



STRIVING TO MEET FOOD NEEDS:
FOOD ACCESS SURVEY OF
OSCODA COUNTY, MI

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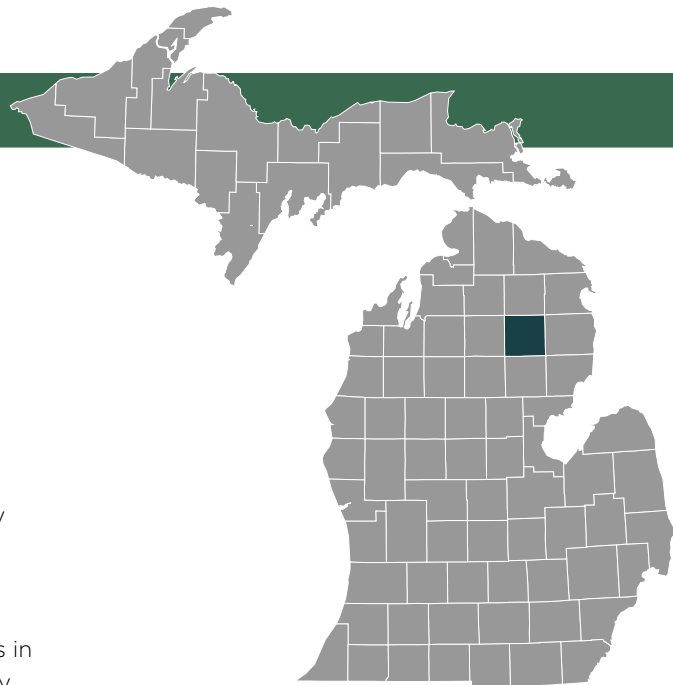


STRIVING TO MEET FOOD NEEDS: A FOOD ACCESS SURVEY OF OSCODA COUNTY, MI

INTRODUCTION

This report presents the results of a survey of Oscoda County residents conducted between February and August of 2018. With support from the Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems, District Health Department No. 2 collaborated with the Oscoda County CHOICES (Creating Healthy Outcomes by Improving, Connecting, and Empowering for Success) group to conduct surveys with Oscoda County residents at public events and community facilities. The goals of this project are to:

- Provide data that will empower community stakeholders to make sustainable improvements in food access related outcomes in Oscoda County.
- Gather community input to develop a customized action plan for addressing food access in Oscoda County
- Bring awareness to Oscoda County residents and stakeholders about the short-term and long-term impacts surrounding food access issues.
- Motivate and engage Oscoda County residents to build strategic alliances for future efforts to address food access.



Oscoda County

Oscoda County has a population of 8,300,¹ making it the fifth least populous county in Michigan and the least populous county in the Lower Peninsula.² The county seat, and largest town in the county, is Mio, with a population of approximately 1,900.³ The demographics of the population are fairly homogenous: most residents identify as White and English speaking, and there is a large elderly population. The median household income in the county is \$36,833 compared to a median of \$52,668 for the state of Michigan.⁴

1 United States Census Bureau. (2013-2017). *American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates. Population*. Retrieved from: <https://factfinder.census.gov/>

2 United States Census Bureau. (2010). *Population, Housing Units, Area, and Density*. Retrieved from: <https://factfinder.census.gov/>

3 United States Census Bureau. (2013-2017). *American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates. Demographic and Housing Estimates*. Retrieved from: <https://factfinder.census.gov/>

4 United States Census Bureau. (2013-2017). *American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates. Community Facts*. Retrieved from: <https://factfinder.census.gov/>

Located within the Huron National Forest, in the heart of the AuSable River Valley, Oscoda County is an excellent location for tourism. However, Oscoda is ranked 66th out of Michigan's 83 counties on social and economic factors, which include education, employment, income, family and social support, and community safety.⁵ For example, unemployment in Oscoda County is 7.2% compared to 4.9% in Michigan overall.⁶ Nearly one third of children under 18 in Oscoda County live in households below the poverty line (30%) compared to 21% for Michigan.⁷

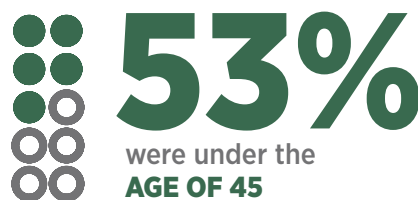
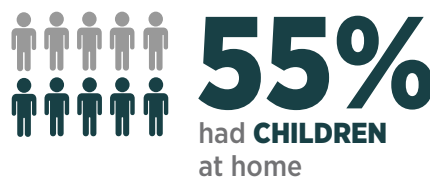
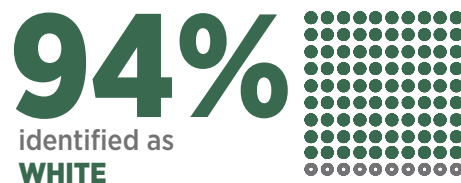
In health outcomes, which measure how long people live and how healthy people feel, Oscoda County ranks 79th out of Michigan's 83 counties.⁸ The county has a large uninsured population (15%) and an overall lack of health care providers.⁹ With regards to primary care providers, Oscoda County has been designated as a Health Professional Shortage Area by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.¹⁰ The prevalence of numerous health risk factors and disease categories is also higher in Oscoda County than the state of Michigan overall. Rates of diabetes prevalence, obesity, cardiovascular disease, smoking, and age-adjusted heart disease mortality are all higher than the state average.¹¹

Oscoda County has relatively few food store options. There is one large supermarket, Family Fare, in Mio, and one small grocery store, Fairview Food Market, in Fairview. There is one farmers market in Mio that operates between June and September. The nearest major chain supermarket (e.g. Meijer or Walmart) is at least an hour drive away.

Who Took the Survey

The survey was conducted with a non-probability convenience sample of individuals. Survey locations included the District Health Department No. 2, AuSable Valley Community Mental Health, Munson Healthcare Grayling Hospital, Oscoda County Council on Aging, St. Bartholomew Community Food Pantry, Primary Care of Mio, and a Rite Aid drug store.

Because the sample was not selected randomly from all residents in the county, it is not representative of the Oscoda County population as a whole. The results of this survey cannot be used to make statistical inferences about the whole population. However, the purposive sampling strategy used in this survey allows us to better understand how low-income individuals strive to meet their food needs when resources are scarce. The survey findings are a window to the food access challenges and opportunities that low-income individuals face.



5 University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. (2018). County Health Rankings. Retrieved from : <http://www.countyhealthrankings.org/app/michigan/2018/rankings/oscoda/county/outcomes/overall/snapshot>
6-9 Ibid.

10 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources & Services Administration. (n.d.). Retrieved from: <https://data.hrsa.gov/tools/shortage-area>

11 Rural Information Hub. (2013). *Rural Data Explorer*. Retrieved from: <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/data-explorer>

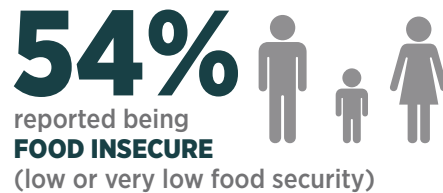
A total of 297 people completed the survey. About half of people (52%, $n = 138$) lived in zip code 48647 (the Mio area). An additional 35% of people ($n = 93$) lived in either zip code 48621 (the Fairview area northeast of Mio) or 48636 (the area southwest of Mio).

Significantly more women (74%, $n = 200$) completed the survey than men (26%, $n = 71$). This is not out of the norm as women have been the focus of most food purchasing research because they are primarily responsible for household food purchasing.¹²⁻¹⁴ The vast majority of people who took the survey identified as white (94%, $n = 255$). Approximately 5% identified as Native American ($n = 13$), 4% as multiple races ($n = 10$), and 3% as Latinx ($n = 7$). One percent or less indicated each of the following racial identities: Asian or Asian American, Middle Eastern or Arab American, and Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander. No survey respondents identified as black or African American.

Slightly more than half of respondents had children under 18 at home (55%, $n = 145$). Among those who had children at home, most (90%, $n = 131$) had between one and three kids. Nearly one fourth of people (23%, $n = 61$) responding had more than two adults living at home (including the person completing the survey). Just over half of people responding (53%, $n = 271$) were under the age of 45.¹⁵ However, according to U.S. Census Bureau estimates, approximately 42% of Oscoda County residents are under the age of 45, which indicates the sample overrepresented younger people.

Based on reported income and household size, half of people (50%, $n = 133$) were at or below the federal poverty line and the majority (73%, $n = 194$) were at or below 150% of the poverty line. By comparison, the U.S. Census Bureau estimates that 12.7% of all Oscoda County families and 22.9% of families with children are below the poverty level. The majority of people responding indicated that they had no college degree (77%, $n = 210$).

Many people have difficulty meeting **BASIC NEEDS**



12 Flagg, LA., Sen, B., Kilgore, M., Locher, JL. (2013). The influence of gender, age, education and household size on meal preparation and food shopping responsibilities. *Public Health Nutr*, 17, (2013), pp. 2061-2070, doi: 10.1017/S1368980013002267

13 Harnack, L., Story, M., Martinson, B., Neumark-Sztainer, D., & Stang, J. (1998). Guess who's cooking? The role of men in meal planning, shopping, and preparation in US families. *J Am Diet Assoc*, 98, (1998), pp. 995-1000, doi: 10.1016/S0002-8223(98)00228-4

14 Carlson, DL., Miller, AJ., Sassler, S. (2018). Stalled for whom? Change in the division of particular housework tasks and their consequences for middle- to low-income couples. *Socius*, 4 (2018), pp. 1-17, doi: 10.1177/2378023118765867

15 United States Census Bureau. (2013-2017). *American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates*. Age and Sex.

Participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Medicaid/Medicare were both common among people responding to the survey — 41% participating in SNAP and 48% participating in Medicaid/Medicare. Between 15 and 20% of people reported receiving Women, Infants, Children (WIC) benefits, disability benefits, and free or reduced-priced school lunch benefits. Very few people reported receiving unemployment benefits (3%) or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (1%).

The largest number of people in the survey describe their overall health as “good” (44%, *n* = 122). However, more than a third described their overall health as “poor” or “fair” (37%, *n* = 102). About one fifth of people (20%) described their overall health as “very good” or “excellent.”

Food insecurity was prevalent among people responding to the survey.¹⁶ More than half of people reported being food insecure (54%, *n* = 160) and nearly a third reported very low food security (31%, *n* = 91), meaning they frequently did not have enough food to eat and reported multiple indications of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake.

The survey also included a series of questions asking whether people had to make choices between

paying for food and other household expenses, like medical care, gas for a car, or housing costs in the past month. Nearly one third of people (32%, *n* = 90) indicated regularly making trade-offs between food and at least two other expenses.¹⁷ Choosing between paying for food and paying for utilities was the most common trade-off (26%, *n* = 75). This was followed closely by choices between food and medicine or medical care (25%), transportation or gas for a car (26%), or rent or a mortgage (20%) (*N* = 284). Needing to choose between paying for food and paying for school loans, tuition, or other education expenses was less common but still affected 10% of the people in this survey.

Where People Get Food and Why

The majority of people who took the survey (86%, *n* = 254) said they do most of the food shopping in their household.

When choosing the factors that were most important to them in deciding where to shop for food, the largest number of people chose prices, sales, or discounts (65%, *n* = 192). In addition, quality of food, distance from home or work, and ability to get everything in one place were all among the

PRICE was by far the most important factor in deciding where to shop

(*N*=296)



¹⁶ The USDA 6-Item Household Food Security Survey Module was used to assess household food security status. Responses were scored using the USDA's mechanism, and participants were stratified into one of four categories: high food security, marginal food security, low food security, and very low food security.
¹⁷ Based on responses of sometimes, often, or always.



or “often” during the past month, supermarkets are by far the most frequented store type. Small grocery stores and dollar stores were the next most common categories — frequented by upwards of a third of people. On average, people shopped at 3.4 types of food stores at least “sometimes.” Nearly half of people responding to the survey (47%, $n = 141$) reported shopping at a minimum of four store types at least sometimes.

In looking at where people shop, it is important to consider what types of stores are available. Twenty-one people (7%) indicated there were no warehouse stores in their community and 12 people (4%) indicated there were no health food stores in their community. Everyone reported that a small grocery store was available, but between two and four people reported that the other food outlet types were unavailable.

Nearly a third of people (31%, $n = 74$) reported that they do not have easy access to stores that meet their needs.

most important factors for roughly one third of people. The factors that were least often selected as important were safety; foods that meet diet restrictions; and foods from my culture, which were selected by between 1 and 6% of people responding.

Survey results show patterns of where people get food most often. When looking at people who got food from a food outlet category either “always”

“We need a Walmart in Mio.”

— Oscoda County resident

MOST people shop at supermarkets



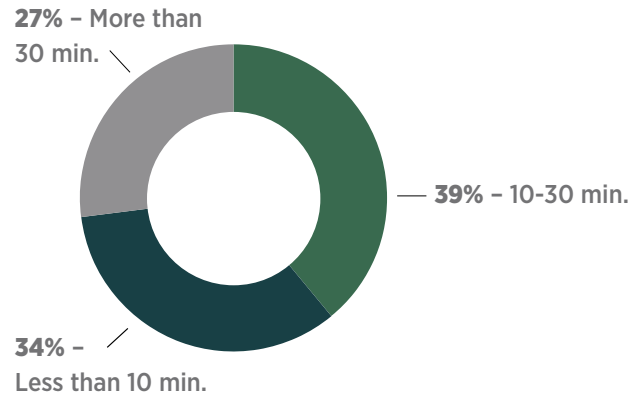
The N values show the number of people who answered each question after excluding people who said “I don’t know” or “Not available in my community.”

Transportation

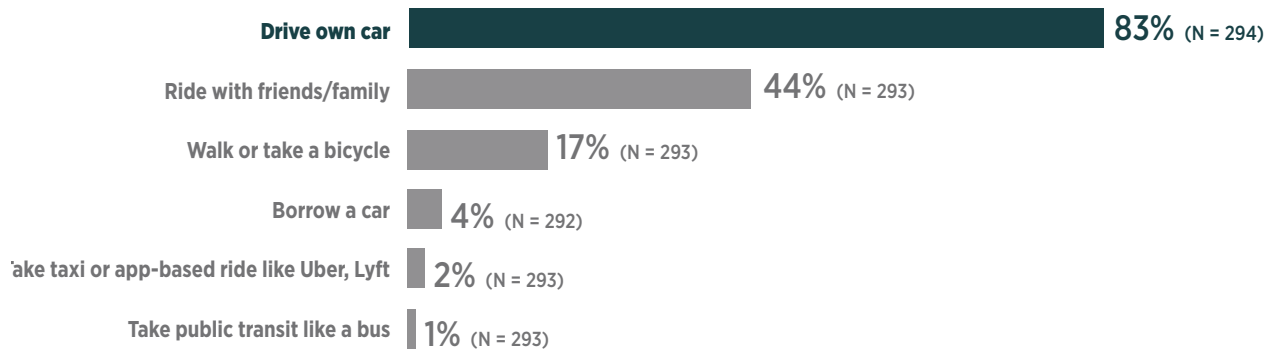
When asked about how many minutes they usually travel for groceries, most people indicated traveling less than 30 minutes (73%, $n = 213$). But more than one fourth of people (27%, $n = 78$) reported that they usually travel more than 30 minutes. Of these, 20 people (7%) said they travel more than 45 minutes for groceries.

Most people reported driving their own car to get groceries. However, just under half of people utilized rides from friends or family to get groceries at least some of the time. And nearly one fifth of people regularly walk or take a bicycle to get groceries.

27% traveled **MORE THAN 30 MINUTES** to buy food



Most people in Oscoda County **DRIVE THEIR OWN CAR** to get groceries



Indications of Access

Most people responding to this survey reported eating well below the recommended levels of fruits and vegetables. Seventy-seven percent indicated eating 2 cups or less of fruit each day and 76% indicated eating 2 cups or less of vegetables each day ($N = 294$). This is consistent with findings for Michigan residents more broadly. In 2015, only 14.4% of Michigan adults reported consuming fruits and vegetables five or more times per day.¹⁸

Shopping at farmers markets was associated with eating more fruits and vegetables. Among those that reported eating at least 2 cups of vegetables per day, a significantly greater proportion reported that they shopped at farmers markets at least “sometimes” (53% vs. 47%).¹⁹ Similarly, among those that reported eating at least 2 cups of fruit per day, a significantly greater proportion reported that they shopped at farmers markets at least “sometimes” (69% vs. 31%).²⁰

The survey data indicates a lack of availability of stores with adequate options. About a third of people reported that they do not have easy access to grocery stores that meet their needs (31%, $n = 74$).²¹ Availability of high-quality fruits and vegetables appears to be an even greater challenge. Nearly half of people responding (48%, $n = 105$) indicated that it was not easy to find high-quality fresh fruits and vegetables where they live.²²

“I believe that it is difficult at times to buy quality fresh produce at a reasonable price in Oscoda County.”

— Oscoda County resident

“I often have to travel out of my county for fresh fruit and veggies.”

— Oscoda County resident



18 Fussman C. (2017). *Health Risk Behaviors within the State of Michigan: 2015 Behavioral Risk Factor Survey*. 29th Annual Report. Lansing, MI: Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, Lifecourse Epidemiology and Genomics Division. Retrieved from: https://www.michigan.gov/documents/mdhhs/2015_MiBRES_Annual_Report_FINAL_578283_7.pdf

19 $N = 292$; Chi-Square test: $p = 0.0370$.

20 $N = 280$; Chi-Square test: $p < 0.0001$

21 This calculation excludes responses from people who said they did not know or had no opinion.

22 This calculation excludes responses from people who said they did not know or had no opinion.

Conclusions

Many of the people represented in this survey indicated struggling to meet basic needs. Calculations of income and household size showed high rates of poverty. The majority reported being food insecure and a large portion of respondents reported experiencing very low food security and making two or more trade-offs between food and other expenses. In considering these findings, it is important to note that the countywide rates of poverty are not as high as seen in this survey. This survey sample intentionally overrepresents households near or below the poverty line to better understand the nature of the food access challenges these individuals and families face.

Prices, sales, and discounts was the leading factor in deciding where to shop for food, leading most people in this survey to frequent supermarkets. The Family Fare in Mio is the largest grocery store in the county and the only store described on the survey as a supermarket. However, compared to a typical Walmart or Meijer, Family Fare is a relatively small store. Since nearly a third of people indicated traveling more than 30 minutes to get groceries, it is possible that a substantial number of people are travelling outside the county for their grocery shopping. A concern with food prices may also be driving people to “deal shop,” visiting different food stores for the best prices, since roughly half of people indicated shopping at four or more types of food stores.

Dissatisfaction with the food retail landscape in Oscoda County may also be driving the large number of stores types frequented. Large numbers of people reported not having easy access to grocery stores that meet their needs (about a third of people) and having difficulty finding high-quality fresh fruits and vegetables in the community (about half of people).

Recommendations

CHOICES has found this project insightful and will use the results as a starting point to address the many different factors affecting food security in Oscoda County. Addressing these barriers will require convening community partners to be a part of the solution to the question, “How can we create a more



aligned, coordinated, and coherent approach to improving access to healthy food in Oscoda County?”

The findings presented here point to at least four recommendations of strategies to increase access to healthy food and better understand current limiting factors.

1. Compare prices on the healthy market basket items at major grocery stores in Oscoda County and the nearest supercenters outside the county.

Respondents in this survey indicated that prices are higher at grocery stores in Oscoda County. Price comparisons could identify the extent of price differences on different types of food items.

2. Assess the quality of produce at grocery stores in Oscoda County. Explore opportunities to connect food retailers with farmers or distributors in the area.

Many survey respondents indicated dissatisfaction with the quality of fruits and vegetables in their community. Direct assessments of produce quality at the major food stores in Oscoda County could provide supporting evidence for residents' concerns and open up opportunities for conversations with store owners about ways to improve quality, including by connecting with farmers in the area.

3. Educate low-income consumers about utilizing the farmers markets in budget friendly ways in order to increase fruit and vegetable consumption.

In this survey, few people (13%) reported regularly shopping at farmers markets. In contrast, 26% of survey respondents in a Battle Creek neighborhood²³ and 27% of respondents in Ypsilanti²⁴ reported regularly shopping at farmers markets. While this likely reflects the greater availability of farmers markets in those communities, the findings in this survey also point to an opportunity to encourage shopping at the farmers market in Mio as a source of high-quality produce.

4. Encourage enrollment in SNAP to help families stretch their food dollar.

While about half of respondents in this survey indicated living below the household poverty line and nearly three fourths indicated living below 150% of the poverty line, only 41% reported participating in the SNAP. This indicates an opportunity to encourage enrollment in SNAP to help alleviate the food insecurity and trade-offs between food and other expenses that many families face.



23 Reynolds, J.R., Colasanti, K. & Parks, C. (2018). *Finding Healthy Food in a Land of Plenty: Food Access Survey of a Battle Creek Neighborhood*. May 2018. Retrieved from: <http://www.canr.msu.edu/resources/battle-creek-food-access-survey>

24 Miller, M., Freeman, E. & Colasanti, K. (2017). *Ypsilanti Area Food Access Survey 2016*. Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems. December 2017. Retrieved from: <https://www.canr.msu.edu/resources/ypsilanti-area-food-access-survey-2016>

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