

CATEGORY: POPULATIONS/PROGRAMS

Food Insecure Populations & Programs

Food insecurity affects many individuals and populations worldwide. It is defined as people who “don’t have enough food to eat or don’t know where their next meal will come from, who have limited or uncertain access to safe and nutritious food” (USDA, 2024). In North America, statistics confirm that people living in rural communities, particularly in the Southern USA are more likely to lack access to food, particularly nutritious food (Food Research & Action Center, 2018; Coleman-Jensen, 2022). Marginalized communities - people with disabilities, LGBTQ, and people of color are at greater risk of food insecurity due to systemic problems and poverty. Research has investigated food insecurity among domestic abuse survivors and their families, incarcerated individuals, Latinx immigrant families, Indigenous people, and on college campuses (Baybutt et al., 2024; Branco, 2018; Cochrane, 2019; Devine-Wright et al., 2019; Amhed, 2024). The health impacts are far-reaching for children and adults, with correlations to mental disorders, obesity, and chronic disease (Burke, 2016; Hernandez et al., 2017). Food insecurity is now considered an important public health issue.

Horticulture for health initiatives and people-plant programming are making efforts to address food insecurity through programming, community gardens and other initiatives. Identifying and then delivering programs for people experiencing food insecurity can be challenging. The types of programming that exist to combat food insecurity, working with individuals who self-identify or participate in these initiatives continues to grow. Examples include organizations distributing free seeds, teaching people to grow healthy food, hospitals identifying and providing food to patients from their associated gardens, and master gardeners supporting community gardening. Many of these are locally-driven efforts occurring in many communities. The use of the term *neighbor* in place of food insecure individuals seems to be taking root.

Community gardens have emerged as important places for improving food access and food sovereignty reducing the stigma about poverty or lack of food resources. College campuses have also seen action related to growing, providing and supporting efforts to improve food access in recognition that greater number of students in these settings are food insecure (Bruening et al., 2017; Classens et al., 2023; Levkoe et al., 2019). A focus on nutritious food, food assistance and reductions in food waste is part of this conversation as is the impact of the war in Ukraine exacerbating global food insecurity (Diekmann et al., 2020; Timler et al., 2019; Bacon et al., 2024, International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems, 2022).

Books that have been recently published on food insecurity have grown in number with various focuses on topics and populations impacted by food insecurity (Broton et al., 2020; Heflin & Harrington Meyer, 2025; Kinderknecht et al., 2023; Mayer & Anderson, 2022; Park et al., 2025; Kingsley & Egerer, 2026).

For related resources refer to category: Plant-based Food, Nutrition and Food Security Initiatives – all sections; category: Landscapes for Health – Community Gardens, Urban Farms.

Key Organizations

[Food Research & Action Center](#)

[Harvest Now](#)

[Inter-Institutional Network for Food, Agriculture, and Sustainability](#)

[National Institute of Food and Agriculture Hunger and Food Security Programs](#)

[Planting Justice](#)

Books, journals & epublications on food insecure populations and programs

Alkon, A.H., & Guthman, J. (2017) (Eds.), *The new food activism: Opposition, cooperation, and collective action*. University of California Press.

Babaniyi, G.G., Babaniyi, B.R., Aransiola, S.A., & Sawicka, B. (Eds.). (2025). *Biotechnology of climate-smart agriculture in food security and sustainable farming*. CRC Press.

Broton, K.M., Cady, C.L., & Goldrick-Rab, S. (Eds.) (2020). *Food insecurity on campus: Action and intervention*. John Hopkins University Press.

[Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems](#)

Heflin, C.M., & Harrington Meyer, M. (2025). *Food for thought: Understanding older food insecurity*. Russell Sage Foundation.

[Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development \(JAFSCD\)](#)

[Journal of Hunger and Environmental Nutrition](#)

Kinderknecht, K.L., DiPiazza, B., Ogbue, C. et al. (2023). [Key considerations for nutrition education programs and interventions for individuals experiencing food insecurity: An evidence review of reach, implementation, adoption, effectiveness, maintenance and equity](#). Feeding America.

Kingsley, J., & Egerer, M. (Eds.). (2025). *Crisis gardening a global perspective*. CRC Press.

Mayer, T., & Anderson, M.D. (Eds.). (2022). *Food insecurity (Critical food studies)*. Routledge.

Park, N.J., Chapman, C., Ripoll, S. et al. (2025). *Towards transformative change: Grass-roots innovations for food security during crises in Brighton & Hove, UK*. The Institute of Development Studies and Partner Organisations.

Talkin, E., & Murray, S. (2020). *Lulu and the hunger monster (Food justice books for kids)*. Free Spirit Publishing.

Research & articles

Recently published selected research & articles:

Adams, E.L., Caccavale, L.J., Smith, D., & Bean, M.K. (2020). Food insecurity, the home food environment, and parent feeding practices in the era of COVID-19. *Obesity*, 28(11).

Ahmed, F., Moriarity, R.J., Spence, N.D., et al. (2024). Adaptation in adversity: Innovative approaches to food security amidst COVID-19 in a remote First Nations community in Canada. *BMC Public Health*, 24(1).

Al-Habsi, N. (2025). Date palm (*Phoenix dactylifera* L.) fruit: Strategic crop for food security, nutritional benefits, postharvest quality, and valorization into emerging functional products. *Sustainability*, 17(16).

Alkon, A.H., & Guthman, J. (2017). Introduction. In A.H. Alkon, & J. Guthman (Eds.), *The new food activism: Opposition, cooperation, and collective action* (pp.1-27). University of California Press.

Bacon, C.M., Gleicher, A., McCurry, E. et al. (2024, April). Toward a justice approach to emergency food assistance and food waste: Exploring pantry-urban gardener partnerships in California's Santa Clara County. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*.

Baybutt, M., Farrier, A., & Nicholson, D. (2025). Greener on the outside for prisons (GOOP): A whole system health and justice intervention of growing food for good lives. In *The role of food in resettlement and Rehabilitation* (pp. 133-153). Routledge.

- Bellemare, M.F., & Dusoruth, V. (2020). Who participates in urban agriculture? An empirical analysis. *Applied Economic Perspectives and Policy*, 43(1).
- Branco, P. (2018). [How therapeutic horticulture help meet the complex needs of domestic violence survivors and their children?](#) [food security a factor]. VAWnet.
- Bruckner, H.K., Westbrook, M., Loberg, L. et al. (2021). “Free” food with a side of shame? Combating stigma in emergency food assistance programs in the quest for food justice. *Geoforum*, 123.
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- Calloway, E., Carpenter, L.R., Gargano, T. et al. (2023) New measures to assess the “other” three pillars of food security—Availability, utilization, and stability. *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*, 20(1), Article 51.
- Cameron, G., Roach, J., Dukeshire, S., & Keys, D. (2023). Raising awareness and advocating change: The work of Nova Scotia food security NGOs. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 12(4).
- Candau, J., & Axon, S. (2025). Beyond food security: Unleashing the potential of sustainable communities to transform the UK food system. *Land*, 14(4).
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- Cochrane, R. (2019). Passionate partners transform incarcerated women into urban farmers. *AHTA Magazine*, 47(3).
- Coleman-Jensen, A., Rabbitt, M.P., Gregory, C.A., & Singh, A. (2022). [Household food security in the United States in 2021](#). U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service.
- Devine-Wright, H., Baybutt, M., & Meek, R. (2019). Producing food in English and Welsh prisons. *Appetite*, 143.
- Diekmann, L.O., Gray, L.C., & Baker, G.A. (2020). Growing ‘good food’: Urban gardens, culturally acceptable produce and food security. *Renewable Agriculture and Food Systems*, 35(2).
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- Egerer, M., & Kingsley, J. (2026). Crisis gardening: An act of resistance and resilience during times of hardship. In *Crisis Gardening* (pp. 1-10). CRC Press.
- Feeding America. (2023). [Connecting health and food access](#).
- Ferraro, J. (2025). [Pathway to food security: Garden therapy for mental illness](#). *Integrative Medicine*, 24(2).
- Fleming, L. (2025). [Horticulture for health programming addresses food insecurity](#). *Cultivate*, 5(3).
- Fleming, L. (2024). University students’ health & well-being supported by nature engagement & campus gardens. *Digging In*, 10(2).
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- Food Research & Action Center. (2018). [How hungry is America? Food hardship in America: A look at national, regional, state, and metropolitan statistical area data on household struggles with hunger](#).

- Gregory, C.A., & Coleman-Jensen, A. (2017). [Food insecurity, chronic disease, and health among working-age adults.](#)
- Hait, M., Bhardwaj, A.K., & Kashyap, N.K. (2025). Role of edible mushroom in addressing malnutrition and food security. In *Bioactive compounds in edible mushrooms: Sustainability and health applications* (pp. 1-40). Springer Nature Switzerland.
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- Houghtaling, B., Haynes-Maslow, L., Andress, L. et al. (2023). Food insecurity among households with children during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 12(3).
- International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems. (2022). [Another perfect storm? How the failure to reform food systems has allowed the war in Ukraine to spark a third global food price crisis in 15 years, and what can be done to prevent the next one.](#)
- Iqbal, T., Ahmad, A., & Altaf, S. (2025). [Nutraceutical and medicinal benefits of horticultural plants in tackling food security-driven health problems.](#) *Biological Times*, 4(3).
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Examples of food insecure populations and programs

Beacon Food Forest in Seattle Washington is open to the public to forage on the 7-acre plot adjacent to a local park and offering classes, work parties with the focus on strengthening the community. <https://beaconfoodforest.org/>

Campus Nature Rx movement supports post-secondary students with nature engagement, campus gardens, food security and environmental activism. <https://www.flhhn.com/cultivate-epub.html>

City of Westminster partnered with Can. Province's Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction, GROWcery Food Network Society and Canadian Horticultural Therapy Association to create a Community Therapeutic Garden including employment opportunities. <https://www.newwestcity.ca/2020/10/14/media-release-city-of-new-westminster-announces-community-therapeutic-garden-in-partnership-with-the-province-growcery-food-network-and-the-canadian-horticultural-therapy-association-to-help-address-food-insecurity-in-the-community.php>

Community Seed Distribution program through Denver Urban Gardens (DUG) is one effort to support food access, food security and local food sovereignty, with distribution annually of 100,000 seed packets at no cost. Related, DUG's *Culturally Inclusive Seeds* program provides rare and specialty plant variety seeds for marginalized communities in support of shared diversity.

<https://dug.org/food-access-programs/community-seed-distribution/>

Denver Food Forests provide free fruit in addition to greening the environment in this agroforestry effort.

[Denver's Food Forests Bear Fruit, for the City and Environment | Civil Eats](#)

Farm and Rehabilitation Meals (FARM) program in San Diego grows and serves farm produce in prison.

<https://foodtank.com/news/2018/08/20-organizations-planting-the-seeds-for-food-justice-in-prisons/#:~:text=San%20Diego's%20Richard%20J.,to%20grow%20and%20harvest%20produce>

Farmer Veteran Coalition has integrated *Fields 4 Valor Farms* into its organization and services, with a focus on addressing food insecurity among Veteran families using agricultural programs.

<https://farmvetco.org/2025/01/16/executive-director-comments-fvc-integrates-fields-4-valor-food-insecurity-efforts/>

Festival Beach Food Forest in Austin TX allows visitors to openly forage and take fresh food from their permaculture designed and regenerative practices site.

<https://festivalbeach.org/>

Food Security Program at Northern Light Acadia Hospital, Maine uses early intervention methods and local partners to address food insecurity by screening/identifying food insecure patients, supplementing patient food bags with produce from Acadia Therapeutic Garden, and identifying additional food insecurity resources.

<https://northernlighthealth.org/Our-System/Acadia-Hospital/Patients-Visitors/Acadia-Food-Insecurity-Program>

Fruit Tree Planting Foundation international non-profit is dedicated to planting fruit trees to alleviate world hunger, strengthen communities and improve the environment.

<https://www.ftpf.org/apply>

Garden Grants for schools, nonprofits and communities address food insecurity including *Growing Spaces* in-kind grants; links to garden grants are included.

<https://growingspaces.com/gardening-grants/>

Heart of Dinner program from New York non-profit delivers weekly groceries and hot meals to Asian elders while building community, its own supply chains and strengthening Asian-owned restaurants, grocery stores and farms.

[Heart of Dinner Brings Hope to Asian Elders, Supports Businesses | Civil Eats](#)

Lettuce Live Garden Projects involves multi-faceted approaches of building community gardens at work sites, community locations, schools, and backyards, based in Missouri, TX.

<https://www.lettucelive.org/garden-projects>

Lookout Garden at Mission Institution partners with Correctional Service Canada (in British Columbia) addressing food security, food access for inmates and local communities, in particular, Aboriginal communities.

https://lookoutsociety.ca/lookout_projects/mission-community-garden/

Master Gardeners in North Carolina participate in food action in response to food insecurity by cultivating community gardens, fostering therapeutic partnerships and teaching new gardeners how to grow food.

<https://emgv.ces.ncsu.edu/2021/03/master-gardener-volunteers-in-action-meeting-community-needs/>

NW Youth Power Child Enrichment Center (daycare), Atlanta GA established a garden in partnership with Grady Health System Asa Yancey Neighborhood Health Center providing food for kids, families and patients.

<https://www.senate.ga.gov/committees/Documents/UHIFoodInsecurityProgramsandProjects.pdf>

Planting Justice's East Oakland Nursery in the Sobrante Park neighborhood operates this growing space for predominantly Black and Spanish-speaking community members with paid work, internships, youth participation, growing food activities and a mobile farmers market.

<https://plantingjustice.org/pages/where-we-grow/sobrante-park-nursery>

<https://plantingjustice.org/pages/what-we-do/food-distribution>

Sprouting Readers program at PAWKids after-school daycare center uses a school garden, literacy + gardening skills, and stem education to enhance learning and food literacy.

<https://www.senate.ga.gov/committees/Documents/UHIFoodInsecurityProgramsandProjects.pdf>

Sustainable CT (Connecticut) is promoting community growing spaces across the state as a strategy for wellness and food security using funding, regional collaborations, provision of tool kits, and success stories of funded projects like sidewalk snack beds, therapeutic horticulture and green houses.

https://sustainablect.org/fileadmin/Random_PDF_Files/Archived_Actions/2024_Actions/10.4_Develop_and_Promote_Community_Growing_Spaces.pdf

The Mother Farm, part of *Planting Justice* organization supporting formerly incarcerated people, is the location where seeds, propagated materials and plants for their other locations provide paid employment, volunteer opportunities, and food, distributed to local schools and low-access places.

<https://plantingjustice.org/pages/where-we-grow/the-mother-farm>

Three Sisters Gardens, a Native-led nonprofit, at its *Sacramento Nursery*, a 5-acre sustainable urban agriculture and education site, developed in partnership with the *City of Sacramento* and *Planting Justice* nonprofit will have a nursery for organic trees and nursery start production, providing paid jobs, education and growing healthy local food economies.

<https://plantingjustice.org/pages/what-we-do/food-distribution>

Transform Your Yard program through *Planting Justice* nonprofit, created 650 gardens for transitional housing, senior housing, schools and community hubs, creating 40 jobs for people coming out of San Quentin State Prison. Horticulture skills and experience provide a holistic re-entry for this population while addressing food insecurity.

<https://plantingjustice.org/pages/where-we-grow/transform-your-yard>

Videos, websites and webinars on food insecure populations and programs

American Community Garden Association website shares resources and spotlights gardens of the month as success stories and inspiration. Eden Garden, Joliet Ill. is one such example where church, children and food literacy/food access have thrived together.

<https://www.communitygarden.org/post/copy-of-community-garden-spotlight-of-the-month-wagner-farms-arboretum-gardens-nj>

Benton-Franklin Juvenile Detention Center Garden has inmates grow food for educational purposes and for addressing food insecurity, working with master gardeners (2016).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vawSAIs1gdo>

Florida Prison Farmworker Programs help state and inmates. “According to UF/IFAS, at the West Florida Research and Education Center in Jay, FL, prisoners produced nearly \$1 million of fresh produce that fed hundreds of needy families and saved the state money.” (2015).

<https://www.growingproduce.com/vegetables/florida-prison-farmworker-programs-fruitful-for-state-inmates/>

Food Action is Happening in People-Plant Programming webinar from the Florida Horticulture for Health Network, with presenters Lesley Fleming, HTR and Donna Perez Lugones sharing insights into how food initiatives can make a difference.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ORSrtP1qBhU&t=4s>

Garden for Good, Hutchinson Correctional Facility in Kansas, (video) provides individual garden beds for inmates to grow their own food; they donate food to local groups; sell produce to inmates and other innovative activities, supported by Kansas State Research and Extension (2014).

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_VKDROXMYmQ

Growing Spaces.com website shares resources, tips on sustainable food production, and funding sources. Article “Floating Gardens: The Sustainable Food Production Secret of the Ancients” is one example.

<https://growingspaces.com/floating-gardens/>

National Institute of Food and Agriculture Hunger and Food Security Programs are wide-ranging programs delivered through the US federal government and include grant programs, Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program, expanded food and nutrition education program among others.

<https://www.nifa.usda.gov/grants/programs/hunger-food-security-programs>

Need to Know Developments in Horticultural Therapy and Horticulture for Health YouTube video/webinar includes nutrition and food literacy with projects addressing food/nutrition access. (2023).

[New Developments in Horticultural Therapy and Horticulture for Health - YouTube](#)

Nutrition Garden Rx webinar/YouTube video shares how garden-based initiatives can address food insecurity.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xBNp3Lr1e0M>

Salvation Farms organization, with the *Vermont Dept of Corrections* uses locally grown potatoes and apples in prison cafeterias, in addition to hands-on food processing skills training, planting and donating food to local food banks in their *Vermont Gleaning Collective*.

<https://www.salvationfarms.org/our-work/#partners>

THAD database includes therapeutic horticulture activities specifically for food insecure populations (activities like [kitchen waste: regrow avocado seeds](#), [freezing herbs](#), [building & planting a pallet garden](#), [field trip to community garden](#), [growing garlic](#), [herb propagation by cutting & seeds](#)).

<https://hos.ifas.ufl.edu/therapeutic-horticulture-activities-database/food-insecure/>

20 organizations Planting the Seeds for Food Justice in Prisons article on Foodtank website identifies newer trends.

<https://foodtank.com/news/2018/08/20-organizations-planting-the-seeds-for-food-justice-in-prisons/>

Related organizations

[Food Matters](#) (U.K.)

Local Cooperative Extension & master gardener programs

Written & compiled by Lesley Fleming in 2024. Revised by Lesley Fleming, Joanna Brown in 2026.