household receive per month (the last time you received it before the pandemic began)?;
• WIC (Program for Women, Infants, & Children); Unemployment benefits; IF YOU WERE RECEIVING UNEMPLOYMENT, how much did you/your
household receive per month (the last time you received it before the pandemic began)?

- Disability Payments or SSDI (Social Security Disability Insurance);
- TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families), sometimes also known as Work First;
- SSI (Supplemental Security Income);
- Donated plasma for money;
- Received a loan from a payday lender;
- Free or reduced-price school lunch or breakfast;
- Money from friends or relatives;
- Food gifts from relatives or friends;
- Food from food banks or food pantries;
- Other (please specify);
- I/we received none of these.;
- Prefer not to answer

24) Have you or anyone in your household received any of the following sources of income or benefits since the pandemic began? Select all that apply.

- SNAP or Food Stamps
  - IF SO, when is the date of your most recent SNAP payment?;
  - How much did you/your household receive the last time you received a SNAP payment?;
  - Have your SNAP payments changed during the pandemic (i.e., decreased or increased during the pandemic)?
    ◊ If so, please explain.;
- WIC (Program for Women, Infants, & Children);
- Unemployment benefits;
  - IF SO, when is the date that you last received unemployment?;
  - How much did you/your household receive the last time you received unemployment?;
  - Have your unemployment payments changed during the pandemic (i.e., decreased or increased during the pandemic)?
    ◊ If so, please explain.;
- Disability Payments or SSDI (Social Security Disability Insurance);
  - Have your disability payments changed during the pandemic (i.e., decreased or increased during the pandemic)?
    ◊ If so, please explain.;
- TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families), sometimes also known as Work First;
  - Have your TANF or Work First payments changed during the pandemic (i.e., decreased or increased during the pandemic)?
    ◊ If so, please explain.;
- SSI (Supplemental Security Income);
Have your SSI payments changed during the pandemic (i.e., decreased or increased during the pandemic)?

◊ If so, please explain.

- Donated plasma for money;
- Received a loan from a payday lender;
- Free or reduced-price school lunch or breakfast (in school, while school is in session);
- School meal pick-up/deliveries (as part of summer meal or COVID-related meal programs—not part of regular school day);
- Money from friends or relatives;
- Food gifts from relatives or friends;
- Food from food banks or food pantries;
- Other (please specify);
- I/we received none of these;
- Prefer not to answer

25) Have you or anyone in your household received food or money from any individual person, before or at any point during COVID-19? These could be friends, relatives, acquaintances, or strangers. Select all that apply. In the three months before COVID-19 + During the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Food from relatives;
- Food from friends;
- Food from acquaintances or friends of friends;
- Food from strangers;
- I/we did not receive food from others;
- Money from relatives;
- Money from friends;
- Money from acquaintances or friends of friends;
- Money from strangers;
- I/we did not receive money from others;
- Other. Please specify.

26) Have you supported others in your community in any of the following ways since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic? Select all that apply.

- Helped with childcare for someone who had to still work, but didn't have care;
- Donated money to a local business or organization;
- Donated money to a family member or friend;
- Donated food to a food bank or food pantry;
- Donated food to a family or friend;
- Delivered groceries/other essential supplies to a family member or friend;
- I was not involved in any of these activities;
- Other;
- Please specify;
- Prefer not to answer
27) Next, I have some questions about your health. In general, how would you describe your health? Is it:
- Poor;
- Fair;
- Good;
- Very Good;
- Excellent;
- Don't know;
- Prefer not to answer

28) Has a doctor or other health professional ever told you that you HAVE any of the following health conditions? Select all that apply.
- Overweight or obese;
- High blood pressure or hypertension;
- Pre-diabetes;
- High blood sugar, Type 1 diabetes, Type II diabetes;
- Gestational diabetes / diabetes during pregnancy;
- Metabolic syndrome;
- Heart condition such as a heart attack, angina, or congestive heart failure Chronic lung disease or moderate to severe asthma;
- Chronic kidney disease;
- Chronic liver disease;
- Immunocompromised (i.e. including cancer treatment, bone marrow or organ transplantation, immune deficiencies);
- Other health condition that you or your doctor think might put you at higher risk of developing COVID-19? Please specify.;
- No, my doctor has never indicated any of the health conditions.;
- Don't know;
- Prefer not to answer

29) Have you been diagnosed or suspect you may have/had COVID-19?
- Yes;
- No;
- I do not know;
- Prefer not to answer

30) If yes, were you:
- Asymptomatic (you did not experience any symptoms, but received a positive diagnosis);
- Impacted mildly (you recovered at home);
- Impacted severely (you were hospitalized as a result);
- Don't know;
- Prefer not to answer

31) Has anyone else in your household been diagnosed or suspect they may have/had COVID-19?
• Yes;
• No;
• I do not know;
• Prefer not to answer

32) In general, has COVID-19 or its surrounding circumstances impacted the health (physical/mental) of any loved ones (any family members or close friends, whether they live with you or not)?
• Yes;
• No;
• Don't know;
• Prefer not to answer

33) If COVID-19 or its surrounding circumstances have impacted your loved ones, how many friends and family members have had their health impacted? Fill in (number):

34) If COVID-19 or its surrounding circumstances have impacted your loved ones, was the impact of COVID-19 on any of these people either fatal or did it result in hospitalization? Please check all that apply.
• Yes, at least one friend/family member died as a result of COVID-19 or its surrounding circumstances.;
• Yes, at least one friend/family member was hospitalized as a result of COVID-19 or its surrounding circumstances.;
• No.;
• Don't know;
• Prefer not to answer

The following questions ask you about your feelings and thoughts since the COVID-19 outbreak began. In each case, you will be asked to indicate how often you felt or thought a certain way. The possible responses are:

• All of the time;
• Most of the time;
• Some of the time;
• A little of the time;
• None of the time;
• Prefer not to answer

35) Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, about how often did you feel nervous?

36) Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, about how often did you feel hopeless?

37) Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, about how often did you feel restless or fidgety?

38) Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, about how often did you feel so sad that nothing could cheer you up?

39) Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, about how often did you feel that everything was an effort?

40) Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, about how often did you feel worthless?
Now think back to BEFORE the COVID-19 pandemic began and answer the same set of questions. The possible response categories are:

- All of the time;
- Most of the time;
- Some of the time;
- A little of the time;
- None of the time;
- Prefer not to answer

41) In the period right BEFORE the COVID-19 pandemic began, about how often did you feel nervous?
42) In the period right BEFORE the COVID-19 pandemic began, about how often did you feel hopeless?
43) In the period right BEFORE the COVID-19 pandemic began, about how often did you feel restless or fidgety?
44) In the period right BEFORE the COVID-19 pandemic began, about how often did you feel so sad that nothing could cheer you up?
45) In the period right BEFORE the COVID-19 pandemic began, about how often did you feel that everything was an effort?
46) In the period right BEFORE the COVID-19 pandemic began, about how often did you feel worthless?
47) If you are feeling more stressed and/or anxious since the COVID-19 pandemic began, can you explain a little more about the source of your stress and/or anxiety?

These questions focus on your food habits now and before the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic began in March 2020. The possible response categories are:

- Every day;
- Several times per week;
- Once a week;
- Once every two weeks;
- Once a month or less, only small trips;
- Rarely make any major shopping trips;
- Prefer not to answer

48) How often do you or someone in your household do the major food shopping for your household? Please do not include times when you/someone else bought only a few items. Would you say (check one)...Before the pandemic
49) How often do you or someone in your household do the major food shopping for your household? Please do not include times when you/someone else bought only a few items. Would you say (check one)...Currently
50) Please consider the following food-related habits and indicate whether you have experienced any changes in how often you have done these behaviors, since the COVID-19 began. If your food habits have changed over time, choose the response
that best represents your habits over the course of the pandemic. Possible response categories are:

- Substantial decrease in frequency (I do this a lot less than I did before);
- Slight decrease in frequency (I do this a little less than I did before);
- No change;
- Slight increase in frequency (I do this a little more than I did before);
- Substantial increase in frequency (I do this a lot more than I did before);
- I did not partake in this activity before or during COVID.;
- Prefer not to answer

- Leaving the house for groceries;
- Eating out (restaurant, cafeteria, fast food)
- Eating at someone else’s place (family, friends)
- Getting take away/pick up or delivery foods from restaurants/fast food
- Cooking at home
- Cooking ready-to eat frozen meals
- Relying on others to get groceries for you
- Buying food out of fear or anxiety
- Eating food out of fear or anxiety
- Snacking
- Baking
- Stockpiling food
- Wasting food
- Drinking alcohol
- Smoking cigarettes

51) Since the pandemic began in early March, have all the foods you needed been available when you shopped?
- Yes
- No
- I do not know
- Prefer not to answer

52) If not, what foods were not available?

53) In the next 3 months, how much do you anticipate that you and your family will actually experience hardships such as inadequate housing, food, or medical care? — You may answer “not at all,” "a little," "some," or "a lot".
- Not at all
- A little
- Some
- A lot
- Don't know
- Refused
Now we have a few questions about food shortages that you may have experienced. Please think about your behavior related to food before and since the COVID-19 pandemic began. These questions apply to everyone who lives in your house. Possible response categories are:

- Often true
- Sometimes true
- Never true
- Don't know
- Prefer not to answer

54) For the 12 months before the COVID pandemic: The food that my household bought just didn't last (not enough food), and I/we didn't have money to get more.
55) Since the COVID pandemic began in early March: The food that my household bought just didn't last (not enough food), and I/we didn't have money to get more.
56) For the 12 months before the COVID pandemic: I/we couldn't afford to eat balanced meals.
57) Since the COVID pandemic began in early March: I/we couldn't afford to eat balanced meals.
58) For the 12 months before the COVID pandemic: Did you or others in your household ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food?
59) Since the COVID pandemic began in early March: Did you or others in your household ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food?
60) For the 12 months before the COVID pandemic: Did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn't enough money for food?
61) Since the COVID pandemic began in early March: Did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn't enough money for food?
62) For the 12 months before the COVID pandemic: Were you ever hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food?
63) Since the COVID pandemic began in early March: Were you ever hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food?
64) For the 12 months before the COVID pandemic: How often would you say you were worried or stressed about having enough money to buy nutritious meals?
65) Since the COVID pandemic began in early March: How often would you say you were worried or stressed about having enough money to buy nutritious meals?
66) **Feedback (open-ended question):** What did you think of these survey questions? Were there any questions that did not make sense or that you were confused about? Do you have any other feedback for us?
INTERVIEW GUIDE – SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW #2
Pickens County, SC

*yellow highlighted text are questions specific to Pickens County, SC

1) How has the last week gone for you?
   Last week, we talked about general changes that have taken place as a result of COVID-19. This week, we are going to talk about changes in how you shop for food, cook, and eat.

2) Let’s take a look at your pictures. Start by picking between 3 and 5 pictures that are important to you. Tell me about them. What is the picture of? What was going on when you took it? Why is this photo important?
   - Discussion should be guided by the photos, but interview should probe around the following topics (as part of the photo discussion, or separately, if it doesn’t come up).
     - **Eating habits:** How have your eating habits changed since COVID-19? (Are there foods you’re appreciating more? Are there foods you are eating more of? Foods you are eating less of?)
     - **Children’s/family eating habits:** How have your children’s food habits changed? Has your family developed any new traditions around food?
     - **Have you ever heard of the term “local food”? How would you define local foods?** Please use miles/kilometers (within X distance) and/or political boundaries (within X nation/state/locality). How did you arrive at this answer?
     - **Division of labor:** Who does the majority of work of cooking/cleaning/shopping for food? How do you decide how to divide this up? How do you feel about this arrangement? How has it changed since the pandemic began?
     - **Cooking:** How has this changed (the way you cook, how often you cook, how you feel about it)? Are you spending more or less time cooking? Are you cooking differently (making new recipes, not making certain things, incorporating new ingredients)? Do you enjoy cooking these days? Why/why not?
     - **Shopping:** What has grocery shopping been like during COVID-19? How has it changed?
       ◊ **Probes:** Locations, frequency, budget, what you’re buying, method (i.e., using delivery or pickup options).
       ◊ **Probe:** Access to transportation (How do you get to the store? Has this changed during the pandemic?)
       ◊ **Probe:** Access to local foods (farmers’ markets, etc.) - Has this changed? Is it easier/harder? How/why has it changed?
       ◊ **Which factor is most important for you when shopping for food?**
(i) The price of your food, that is how much it costs? or is it finding food that is grown or produced somewhere close to you, that is, locally grown food? Why would you say this is the case?

1. Does this factor change in level of importance based on where you are shopping (grocery store, sit-down restaurant, fast food restaurant, convenience store)? That is, is price more important than local food, if you are shopping at one store versus another? Why or why not?

◊ Do you feel comfortable shopping for food at a farmer’s market? If you had access to get to your local farmer’s market and the means to buy food you wanted, would you feel comfortable doing so? Why or why not?

(a) Are certain foods easier/harder to get? Have you found that certain foods are more expensive?

3) Food shortages (may have come up in discussion of photos—if not, ask!): Since COVID-19, have you or your family experienced food shortages or come close to running out of food? (Can you describe what was happening at the time? What did you do? What resources did you rely on? How were you feeling?).

4) What are the resources that have helped you get food for your family during this pandemic? Researcher should specifically ask about each of these if they don’t come up:

• SNAP (Were you getting SNAP before? Have your SNAP benefits changed? Do they cover the food you need for you and your family? How do your SNAP benefits affect what kinds of food you purchase (i.e., rules/regulations, amount)?

• WIC (Were you getting WIC before? Has anything changed with the WIC program—e.g., appointments, vouchers—during the pandemic? Are these benefits enough for you to provide what you need? Are the foods you buy with WIC different from the kind of food you would normally buy?)

• Food pantries: Have you visited a food pantry during the pandemic?)
  ♦ If NO: Why not?
  ♦ If YES: Can you tell me about it? Tell me a little bit about the last experience you had visiting a food pantry. What was it like (e.g., location, getting in (walk-in vs. appointments vs. curbside), staff, set-up, food, etc.)? Did you feel safe? How do you get there (car, public transportation, etc.)? What would you change, if anything, about that experience?

• School meal programs: Have you gotten any school meals during the pandemic?
  ♦ If NO: Why not?
  ♦ If YES: Can you tell me about it? How often did you go? What was it like (e.g., delivery vs. pickup, location, staff, set-up, food)? Did you feel safe? What would you change, if anything, about that experience?

5) What are other (non-food) resources that have helped you during the pandemic?

• Probes/examples: unemployment, stimulus check, shelters
  ♦ What resources have helped you the most? Why/how?
  ♦ What other resources would help?
6) How have other people (family/friends/neighbors/faith community members) helped you during the pandemic?
   - Can you tell me about a recent time when this happened?
   - Probe for specifics: sharing food or money, helping with childcare, caring for people when they are sick, etc.

7) Have you supported other people (family/friends/community members) during COVID-19? What has that been like?
   - Can you tell me about a recent time when this happened?
   - Probe for specifics: sharing food or money, helping with childcare, caring for people when they are sick, etc.

8) In general, what is the biggest struggle your family is currently facing?
   - Can you tell me about a recent time when this happened?
   - Probe for specifics: sharing food or money, helping with childcare, caring for people when they are sick, etc.

9) I know it may be difficult to remember, but please try to remember the BIGGEST/MOST SIGNIFICANT change your family has faced related to food access since the pandemic started.
   - What was that like? Can you describe it?
   - Has food access become easier during the pandemic? More difficult?

10) Are there any factors that have helped your family get by during the pandemic? In other words, what has helped your family navigate through these challenging times, both in general and related to food access?
   - Can you tell me a story about a time when you were proud of how you and your family met these challenges?

TRANSITION: Thank you for sharing your experiences. Now, we are going to ask you a few questions about your opinion of your community’s and the government’s response to COVID-19.

11) What do you think about the response of people (your neighbors and the general public) in your community to COVID-19, in general? What about in terms of food/food access, specifically?
   - What is working? What is not working? What else would you like to see?

These next few questions ask you what you think of the government’s response to COVID-19, in general, and specifically in terms of food access. (NOTE: (Researcher should probe about specific shelter-in-place, school policies, and/or food policies at the city/county/state level, if possible.).

12) First, what do you think about how your city/town/municipality has responded COVID-19? What about in terms of food access?
   - What is working? What is not working? What else would you like to see?
   - Would you buy fresh vegetables or fruit from a food truck or Mobile Market if there was one that came to your neighborhood, community? What do you view as
the advantages or disadvantages of such an approach for you and your family? Are there any factors that would lead you to NOT want to purchase food from a mobile market such as this?

- Definition (if asked): A mobile market is like a refrigerated truck or bus that travels from neighborhood to neighborhood selling fresh fruit and produce. It may have an EBT/SNAP card swipe that you could use to pay for the fruits and vegetables.

13) First, what do you think about your county’s response to COVID-19? What about in terms of food access?
   - What is working? What is not working? What else would you like to see?
   - There are many ways to create a healthy food environment in a community. For example, some communities develop a Food Policy Council. Other communities would like to involve community members such as yourself in a Hunger Coalition to work on issues as those we have discussed.
   - Do you know what a Food Policy Council is? If not, please let me explain.…
   - Would you like to become involved in these kinds of efforts so you can contribute your strengths to help your community?

14) What do you think about your state’s response to COVID-19? What about in terms of food access?
   - What is working? What is not working? What else would you like to see?

15) Finally, what do you think about the federal government’s response to COVID-19, including in terms of food access (such as, for example, SNAP and the P-EBT program)?
   - What is working? What is not working? What else would you like to see?

TRANSITION: We have just a few more questions to wrap up the interview.

16) What do you think things will look like 3 months from now (for you/your family/your community)? What about a year from now?
   - Probes: future worries and future hopes (that they might not have considered before the pandemic)

17) Are there any habits/activities that you’ve started doing during the pandemic that you’ll try to continue? (for example, new traditions, new habits, new hobbies)

18) Are there any lessons you’ve learned from your experience during COVID-19 that you’ll take going with you going forward?
Appendix K: South Carolina Key Informant Interviews Consent Form

Information about Being in a Research Study - Clemson University
A Needs Assessment of Food Security in Pickens County, SC (and surrounding areas)

Interviews with Key Informants

KEY INFORMATION ABOUT THE RESEARCH STUDY

Voluntary Consent: Dr. Catherine Mobley, is inviting you to volunteer for a research study. Dr. Mobley is a Professor of Sociology at Clemson University and is conducting the study with Cassius Hossfeld.

You may choose not to take part and you may choose to stop taking part at any time. You will not be punished in any way if you decide not to be in the study or to stop taking part in the study.

Study Purpose: The purpose of this research is to better understand the nature and context of hunger and food insecurity in Pickens County, South Carolina and to identify the resources for addressing hunger and food insecurity in the county. The study results will be used in graduate thesis work developed by Cassius Hossfeld.

Activities and Procedures: Your part in the study will be to participate in an interview (no longer than 90 minutes) about hunger and food insecurity in Pickens County.

Participation Time: It will take you no longer than 90 minutes to complete the interview.

Risks and Discomforts: We do not know of any risks or discomforts to you in this research study.

Possible Benefits: You may benefit from talking about your knowledge about and experiences with hunger and food insecurity.

AUDIO/VIDEO RECORDING AND PHOTOGRAPHS
Interviews will be audio and video recorded. The transcripts and recordings will be available to the team members only and will be stored in a secure fashion.

PROTECTION OF PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY
The results of this study may be shared through community forums, technical reports, journal articles, and educational presentations. Your name, title and organizational affiliation will be listed as a participant in the study.
The information collected during the study could be used for future research studies or distributed to another investigator for future research studies without additional informed consent from the participants or legally authorized representative.

Identifiable information collected during the study will be removed and the de-identified information could be used for future research studies or distributed to another investigator for future research studies without additional informed consent from the participants or legally authorized representative.

CONTACT INFORMATION
If you have any questions or concerns about your rights in this research study, please contact the Clemson University Office of Research Compliance (ORC) at 864-656-0636 or irb@clemson.edu. If you are outside of the Upstate South Carolina area, please use the ORC’s toll-free number, 866-297-3071. The Clemson IRB will not be able to answer some study-specific questions. However, you may contact the Clemson IRB if the research staff cannot be reached or if you wish to speak with someone other than the research staff.

If you have any study-related questions or if any problems arise, please contact Dr. Catherine Mobley at Clemson University at 864-656-3815 or camoble@clemson.edu.

CONSENT
By participating in the study, you indicate that you have read the information written above, been allowed to ask any questions, and you are voluntarily choosing to take part in this research.

A copy of this form will be given to you.
Appendix L: South Carolina Key Informant Interviews Protocol

Key Informant Interviews with South Carolina Food Security Stakeholders
INTERVIEW GUIDE – SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

First, let’s talk about household food security:
1. Please define for me what food insecurity is.
   1. **Probe:** Do you think that food insecurity is a challenge of getting enough food?
   2. **Probe:** Do you think that food insecurity is a challenge of getting the right kinds of food?

2. Please describe the factors that you think contribute to food insecurity in general.
   1. **Probe:** How do you see food insecurity manifest itself?
      1. **Example:** Single-mother is newly unemployed and due to unspecified factors cannot receive SNAP for at least six weeks
      2. **Example:** Household lives in a rural area without transportation and can only physically access a traditional grocer once every three weeks

Now, let’s talk about the community at large:
1. Where do you work?
2. What is the extent of food insecurity in the community within which you work?
   1. **Probe:** Please describe the ways that the residents of the community within which you work cope with the challenge of food insecurity.
   2. **Probe:** What assets might the residents of the community within which you work employ to meet their food-related challenges?

3. **Probe:** How do you think the characteristics of food insecurity differ between the community within which you work and other communities?

4. Do you think that local food is accessible, available, and affordable in the community within which you work?
   1. **Probe:** If yes, what supports the accessibility, availability, and affordability of foods in the community within which you work?
   2. **Probe:** If no, what prevents the accessibility, availability, and affordability of foods in the community within which you work?

5. How does food insecurity differ between separate locations in the community within which you work?
   1. **Example:** Although our local agricultural area produces food, our local agricultural area is subject to high rates of food insecurity
   2. **Example:** There is not food access for residents of our local neighborhood

6. What do you think are the biggest problems related to food security at the community level?
   1. **Probe:** Why do you think these problems exist?

7. What else could be done to improve community member’s access to healthy, affordable food?
1. **Probe:** In the community within which you work, are local agricultural products available to consumers through traditional food retailers?
   1. **Probe:** If yes, by what process are traditional food retailers able to get local agricultural products to consumers?
   2. **Probe:** If no, what restricts traditional food retailers from being able to get local agricultural products to consumers?

2. **Probe:** In the community within which you work, is free food available to consumers through food pantry/food bank services?
   1. **Probe:** If yes, by what process are food pantry/food bank services able to get free food to consumers?
   2. **Probe:** If no, what restricts food pantry/food bank services from being able to get free food to consumers?

8. Who are the key players (individuals and/or organizations) in the food system within which you work?
   1. **Example:** Food producers (Farmer John – John Farms Inc.)
   2. **Example:** Food distributors (John Trucker – John Trucking Inc.)
   3. **Example:** Food processors (John Meatpacker – John Meatpacking Inc.)
   4. **Example:** Food retailers (John Grocer – John Grocery Inc.)
   5. **Example:** Food decomposers (John Composter – John Industrial Composting Inc.)

9. Tell me about transportation and community access to food in the community within which you work.
   1. **Probe:** Do transportation services make it easier/harder for low-income consumers to access food in the community within which you work?

*Now, I would like to focus on local food-related policies:*

1. Do you think that local food is accessible, available, and affordable in the community within which you work?
   1. **Probe:** If yes, what supports the accessibility, availability, and affordability of local foods in the community within which you work?
   2. **Probe:** If no, what prevents the accessibility, availability, and affordability of local foods in the community within which you work?

2. Please describe any local ordinances or other policies that affect food production, distribution, and consumption in the community within which you work.
   1. **Example:** Zoning rules that affect supermarket development
   2. **Example:** Food purchasing regulations for local schools or institutions
   3. **Example:** Policies on the use of city-owned land for community gardens

3. Please describe any conservation efforts that support agricultural preservation in the community within which you work.

4. Please describe any food related agenda integrated into the community planning process in the community within which you work.

5. How does the community within which you work address food insecurity?
1. **Probe:** What resources are in place to avoid the problem of food insecurity, if it does not exist?
   1. **Example:** Food sharing programs exist that provide community members with easy access to reduced-price local food
   2. **Example:** Local government encourages funding opportunities for food pantries to deliver services

6. As suggested by members of the academic community, food policy councils are viable institutions designed to address a community’s food insecurity. The following definition provided by Harper et al. (2009:2) suggests that food policy councils typically have the following four functions: **“To serve as forums for discussing food issues, to foster coordination between sectors in the food system, to evaluate and influence policy, and to launch or support programs and services that address local needs.”** This is an example of a standard mechanism that can reduce community food insecurity.
   1. If invited to join a food policy council, would you join as a representative of your place of work?
   2. If tasked with reducing food insecurity in the community within which you work, how would you address this task?
      1. **Probe:** Who would be the individuals/organizations that you would contact?
         1. **Example:** Would you begin by contacting government or non-government representatives?
   3. If tasked with reducing food insecurity in the community within which you work, would you choose to develop an institution other than a food policy council?
      1. **Probe:** If yes, what institution would you choose to develop to reduce food insecurity in the community within which you work?
      2. **Probe:** If no, why would you choose a food policy council as your mechanism for reducing food insecurity in the community within which you work?

*End of interview:*

1. Please let us know if you have anything else to add about the issues we have covered in our discussion; pertaining to hunger and food insecurity, service provision, and meeting the needs of community members within the community which you work.
   1. **Probe:** Is there anyone else you recommend our research team speak with about food policies and food insecurity?

*Honorary Mention Question: What adjective would you use to organize the food system?*

*(For **********): Please explain land conservation. Are there local land conservation efforts in Pickens County, SC? How might agricultural conservation affect local food insecurity?*

*(For **********): What prompted you to organize the Oconee Food Summit?*
*(For ******** *******): What is the farmland conservation project related to food deserts that you are currently working on?  
  
  **Probe:** Who is funding the research?  
  
  **Probe:** Why is Upstate Forever trying to target land conservation in food deserts?  
  
  **Probe:** Are you aware of additional projects relating land conservation efforts to food insecurity?
### Appendix M: Qualitative Data Codebook

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code (all interpretations in the data)</th>
<th>Code Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food Strategies (Eating Habits; Food Preparation)</td>
<td>A household or individual's decisions about how to prepare or consume food.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistance (Government Support)</td>
<td>Reference to government or public food support, typically in the form of direct payment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income (Financial)</td>
<td>Household or individual income and the corresponding changes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>Reference to household, individual, or community access to public or private transportation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Formal education (high school; college) as well as food education (knowledge about food preparation).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Access</td>
<td>Reference to the ability or inability to purchase food or get to food sites (this definition can overlap with the “Transportation” definition above).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith-Based Organization</td>
<td>Public assistance organizations that are affiliated with a specific church.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>Reference to household or individual mental, physical, or emotional health.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Reference to the relationship between age and food insecurity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource (Food)</td>
<td>Discussion of an area's specific public assistance organizations and food sites. This code typically indicates a reference by name.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Pantry (Food Bank; Soup Kitchen)</td>
<td>Reference (specific or general) to the food assistance services, typically within Pickens County, SC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Policy Council (Hunger Coalition)</td>
<td>Reference (specific or general) to a local food systems coalition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Production (Food Subsistence)</td>
<td>Discussion of the capacity to produce food.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Area (Service Provision)</td>
<td>Discussion of a public assistance provider and the physical area or population it specifically targets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Distribution (Golden Harvest)</td>
<td>Reference to the distribution of substantial food quantities (the organizational distribution of food).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile Market (Pickens Mobile Market)</td>
<td>A physical market that can simultaneously store food and travel so as to provide increased food access to consumers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Shopping</td>
<td>Household or individual shopping for food at food sites.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Quality</td>
<td>The appearance, nutritional value, age, taste, and shape of foods.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Routine</td>
<td>Household or individual daily routines, specifically in reference to the changes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childcare (Daycare)</td>
<td>The household or individual use of childcare services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criteria to Receive Agency Resources</td>
<td>Consumers’ eligibility to access public assistance services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>Reference to a specific organization without using a specific context. Typically referring to the organization without directly using the organization’s name.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggestions (Future Contacts; Future Concerns)</td>
<td>Recommendations from food system stakeholders on who to contact during future research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Labor</td>
<td>References to each individual's contribution (or lack thereof) to the household.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Support</td>
<td>Reference to familial or friendship networks available to households and individuals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Local” Definition</td>
<td>Typically, a response to the question: &quot;How would you define the term local?&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>