



Marion Community Food Assessment



SEPTEMBER
2022



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This project is funded through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program – SNAP.

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

SNAP-Ed is a federal nutrition assistance program that aims to ensure people living on a low-income are able to meet national dietary and physical activity guidelines while on a budget.

1

Introduction

Pick 42 Foundation serves as a central nucleus in an effort to better understand the availability and access to food and reduce the health crisis associated with poor nutrition. Through regular assessment and partnership, Pick 42 explored the level of food insecurity in Marion County. Pick 42 Foundation seeks to continue projects, explore resources, and utilize needed solutions to target problem food insecurity and reoccurring health disparities.

Pick 42 Foundation offers several programs aimed at providing healthier food options and access to food for citizens. These programs include:

- The Marion County Food Policy Council
- The Mobile Food Pantry
- Reimagine Gardens
- Community Garden Food Share
- Building Better Black Farmers
- Eat Local Pee Dee



Pick 42 Foundation collaborated with Clemson Extension and the City of Mullins to initiate the first Marion County Food Policy Council (M.C.F.P.C.), with an executive board consisting of individuals from all three organizations (City of Mullins, Clemson Extension, and Pick 42 Foundation).

The goal is to bring food into the community through a network of partnerships using three primary components:

1**DELIVER**

The Mobile Food Pantry delivers food to every city in the county. Food is provided via partnerships with the Food Bank (*Harvest Hope Pee Dee*) or donations from other donors for special events such as turkey/ham giveaways. Food is distributed in one of two methods

- 1) Direct delivery to our 14 partners (*non-profit churches*) or
- 2) Pick 42 Foundation organized events.

2**GROW**

In 2019, Pick 42 Foundation began a seed and garden supply distribution to the community during planting season. In 2020, we added over 2,000 items, seeds, and materials to our Online Free Store and donated the remaining seeds to the future community garden.

3**EDUCATE AND PLAN**

Pick 42 Foundation implemented the first Food Policy Council in Marion County. The Food Policy Council works to establish a network of food policies encompassing food access, food delivery, gardening, and community involvement.

The first project of the newly formed M.C.F.P.C. is the installation of four community food gardens named Reimagine Gardens. All four gardens will be located in the City of Mullins on city-owned land. The City of Mullins comprises approximately 3 square miles and is over 61% African American, with over 24% living below the poverty lines and many food insecure.

A scoring system was used to select each garden location based on several factors, including proximity to a community garden captain, access to utilities, and ability to walk/access and safety. The gardens are an integral part of a forward-moving rebuilding process while simultaneously helping to address food insecurity in the area. Volunteers and employees maintain the gardens.

The members of the Food Policy Council were recruited and were key partners in multiple aspects of the food assessment. The council offered personal and professional expertise while identifying community agencies for inclusion in the food assessment process. The council consists of the Executive Committee, Community Outreach Committee, Food Access Committee, and Farm and Land Committee. The Executive Committee and members list is located in the Appendix.

The mission of the Food Policy Council is to coordinate better community outcomes for health and food. The council commits to strengthening community partnerships and solidifying services that yield healthier communities. The Marion County Food Policy Council achieves its mission through collaboration, promoting awareness of food and health disparities, connecting resources to address identified needs, and identifying methods to overcome issues. Pick 42 Foundation targets food insecurity through three components of the food policy council: **Access, Grow, and Deliver.**



Access

Pick 42 Foundation, and community partners organized Reimagine Gardens, a community garden aimed to provide access to healthy food options in Marion County. Core partners for this initiative included the University of South Carolina, Arnold School of Public Health, Clemson Cooperative Extension Service, City of Mullins, and Marion County School District. The garden serves as a central point for sharing local produce with the citizens of Marion County. Local citizens are invited to contribute to the food shared from their gardens. All produce is inspected by staff and packaged before public arrival. Citizens also receive fresh produce from the community garden and local donors. The consistent access provides a significant increase in the number of healthy foods consumed within the community.

The garden serves an average of **fifty families** per week. A total of **1,202 community members** were served over the past nineteen food shares. The community garden is expanding to five gardens, increasing the reach to multiple family members throughout the county. In September 2022, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (U.S.D.A.) awarded Pick 42 Foundation **\$146,000** to aid in the fight against food insecurity and expand the mission of creating healthier food options. Reimagine Gardens will expand to four additional guardians, significantly multiplying the access to more nutritious foods for Marion County citizens. With the expansion of the community garden community gardens in Marion County Gardens, thousands of families will receive access to healthy food options. The increase in healthy foods will positively affect health outcomes across the county.



Grow

In 2019, Pick 42 Foundation began the seed and garden supply distribution. Local citizens are encouraged to mirror the planting of seasonal fruit and vegetables as shown in the community garden. Citizens have access to guidance and information from local Master Gardeners and farmers. The seed and garden supply is offered during Pick 42 Foundation's Free Store events and the Community Garden Food share. Citizens are taught how to plant seeds properly and guided through garden management up to harvesting. Citizens are welcome to volunteer during each stage, from planting to harvesting. This hands-on experience provides citizens with the confidence and information needed to maintain their personal gardens.



Deliver

Some areas in Marion County lack access to fresh grocery stores. Pick 42 Foundation closes this gap with the help of several food pantries. Pick 42 Foundation has three food pantries and networks with twelve community partners. The mobile food pantry delivers food to every city in the county. Food is received from partnerships with local food banks such as Harvest Hope Food Bank. Donations are also obtained from other donors. Food is distributed to one of the partnering sites or during Pick 42 Foundation community events. In 2022, a total of **6068 families** were fed.

The Building Better Black Farmers (B.B.B.F.) project is part of an overall umbrella of projects to support Black Farmers in our community, including R.E.F.O.R.M. Ambassadors & the Marion County Food Policy Council. This project focuses on assisting the historically and systemically disenfranchised black farmers by connecting them to resources and helping them complete any necessary paperwork. The Executive Director is the Board Vice Chair for the South Carolina Food Policy Council and founded the first Marion County Food Policy Council. Our partners include the University of South Carolina, Clemson Extension, and Bonita Global.

The B.B.B.F. has an assigned program coordinator who collaborates explicitly with local farmers. Farmers attend regularly scheduled events and meetings as outlined by the program coordinator. The program consists of three main components:

1

Connect identified black farmers with resources.

2

Purchase locally grown produce from the identified farmers. Produce is distributed for free to the food-insecure families in our community.

3

Collaborate with partnering agencies such as Clemson Extension and South Carolina State Extension to enhance the Marion County Black Farmer Co-op.

There are plans to partner with the City of Mullins to initiate a local farmers market. The farmer's market will motivate farmers to grow food to feed the community and aid them in making a profit.

Executive Summary

This assessment contains goals and strategies to address food insecurity and the need to improve health outcomes in Marion County. This Community Food Assessment will cover demographic information for Marion County, health indicators, food access, agriculture, community input and feedback, and recommendations for strategic change.

The data was prepared using multiple resources, including the U.S. Census Bureau, SC DHEC Data, SC Local Roadmap, and U.S.D.A. Food Access Research Atlas. The data tables used standardized rates comparing Marion County and the state of South Carolina.

The central aim of Food Policy Councils is to identify and propose innovative solutions to improve local or state food systems, spurring local economic development and making food systems more environmentally sustainable and socially just.

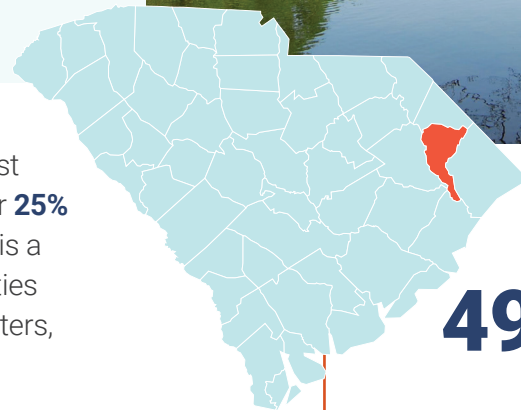
Data noted in this report can be used to better understand the needs of Marion County as a whole.



2

Basic Demographics

Marion County was established in 1798 and named after a revolutionary war hero. The area was branded as a cotton-growing region until switching to tobacco in the late 19th century. Tobacco growing, lumbering, and manufacturing (textile products, candy, and canned foods) are the economy's foundation.



494 square miles

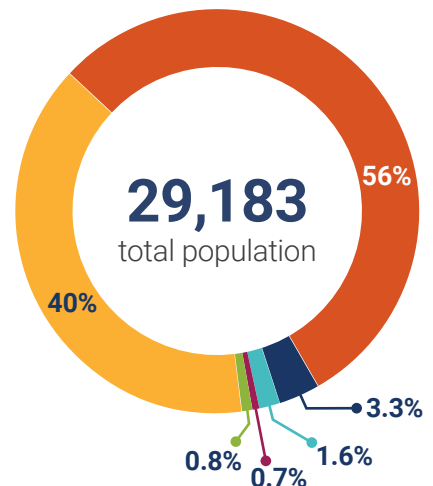
Marion County is **56%** African American, and the two largest cities are over **70%** African American. Poverty impacts over **25%** of the residents living in the community. The entire county is a Title I school district, and food insecurity and health inequities exist throughout the county. Four nationally declared disasters, including two hurricanes since 2015, caused unmeasured damage to the already suffering community.

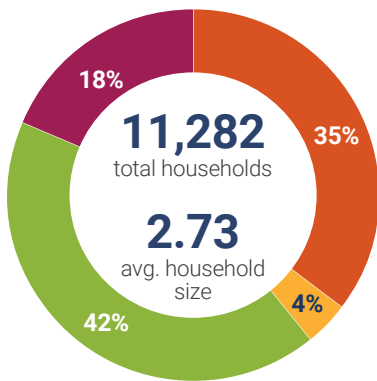
Marion County is located in the Pee Dee Region of South Carolina. The county totals **494 square miles**, and rest between Florence and Myrtle Beach. The county includes two cities (Marion, Mullins), two towns (Sellers, Nichols), four communities (Zion, Rains, Daviston, Centenary), and five unincorporated communities (Brittons Neck, Friendship, Ariel Crossroad, Gresham, Temperance Hill). The basis of the economy includes manufacturing, tobacco, and lumber.

- 2** cities
- 2** towns
- 4** communities
- 5** unincorporated communities

In 2020 the U.S. Census Bureau reported the population of Marion County as **29,183**. The report noted an estimated population of **28,784** by July 2021. Males represented **46.6** percent of the population and females **53.4**. The breakdown of race origin is as follows:

- African Americans (56.6%)
- White (40.2%)
- American Indian/Alaskan Native (0.8%)
- Asian (0.7%)
- Two or more races (1.6%)
- Hispanic/Latino (3.3%)





In 2016-2020, there were **11,282** households in Marion County, South Carolina. The average household size was **2.73** people.

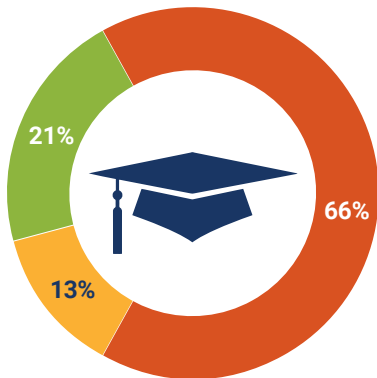
- Married-couple families comprised **35.3%**
- Cohabiting couples comprised **4.0%**
- Female householders with no spouse or partner present were **42.3%**
- Male householders with no spouse or partner present were **18.4%**

Of people living alone, **13.9** percent were male householders, and **18.6** percent were female householders, for a total of **32.5** percent of all households. In Marion County, South Carolina, **29.2** percent of all households have one or more people under the age of 18; **39.9** percent of all households have one or more people 65 years and older.

Between 2016-2020,

- **79.2** percent of people 25 years and over had at least graduated from high school
- **13.0** percent had a bachelor's degree or higher.
- An estimated **20.9** percent did not complete high school.

The total school enrollment in Marion County, South Carolina was **6,906** in 2016-2020. Nursery school enrollment was **153**, and kindergarten through 12th-grade enrollment was **5,302**. College or graduate school enrollment was **1,451**.



The median household income in Marion County was **\$30,791**. Between 2016-2020 **22.9** percent of people were in poverty. An estimated **32.9** percent of children under age 18 were below the poverty level, with **18.9** percent being 65 and older. An estimated **20.5** percent of adults between 18-64 were below the poverty level.

22.9%
of people were in
poverty, 2016-2020

Marion County houses an off-site campus for Florence Darlington Technical College (F.D.T.C.). This site offers technical education and continuing education courses. The site was established in 2003 and has since expanded to provide additional course opportunities for students. The building for this site is a certified part of the City of Mullins Commercial-Historic District.

Local media coverage is offered through Marion Mullins Star Enterprise and locally owned radio station W.J.A.Y. The county provides several recreational sports for youth and has multiple parks throughout the county, including the newly designed Amazing Grace Park. The county houses multiple historic sites and operates two active museums.

The leadership within the county consists of a diverse group of individuals of various ages and backgrounds. In 2020, the City of Mullins elected its first African American Mayor. The City of Mullins and the City of Marion actively engage in revitalization projects to create an innovative and progressive community. The county houses many vacant buildings that can potentially be utilized for the betterment of the county. The county encompasses aspiring leaders who are dedicated to shifting the county to necessary technological advancements while using needed foundational principles for predecessors

3

Health Indicators

Chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease are the top health concerns for Marion County and South Carolina. The Center for Disease Control (C.D.C.) suggests collaboration between private and public health partners to address the alarming concerns. The top-ranking health concerns for Marion County are heart disease (**33**), hypertension (**43**), diabetes (**44**), and obesity (**38**). The data for Marion County's obesity rate is slightly higher than the state's overall rate (**34**). Education, prevention tactics, and healthier food options are avenues necessary to promote healthier lifestyles in Marion County.



Marion County has one certified roadside market, Atkinson Farms, which serves fresh corn and strawberry. Rabons also serves as a well-known local roadside market in Mullins, SC. Several companies throughout the county serve as certified food banks. Collaborative partnerships have afforded an extension on services to operating food banks.

Reimagine Gardens serves as a thriving local community garden in Marion County. As aforementioned, produce is served to citizens for free weekly.

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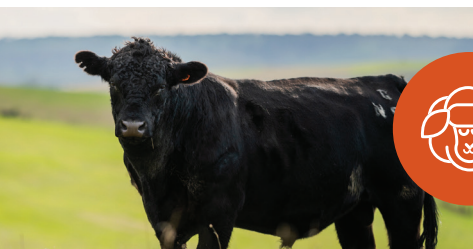
Food Access



In 2017, **98%** of the farms in Marion County were family farms. The average farm size noted in 2017 was **256** acres and **226** in 2007; showing an average of change of **30** acres between 2007-2017. The average product value per farm was recorded as **113,763** in 2017. There was a total of **197** farms in 2017 and a total of **308** in 2007; reflecting a decline of **111** farms between 2007-2017.



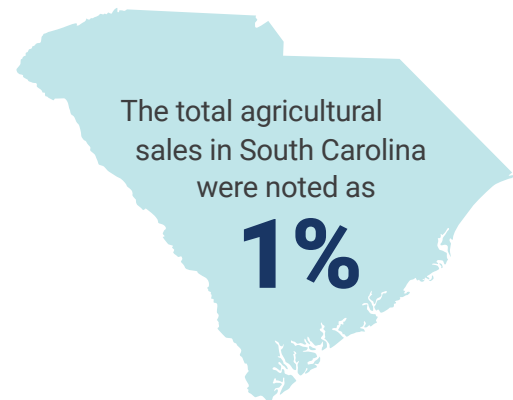
The total crop sales were **\$12,345,000**, for 2017 and **\$28,363,000** in 2012, highlighting a decrease of **\$16,018,000** between 2012-2017.



Livestock sales for 2017 were **\$10,066,000** and **\$12,287,000** in 2012, showing a difference of **\$2,221,000**. The total market sales were **\$22,441,000** in 2017 and **\$21,727,000** in 2007, noting and the change of **\$684,000** between 2007-2017.



The average net cash income per farm was **\$27,547** in 2017 and **\$36,623** in 2012, noting a decrease of **\$9047**. **5%** percent of farms sell directly to consumers.



5

Agriculture

Processing, Packaging, Production



The following processing centers are within the area:

- Carolina Fresh Food (Florence, SC),
- Latta Custom Meat Processing (Latta, SC)
- Mullins Food Processing (Mullins, SC)



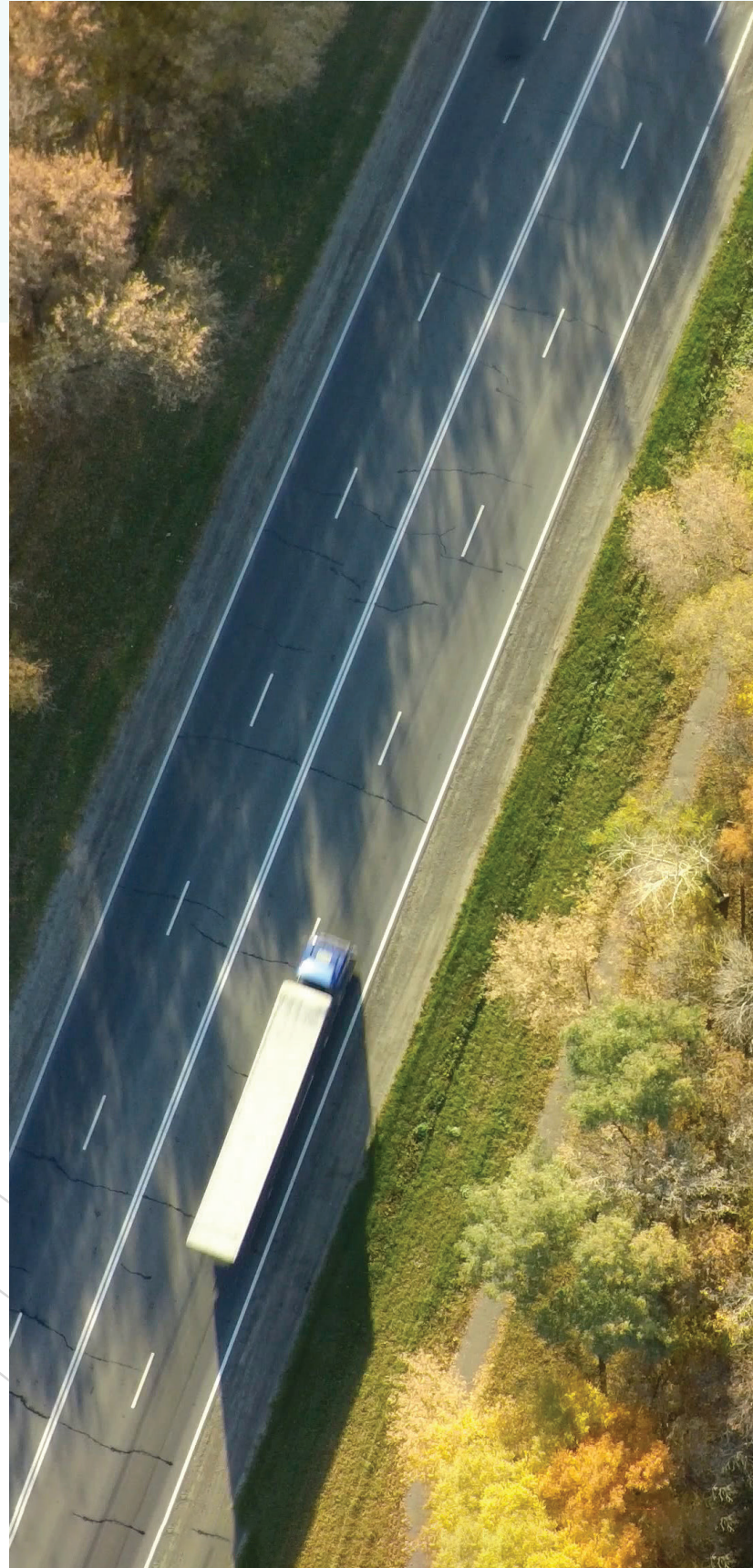
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Transportation

Limited transportation reigned as a pressing concern within Marion County for many years. As of January 2, 2023, P.D.R.T.A. restored transportation services to Marion County. The route now includes nineteen stops in Mullins and twenty-two stops in Marion. The route consists of stops at stores such as Walmart and local grocery stores.

19
Stops in Mullins

22
Stops in Marion



7

Community Feedback

A survey was conducted in Marion County with 152 adult citizens. Most of the responses were from citizens residing in zip codes 29571 (Marion) and 29574 (Mullins). See the feedback on the following pages.



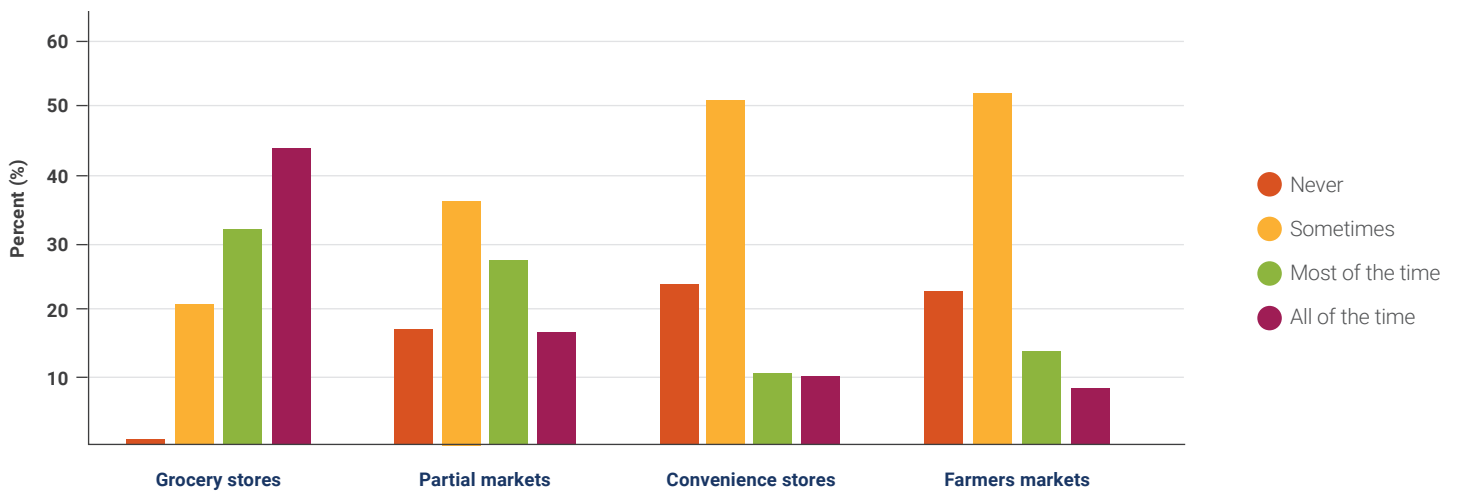
Marion County had 152 survey responses in total.

Individuals who participated were from the following zip codes: 29546 (<1%), 29571 (52.63%), 29574 (42.76%), 29592 (2%), and zip codes not provided (2%).

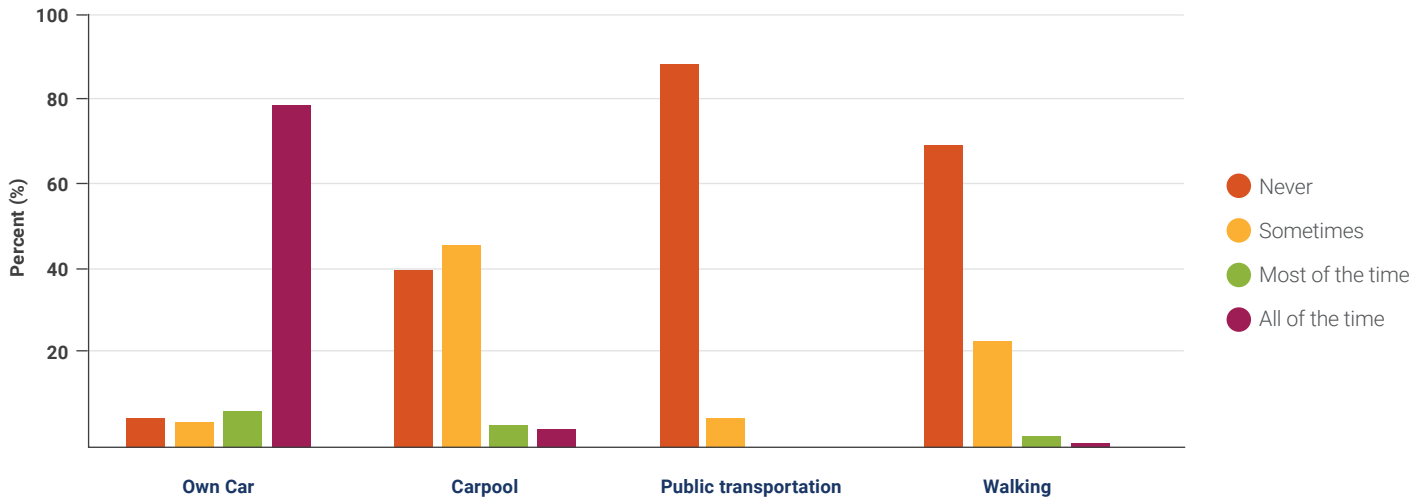
Variable	Number out of Total	Percentage of Total
Age (17-84)*	35% of people were younger than 50 years old. 9 people did not answer.	
Sex	31	20.39
Male	119	78.29
Female	1	0.66
Neither of these	1	0.66
Refused		
Race	2 people did not answer.	
White	35	23.33
Black	113	75.33
Asian	1	0.67
Multiracial	1	0.67
Household Income		
<\$15,000	62	40.78
\$15,000-\$25,000	37	24.34
\$25,000-\$50,000	28	18.42
>\$50,000	16	10.52
Refused to answer	9	5.94

Variable	Number out of Total	Percentage of Total
Obesity*	20 people did not have complete information about this.	
No	60	45.45
Yes	72	54.55
# Child household members		
0	93	61.18
1	30	19.74
2	17	11.18
3	8	5.26
4 or more	4	2.64
# adult household members		
0	5	3.29
1	43	28.29
2	66	43.42
3	22	14.47
4 or more	16	10.53
(*) indicates the total is less than 152.		

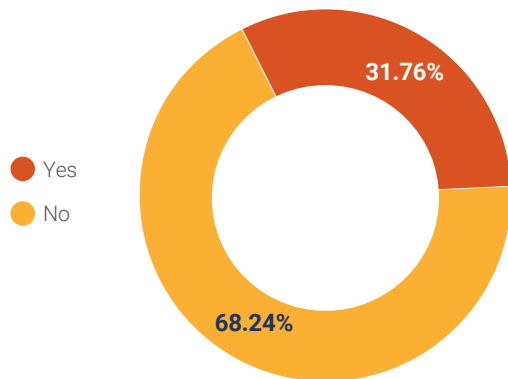
Over the last 3 months, how often did you or members of your household shopped at these types of stores?



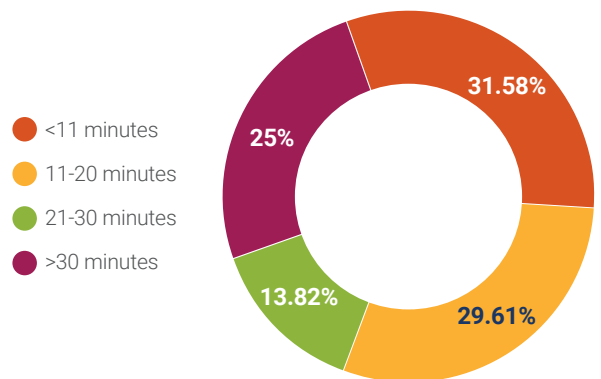
Over the last 3 months, how often did you use the following types of transportation to go food shopping?



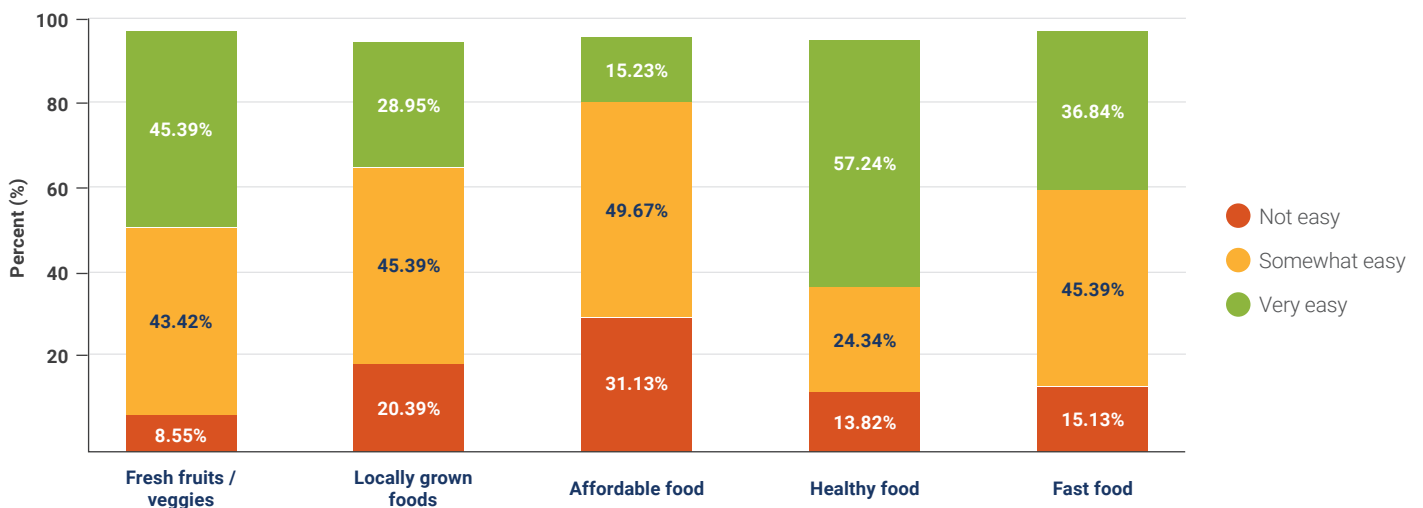
In the past 12 months, did you/any family members living here receive SNAP benefits?



About how long would it take you to get from your home to the store where you buy most of your food, if you had to walk there?

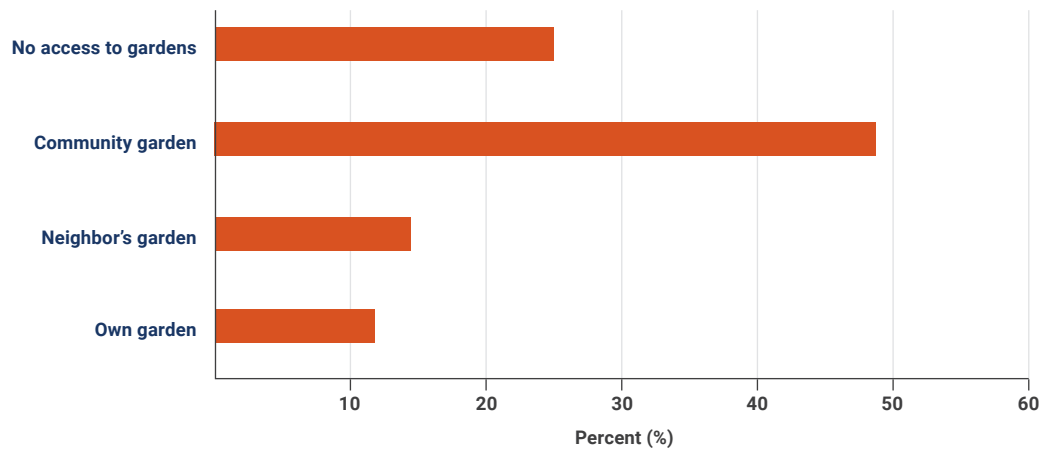


How easy is it to access (purchase or get) the following items in your community?

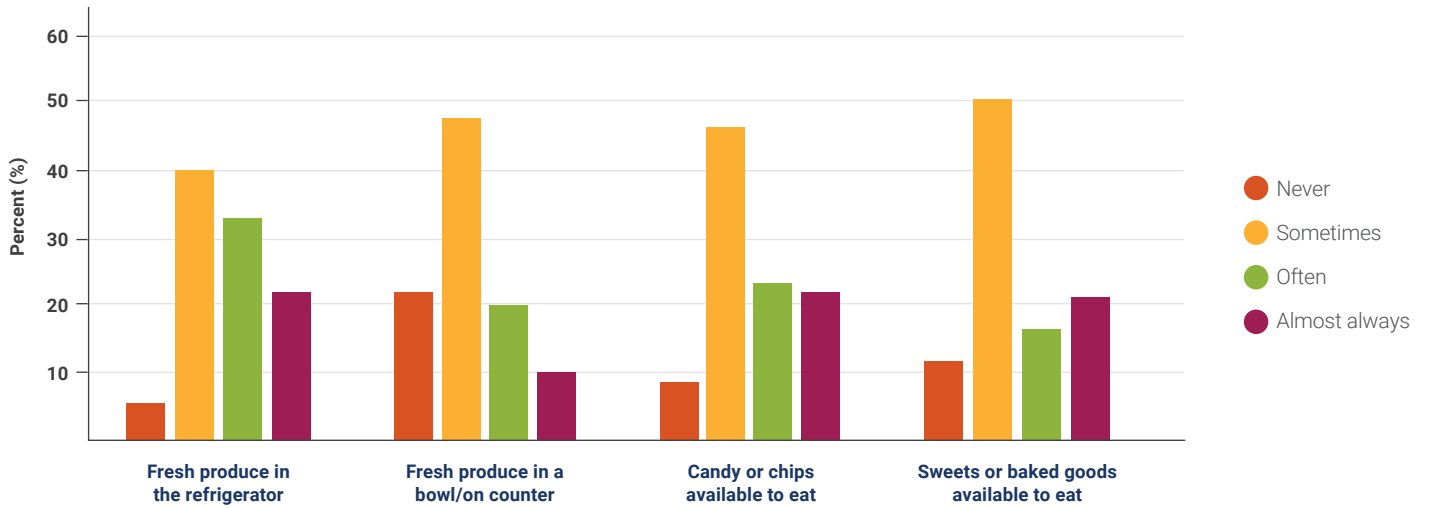


Questions Assessing Food Insecurity	Number out of Total	Percentage of Total
In the last 3 months: "The food that (I/we) bought just didn't last, and (I/we) didn't have money to get more."		5 people did not answer.
Often true	18	12.24
Sometimes true	71	48.30
Never true	57	38.78
In the last 3 months: "(I/we) couldn't afford to eat balanced meals."		5 people did not answer.
Often true	13	8.90
Sometimes true	63	43.15
Never true	68	46.58
In the last 3 months, did (you/other adults in your household) ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food?		
Yes	47	31.13
No	99	65.56
Unsure	5	3.31
In the last 3 months, did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn't enough money for food?		4 people did not answer.
Yes	43	29.05
No	99	66.89
Unsure	6	4.05
In the last 3 months, were you ever hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food?		
Yes	33	22.30
No	115	77.70

Do you have access to fresh produce through gardens?



How often do you have...



8

Recommendations and P.S.E. Change Strategies of Focus

The Marion County Food Policy council, along with partners and stakeholders, have implemented practices to reduce food insecurity, encourage the consumption of healthier foods, and to create avenues to overall healthier life practices. Based on community input, further education is needed to highlight the impact of consistent unhealthy food consumption. The education should include an intentional interaction with targeted audiences. The instruction allows local citizens to volunteer to build gardens and garden maintenance. There should be a continued effort to encourage residents to grow food at their homes if feasible.



The initiatives build power through a shared sense of community and responsibility. The lifelong practices can therefore be passed on for generations to come. The initiative should expand its reach to youth, including partnering with youth programs to broaden the efforts of the agency and partners. A powerful solution to hunger will be to encourage eating from local farmers and teach the art of farming to all citizens. Providing food to citizens is a temporary solution, but teaching the craft of agriculture will provide a lifetime of eating.



The council will invest in programs that help people learn to grow their food utilizing current trends. The council will continue to use resources to provide people with nutritious and affordable food. The council will support local farmers and agencies working to transform the local food system. The council will continue to offer creative avenues to encourage citizens to make intentional moves to create healthier lifestyles. Efforts will include education on food consumed, creating a balanced life, and physical movement.

Appendix

This appendix includes the following sections:

- Food Policy Council Members
- Marion County Asset Map
- Photos of Reimagine Garden



Food Policy Council Executive Board

Terry D. Davis
Weatherly Thomas
Miko Pickett
Robert Woodbury
Dominic Pickett

Food Policy Council Members

Annette Covington
Barker Brown
Jaqueline Alford
Slyvia Ciccarelli
Daniel Cabaniss
Sharon Reaves
Virginia Ellerbe
Jordan Smith

Jean Abram
Ross Gerald
Janetha Nixon
Donald Smith
Terri Brigman
Mayo Phillips
Bill Nelson
Magdalene Jenkins

Shawn Smith
Joey Bradford
Qurita McGowan
Blonde Reed III
Kay Richburg
Joseph Finklea
Mary Bradford
Katisha Smith

Robert Sealy
Weatherly Thomas
Felton Eaddy
Elder Llyod Veerapen
Steven Hardnett

Acknowledgments

This assessment was completed by Cynthia O LLC with assistance from Virginia Ellerbe. Valuable input was shared from Samuel Baxter (Data entry).

Reimagine Community Garden is the product of the diligent work of Pick 42 foundation along with the following core partners: Clemson Cooperative Extension, University of South Carolina, Arnold School of Public Health, City of Mullins, and Marion County School District.

For additional information about Pick 42 Foundation visit www.pick42foundation.org.

Marion County Asset Map

A community asset map was created, noting local assets in Marion County.



Food Banks

1. Saint James Ame Church Pantry - Food Distribution Center
2. Sandy Grove Holiness Church Food Distribution Center
3. Canaan Land Revival Temple Food Distribution Center
4. Tabernacle AME Church - Food Distribution Center
5. Monument Of Faith - Food Distribution Center
6. Performing Arts & Science Academy - Food Distribution Center
7. Mount Olive Seventh Day Adventist Church - Food Distribution Center
8. Harvest Time Evangelistic Church - Food Distribution Center

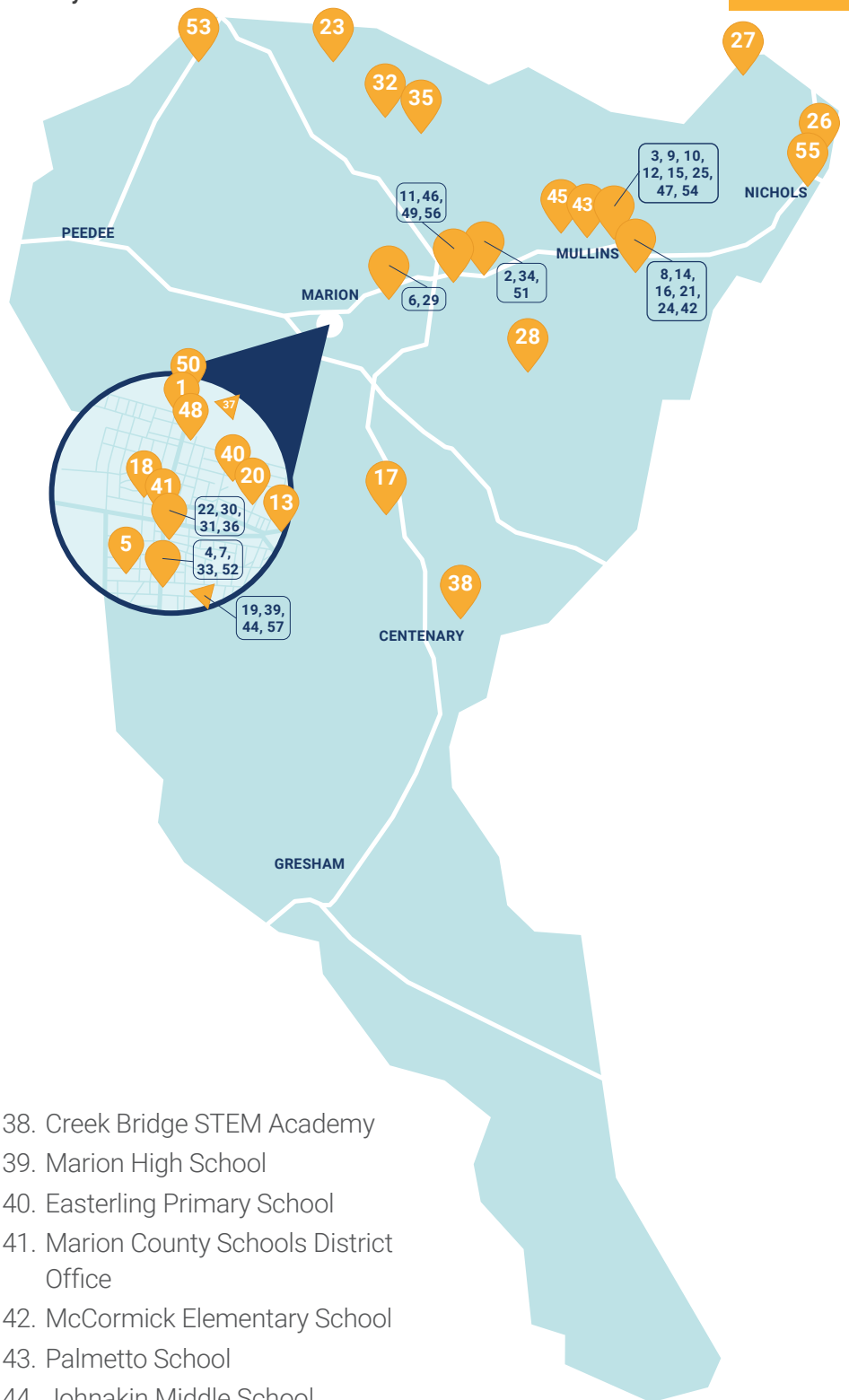


Nonprofits

1. Woman2Woman Resource Center
2. Marion County Habitat for Humanity
3. Marion County Healthcare Foundation
4. Pee Dee Coalition Against
5. Marion County Council on Aging
6. Marion County Economic Development
7. Historic Marion Revitalization Association, Inc.
8. Little Pee Dee Baptist E & M Association Center
9. Mullins First Baptist Church
10. Bethel Word Church
11. Marion County Food Stamp Department
12. Mullins Housing Authority
13. Pee Dee Community Action Agency
14. Mullins Presbyterian Church
15. Reimagine Community Garden
16. Miles Community Center
17. Centenary Community Center
18. AC Tollison Recreation Center
19. Eliose Grice Recreation Center
20. Watsonia Recreation Center
21. McRae Family Farms
22. Marvin Stevenson
23. Lucky J Farm
24. Diamond E Farm
25. Cricket Creek Farm Fresh Eggs
26. M/T Farms
27. Bass Family Farm
28. Thad D Strickland Farm House
29. Marion County Administration Building
30. Koworking Korner
31. Kings & Queens Venue
32. Hidden Acres
33. Marion Old Town Hall and Opera House
34. MUSC Health Marion Medical
35. The Homestead at Zion
36. Magnolia's on Main
37. Marion Intermediate School

38. Creek Bridge STEM Academy
39. Marion High School
40. Easterling Primary School
41. Marion County Schools District Office
42. McCormick Elementary School
43. Palmetto School
44. Johnakin Middle School
45. Mullins High School
46. Academy for Careers & Technology
47. Florence-Darlington Technical College Mullins
48. Cathedral Bible College
49. Marion County Adult Education SC

50. Marion County Christian Academy
51. Pee Dee Academy
52. Marion County Library
53. Sellers Library & Resource Center
54. Mullins Library
55. Nichols Library
56. WIC Marion County Health
57. Health & Environmental Control



Office of Economic Development

1. Marion County Economic Development

Parks

1. Watsonia Recreation Center
2. Grice's Park
3. Withlacoochee Park
4. Mullins Recreational Gym
5. Smith Haven Park
6. Buddy Collins Park and Community Center
7. Amazing Grace Park, The Clementa Pinckney Memorial

Public Transport

1. Pee Dee Regional Transportation Authority



● Groceries

1. Walmart Supercenter
2. Food Lion
3. Piggly Wiggly
4. Marion IGA
5. Parmar IGA Foodliner



● Restaurants

1. T-Roy's Restaurant
2. Rasta's Hut The Caribbean Escape Restaurant
3. Huddle House
4. No. 1 Restaurant
5. Neeva's American & Caribbean Cuisine
6. Makkoli Chinese Restaurant
7. Jimmy B's
8. Pizza Hut
9. Jin Jin
10. Yummy Yummy Hibachi
11. Bravo Pizza
12. Garden Alley
13. Fred's Restaurant
14. Margrets Restaurant
15. Arby's
16. Burger King
17. KFC



Photos of Reimagine Community Garden



