# Northwest Colorado Community Food Assessment:
*Understanding the Food Environment, Policies, and Programs that Affect Healthy Food Access, January 2013*

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Executive Summary

A. Goals of the Food Assessment
LiveWell Northwest initiated this community food assessment in the fall of 2011 in order to inform and advance its strategic goals. Specifically, the assessment aims to address the following coalition goal:

- **Goal 3**: Increase the availability and consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables for Routt County residents to decrease the incidence of obesity and overweight of this population by 2015.
  - **Strategy 3D**: Healthy Food Access - Increase availability and consumption of affordable fruits and vegetables in Routt County.

Thus, the objective of this phase of the Northwest Colorado Community Food Assessment is to answer the question: “Are we maximizing our food environment, policies, and programs to increase fruit and vegetable consumption for all residents?” The assessment addresses this question by investigating Routt County residents’ barriers, needs and opportunities around the four tenants of healthy food access - economical, physical, nutritional, and social.

B. Food Assessment Methods
This report summarizes secondary data collection efforts (e.g., state and local health data, food assistance participation rates, national food security studies) in order to broadly describe the region and its food environment. It also outlines and summarizes primary data collected by the LiveWell Northwest Colorado’s food assessment team. The methods used for primary data collection included: food retail mapping; a food availability survey of local stores to determine availability and prices of common foods used in the USDA’s Thrifty Food Plan; guided conversations on food security with community members and surveys based on the USDA’s Community Food Assessment Toolkit; and, a county-wide internet and paper survey to engage the whole community.

C. Key Results

*Current indicators of overall health and healthy food access:*

- **Fruit and vegetable consumption:**
  - In the community survey almost half (48%) of respondents report consuming only 3 or less servings of fruits and vegetables a day (serving defined as ½ cup). Only 15% report consuming 5 a day, and 15% report consuming 6 or more. The current recommendations are to consume 9 a day.
  - The most recent state-collected data also shows that fruit and vegetable consumption rates are declining in Routt County.

- **Food security:**
  - National studies indicate that 14% of the Routt County population is food insecure. Of those food insecure individuals, 54% are not eligible for food assistance benefits and 24% of them are children.
  - 18% of the county’s children are food insecure, and of those 53% are not eligible for benefits.
According to local data, SNAP participation is climbing steadily, but state studies show that participation rates (percent of those eligible who participate) are low, and Routt is ranked 24th of 25 counties tracked in Colorado.

Local data shows rising numbers of Free and Reduced Price Meal-eligible students.

Local community outreach reveals a high degree of satisfaction from those participating in federal and community food assistance programs, but a need to increase participation rates in general, to conduct more outreach so residents know about all programs available, and to address social stigmas about such programs.

Rates of overweight and obesity:

- Local data shows that Body Mass Index ratings are growing steadily in elementary-aged children and are approaching the state average in two school districts.
- State data shows that Routt County has recently passed state rates for percent of “overweight” (not obese) population.

**Barriers to healthy eating:**

- Barriers to accessing fruits and vegetables:
  - 42% of community survey respondents (the most common response) reported no barriers to accessing fruits and vegetables.
  - The most common response regarding barriers, from those who did report having barriers, was food prices. (29%)
  - Reported barriers do not vary significantly when income is taken in to account. Survey respondents with a reported income of less than $50,000 (168) report similar primary barriers as those with incomes above $50,000 (444).
  - Reported barriers also do not vary significantly by amount of fruits and vegetables consumed by the respondent. However, those reporting no fruit and vegetable consumption report elevated barriers regarding time available and store hours.
  - While some grocers (e.g., City Market) exist in the County that provide set and comparable food prices to the rest of the state, survey respondents indicate, and national data shows, that food prices are high. The county average cost of the Thrifty Food Plan is 34.3% higher than the national average for 2011 and the average cost of a meal is higher in the County than the state ($3.12 versus $2.43).
  - Community mapping shows an abundance (higher ratios than state and national averages) of unhealthy food retail in Steamboat Springs.
  - Distance to stores, particularly ones that sell fresh, high-quality produce, is a locally-reported concern for the county's outlying communities.
  - Local store surveys show that food availability/options in grocery stores is not a particularly large issue. Even the small rural grocers scored well on the food availability assessment.

- Barriers to consuming fruits and vegetables:
  - 62% of community survey respondents (the most common response) reported no barriers to consuming fruits and vegetables.
  - The most common response regarding barriers, from those who did report having barriers, was time to prepare food. (16%)
  - Reported barriers do not vary significantly when income is taken in to account. Survey respondents with a reported income of less than $50,000 (168) report similar primary barriers as those with incomes above $50,000 (444).
Reported barriers also do not vary significantly by amount of fruits and vegetables consumed by the respondent. The primary difference is that those reporting *no* fruit and vegetable consumption report a slightly more significant barrier of not enough time to prepare and tastes and preferences of household members.

Survey and other locally-collected data consistently report a lack of enough variety of fresh, high-quality produce to eat.

**Opportunities for increasing healthy food access – and consumption:**

- **Focus on direct markets:**
  - *Survey respondents consider “local” items to be made or grown within Colorado (67%) or within Routt County (26%).*
  - The most common survey response of where respondents would *like* to get more fruits and vegetables is direct from the grower.
  - The most common response for strategies to make consuming fruits and vegetables easier was also to have more direct from grower outlets, preferably available at grocery stores where residents already shop.
  - 95% of survey respondents indicated that locally grown/made items are important to them and 44% say they would pay more for them.

- **Focus on high-quality, fresh produce:**
  - *Survey respondents’ top-reported factor when choosing fruits and vegetables is freshness and quality.*
  - A substantial number of survey respondents made a written request to bring a Whole Foods Market to Routt County.

- **Focus on increasing food security:**
  - Locally-collected data revealed a desire for more outreach, coordination, and cross-promotion across all food assistance programs, including community food assistance such as food pantries.
  - Locally-collected data stressed the need to increase participation rates in existing federal food assistance programs, particularly SNAP.

**D. Summary of Findings: What do the Results Tell us?**

**Economic Access – Are Healthy Foods Available and Affordable?**

*Answer: yes and no – healthy foods are available, but not affordable for all residents.*

The assessments results, collectively, indicate that healthy foods are available for residents throughout the county, but they are not affordable for all residents. The national data on food "gaps", rates of food assistance program participation, lack of awareness of all available food assistance programs, and high costs of meals point to a significant issue of food insecurity in Routt County. This may be a “hidden” problem in the County. Data indicates that residents are food insecure yet ineligible for food assistance programs, and therefore not being reached. This problem may be particularly acute for children, as they make up a substantial part of the food insecure population. Other local data corroborates increasing challenges in meeting the needs of Routt County’s children, with increasing rates of overweight and obesity and rising numbers of Free and Reduced Price students.

**Physical Access - Do Residents Have Access to Food Outlets?**

*Answer: Yes.*
All of the assessment tools used tell a fairly consistent story -- that physical access to at least one food retailer that offers or sells a variety of healthy food options is not a significant issue in Routt County. There are some concerns that outlying communities, especially lower-income individuals in those communities, simply have too far to go to get to a food pantry or grocer. However, store surveys show that where rural grocers do exist they are stocking diverse and healthy options. Also, mapping shows that a “food swamp” of too many unhealthy food retailers (restaurants, corner stores, gas stations) exists in Steamboat Springs.

Nutritional Access - Are Varied, Healthy Food Options Available?
Answer: yes and no – healthy options are available, but residents are unhappy with local selection and report low rates of fruit and vegetable consumption.

As discussed under physical access, residents report few challenges in accessing healthy food retailers. However, fruit and vegetable consumption rates are still rather low in Routt County and may be decreasing. Rising rates of obesity and particular of overweight rates in the County indicate a need for healthier eating overall. Residents may be able to get to a grocery store – but they are not choosing to buy produce once they get there. Residents of all income ranges voice a strong desire for more varied, fresh, high-quality and direct-from-grower produce in order to increase their fruit and vegetable purchases and consumption.

Social and Cultural Access - Does Consumer Demand for Healthy Foods Exist and is it Being Met?
Answer: yes and no – local demand for fresh and local produce exists, but it is going unmet.

Many residents report no barriers to accessing or consuming fruits and vegetables in Routt County, yet their consumption rates are low. Findings indicate that residents want their fruits and vegetables, they just want them differently than what is available. There is an unmet demand. Residents express a strong interest in direct-from-grower foods, and believe that this could be satisfied from Colorado products and products sold in area grocers, not necessarily through developing more local gardens or farms. Residents have also voiced a strong need for fresher, more high-quality produce in all corners of the County. The strong interest in bringing in a Whole Foods indicates a local, cultural demand for a certain type of shopping experience.

Total Healthy Food Access
In sum, the assessment results indicate a need to increase fruit and vegetable consumption for all residents in all parts of the County. The assessment shows that physical access (access to transportation, distance to grocery outlets, etc.) to fruit and vegetables is not an issue for most residents in Routt County. Instead, financial access should be considered as a primary factor affecting some Routt County residents’ ability to choose healthy food and this may become an increasing issue. Price is a real and perceived barrier for all income levels. There is a population in Routt County whose food needs are not being met and who are often hard to identify and to help. Additional factors include a lack of quality or variety in available foods; lack of (or lack of awareness of) Colorado-grown produce; and barriers of time and taste/preferences to consume fruits and vegetables. There is an unmet demand, regardless of income, for better access to fresh and local produce.
I. Background

A. LiveWell Northwest Colorado

LiveWell Northwest Colorado (LWNW) is one of twenty-two communities funded by LiveWell Colorado that works to improve health outcomes and reduce and prevent obesity for all Colorado residents by promoting physical activity and healthy eating. LiveWell Northwest Colorado's specific vision and mission are as follows:

**Vision** Routt County is a healthy community to live in for all.

**Mission** Reduce obesity in Routt County by introducing healthy eating and active living choices and empowering residents to select them

Part of the plan to fulfill this mission is to understand and increase healthy food access in the region.

B. Defining Healthy Food Access and Food Security

Generally, food security is defined as “access by all to sufficient food for an active, healthy life.” Food access is more complex and has several technical definitions depending on the conversation. It is, however, generally agreed that it consists of the following factors:

- Economic access: food options are available and affordable
- Physical access: residents live within a reasonable distance of an appropriate food outlet
- Nutritional access: healthy, varied options are available and accommodate various dietary restrictions
- Social/cultural access: familiar foods that are consistent with cultural traditions are available

The terms food access and food security are often used interchangeably. While a person may be able to access enough calories to support their lifestyle, health and wellness advocates take food access beyond calories to mean “healthy food access”. Although there is no real agreed upon definition of “healthy food access”, experts tend to agree that fast food restaurants and convenience stores don't make the cut. Furthermore, it is not clear what appropriate “access” is; rather it is suggested that the presence of a supermarket or grocery store within some “acceptable” distance qualifies as appropriate access, regardless of socioeconomic characteristics of the population.

In the few studies that have defined acceptable levels of access, urban food access has been defined as a person living within a “walkable” distance of a large food retailer, while rural and suburban food access has been defined as within ten miles (Algert, Agrawal, & Lewis, 2006; Morton & Blanchard, 2007). However, communities considered food secure due to “adequate” access to retail venues may still experience challenges accessing and consuming enough food options for a healthy diet for different reasons, and these residents will be underserved by traditional interventions and programs.
Common Issues for Rural Food Environments

Most rural food environments are completely devoid of any food outlet of any sort for many miles. Of primary concern is the lack of supermarkets. There are several explanations for this. As rural residents migrate to cities, populations dwindle below a number able to support a grocery store. Competition from new supercenters, such as Wal-Mart, in neighboring towns and counties drive small, independent stores out of business. In Iowa, O'Brien found that the number of grocery stores dropped from about 1,400 stores in 1995 to slightly over 700 in 2005. Over the same time, supercenters increased by 175% (2008). Another study in South Carolina found that of the seventy-seven food service stores in one rural county, 75% of them were convenience stores, and only 28% of the stores carried fruits and vegetables (Springen, 2007). Studies by other researchers and other states have found comparable results (Bustillos, Sharkey, Anding, & McIntosh, 2009; Goforth, 2010; Yousefian, Leighton, Fox, & Hartley, 2011).

Additional common characters of rural communities conflict with standard ways of assessing food access. For example it is commonly thought that access to transportation, both public and private, is the largest predictor of food access. A study by the USDA, Access to Affordable and Nutritious Food: Measuring and Understanding Food Deserts and Their Consequences, finds that rural residences have a significantly higher rate of vehicle ownership, 95% compared to 88% in urban areas, yet rural residents tend to have lower food access due to increased time travel burden. Furthermore, small grocers are often not included in food environment assessments, despite their ability to serve their community (2009).

Focus groups in rural Maine led by Yousefian et al. discovered that rural residents depend on seasonal outlets such as farmers markets, roadside farm stands, personal gardens, long term food storage, hunting, and trading with neighborhoods, potentially more so than urban and suburban residents (2011). The culmination of papers regarding rural food environments paints a picture of a landscape free of the most common retail outlets, but it is also a picture of a more creative and resilient citizenry. There is no doubt that real food access issues exist in rural America, however, it is possible that local solutions are consistently being overlooked by more “urban” models of understanding access.

These shortfalls require that the tools used to measure access move beyond identification of food retail outlets and mapping exercises to a more comprehensive view of the food system in question. A person's perception of his or her own food environment may be a significant factor to consider. Community food assessments hold promise for achieving a more thorough and individualized assessment of a food system of interest that will lead to the generation of solutions that best suit that community.

What is a Community Food Assessment?

Community food assessments are increasingly used by coalitions of community members seeking to improve their communities as opposed to conducting academic research. Community food assessments are recommended to community-based nonprofit organizations and business groups, local government officials, private citizens, and community planners. Often the process of collecting information as a coalition can be just
as valuable as the actual information gathered (Cohen, 2002). Community food assessments are largely tailored to what the community coalition wants to know. For example, if a local government is concerned about the number of small grocers to supermarkets, the assessment may ask questions focused on where residents shop for various items. Are they shopping at the local corner store, or are they traveling to the supercenter in the next town? During a recent discussion on the COMFOOD\(^1\) listserv, Ken Meter, President of Crossroads Resource Center, defined community food assessments as the following:

A Community Food Assessment (CFA) is at some level an assessment of a community and its concerns, best performed when the community itself is involved in the process. Probably the highest form of this is when it is a community assessing its own potential. This also means, however, that a community is free to select the issues it will focus upon, so this does not inherently mean food security is part of the assessment. Inherently, a CFA that addresses food security is making some manner of economic assessment. A CFA can also be performed by a professional or scholar or other researcher who is outside the community, and these may offer insights the community itself cannot muster, but may also involve such a separation from the community that important local wisdom gets overlooked (2011).

E. History of the Northwest Colorado Community Food Assessment

A group interested in addressing the local food system initiated by LiveWell Northwest CO began meeting informally in early 2011. Partners included community members and representatives from the Community Agriculture Alliance, Northwest Colorado Products, Deep Roots, Transition Steamboat, and CSU Extension. While a Community Agriculture Alliance Dialog had identified a number of food system issues within the County, no community based study to understand the components of the food system had been completed. A common theme when discussing the food system in the community is that food was not affordable and “local” produce was not accessible. The group met regularly throughout 2011 with 2 goals. The first goal was, to develop a Coalition structure and mission and vision. Second, to identify and complete a community food assessment in order to not only understand the condition of the local food system but also to use to develop a strategic plan to increase healthy eating within Routt County.

The USDA Community Food Assessment Toolkit was completed in the summer and fall of 2011. This assessment included surveying the low income on food security issues, a key informant focus group with non-profit partners, and developing a data base on components of the food system. In 2012, WPM Inc, was hired to complete a county wide food assessment using the data already collected by the work group and incorporating other primary and secondary data sources. In May 2012, the first “formal” meeting was held by the Northwest CO Food Coalition (NCFC). NCFC will use the County Wide Food Assessment to draft and implement a strategic plan to meet the mission and vision of the group.

\(^1\) COMFOOD is an email list created to link individuals and organizations involved with or interested in community food security (CFS). More information can be found at http://www.foodsecurity.org/list.html
F. Goals of this Community Food Assessment

The following goal and strategy are outlined in LiveWell Northwest Colorado's strategic plan:

- **Goal 3:** Increase the availability and consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables for Routt County residents to decrease the incidence of obesity and overweight of this population by 2015.
  - **Strategy 3D:** Healthy Food Access-Increase availability and consumption of affordable fruits and vegetables in Routt County.

To help facilitate the fulfillment of this overarching goal and support this strategy, the objective of this phase of the Northwest Colorado Community Food Assessment is to answer the question:

> Are we maximizing our food environment, policies, and programs to increase fruit and vegetable consumption for all residents?

This question is critical to understand in almost any community given typically low rates of fruit and vegetable consumption everywhere. Currently, the recommendations for daily servings are *nine fruits and vegetables a day*. Very few Americans achieve this. This assessment examines this issue for Routt County by investigating the four tenants of food access -- economical, physical, nutritional, and social -- through the following objectives:

- **Total Access:** Develop an understanding of food security and insecurity in Northwest Colorado
- **Physical Access:** Map and outline the food environment in order to understand points of basic food access
- **Nutritional and Social Access:** Understand consumer demand and behavior
- **Economical and Social Access:** Identify and document local participation rates, barriers, and opportunities concerning federal food assistance programs
- **Economical and Social Access:** Understand residents' views and use of community food assistance (e.g., food pantries and meal program)

G. Assessment Methodology

This assessment is composed of two primary components. The first component, featured in the following section - *About Northwest Colorado* - summarizes *secondary data collection* efforts (e.g., state health data) in order to broadly describe the region and its food environment. The second component featured in Chapter III - *Understanding Food Access and Consumer Behavior* - outlines and summarizes *primary data collected* by the LiveWell Northwest Colorado’s food assessment team. The methods used for primary data collection closely followed the protocols established by WPM Consulting, LLC through their 2010 Longmont Community Food Assessment and 2011 Chaffee County Food Assessment (copies of these reports are available on request), and the USDA’s ERS Community Food Assessment Toolkit². For an overview of staff and consultants involved, see Appendix A. Assessment methodologies are discussed in greater detail later.

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II. About Northwest Colorado

Routt County is a rural county located 186 miles northwest of Denver in the mountains of northwestern Colorado. It encompasses a total of 2,632 square miles and has a total population of 23,509 people (U.S. Census, 2010). The population center of Routt County is the town of Steamboat Springs, with 12,356 citizens. There are two other towns, Hayden, total population of 1810 and Oak Creek, with a population of 855, which comprise the majority of residents in Routt County (American Community Survey, 2009). In addition, there are 3 unincorporated municipalities: Stagecoach, Yampa and Phippsburg in South Routt County.

Routt County is governed by a three-member Board of Commissioners. The City of Steamboat Springs has a seven-member town council and a city manager. The town of Oak Creek has a seven-member town council and a mayor and the town of Hayden has a seven-member town council, a mayor, and a town manager.

There are three school districts in Routt County (Steamboat Springs, South Routt (SOROCO) and Hayden). The Steamboat Springs School District has five schools (one charter, 2 elementary, one middle and one high school). The Hayden School District has three schools (one elementary, one middle and one high school). The SOROCO School District is made up of four small communities (Phippsburg, Yampa, Oak Creek and Stagecoach) and has three schools (one elementary, one middle and one high school).

As the home of the Steamboat Springs Resort, Routt is a county with two main population groups - those who have more than adequate family resources and those who do not. The Resort brings an influx of affluent individuals, many of whom have second homes or condominiums in the town of Steamboat Springs. Residents in the surrounding communities of Hayden and Oak Creek and seasonal workers tend to support the resort industry.

According to a recent study conducted by the Colorado Fiscal Policy Institute, Routt County is one of the most expensive places to live in Colorado (more expensive than Denver), where a breadwinner supporting a spouse/partner and two children must gross $61,490 annually to live self-sufficiently, without relying on any government program. In addition, there is significant financial disparity among the three communities. This is shown in Figure 1, where higher income populations are clustered around Steamboat Springs, middle-income households surround the Steamboat Springs cluster, and lower-income households reside in South Routt County, where Yampa is their town center.
A. Basic Community Health Indicators

This assessment aims to more deeply understand issues of food access and healthy eating behaviors across Routt County. It is helpful to contextualize the data presented here within a broader snapshot of the county – how healthy are Routt County residents as compared to the rest of the state when it comes to standard health indicators? Since healthy eating often goes hand in hand with rates of diabetes and obesity, examining such indicators is informative of general health status. In later sections, this report then examines the role of access to and consumption of healthy foods specifically and the role that plays in achieving good health.

The Behavioral Risk Factor Statistics (BRFSS) collected and compiled through the Colorado Health Information Dataset (CoHID) by the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment provides local-level, self-reported health information for a variety of indicators for adult populations. The three figures below show how Routt County compares to the state of Colorado across some of the most commonly used indicators of general health and healthy eating. Reviewing the available data shows that Routt County,

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3 This, and all GIS maps included in this report, were developed by Lisa Harner, Research Specialist, Kaiser Permanente
overall (not completely), does better than the State of Colorado - higher rates of fruit and vegetable consumption and lower rates of diabetes and obesity.

Figure 2: % that Ate 5 or More Servings of Fruits and Vegetables a Day Over Time\(^4\) (Colorado Health Information Dataset, 2005-2010)

Over the course of time that this survey was distributed, the USDA Dietary Guidelines recommended consuming 5 or more servings of fruits and vegetables a day. A serving was defined as approximately 1 cup. In 2010, new guidelines recommend 9-11 servings of fruits and vegetables a day, where a serving is defined as approximately \(\frac{1}{2}\) cup.

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\(^4\) Over the course of time that this survey was distributed, the USDA Dietary Guidelines recommended consuming 5 or more servings of fruits and vegetables a day. A serving was defined as approximately 1 cup. In 2010, new guidelines recommend 9-11 servings of fruits and vegetables a day, where a serving is defined as approximately \(\frac{1}{2}\) cup.
Even with relatively stronger health indicators, food insecurity, health disparities, and general poor eating habits can and do still exist in Routt County. One trend to watch is a recent increase in rates of “overweight” Routt County residents, which are climbing above state rates. Importantly for this assessment, fruit and vegetable consumption seems to be decreasing in Routt County, while still higher than the state average. Also, the results from a Fall 2011 5210 Initiative Survey of all-aged students show that the goal of increasing fruit and vegetable consumption to 5-a-day was the least likely goal to meet its targets, and in total, across all ages and all county school districts, only 6.5% were eating more than 5 a day and 22% eating 4-5 a day (See Appendix B for full survey findings).

Also concerning are data reported from the school districts located in Northwest Colorado on student BMI. As Figure 4 demonstrates, rates of overweight and obesity have not increased significantly collectively. However, additional data in Appendix I shows that rates have risen across all elementary-aged children. Average state childhood (2-14 years old) overweight and obesity rates were 25.8% and state high school overweight and obesity rates were 18.2% in 2011, making Hayden and SOROCO School Districts comparable to state trends. Collectively, such data possibly foretells sharp increases in adult overweight and obesity to come, and reveals a need for stronger support for healthy habits in the youngest populations.

The remainder of this report explores in more depth the disparities that do exist, and the reasons that access to and consumption of healthy food, while perhaps stronger in Routt

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5 The 5210 Initiative encourages children to meet the goal of at least 5 fruits and vegetable servings, no more than 2 hours media time, at least 1 hour of physical activity, and 0 sweetened drinks each day.
than the rest of the state by some measures, is still a significant challenge for some residents.

To better understand some of the unique, local conditions that do affect different residents’ access to and consumption of fruits and vegetables, the following section explores the local food environments of the primary municipalities - Steamboat Springs (SS), Oak Creek, and Hayden. For points of comparison, socioeconomic, demographic, and agricultural profiles of Routt County, Eagle County, and Summit County are available in Appendices B and C. Eagle and Summit Counties are used for a basis of comparison because they are similar to Routt County in climate and economy.

B. Routt County Food Environment
The food environment is composed of all varieties of food outlets in the community, including grocery stores, gas stations, convenience stores, full-service restaurants, fast food restaurants, farm stands, etc. Their abundance, geographic location, proximity to residential areas and transportation systems, ability to accept Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) benefits, and prices, among other things, all affect the degree to which a food environment is considered healthy and accessible. Unfortunately, secondary data on food environment indicators is limited and can only really provide a basis for comparing similar regions of interest (this is due to a lack of agreed upon standard for a “healthy food environment”). For a list of food retail terms and definitions, please refer to Appendix H.

Shown below are a figure and three tables representing the Routt County food environment. Figures 5 and 6 are maps of food outlets in Routt County and Steamboat Springs, showing that outlets are clearly clustered around the primary population center - Steamboat Springs - with some outlets in Hayden, Oak Creek, and Yampa.
It appears as though for the vast majority of households, food is accessible; there are plenty of outlets in population centers. Clearly, parts of Routt County have a developed food environment; however, the imbalance of grocery stores and supercenters to convenience stores and fast food restaurants suggest that areas of Routt County could be considered a food swamp (generally considered an overabundance of unhealthy retail options in comparison to full service grocers and restaurants). The bulk of these retail options are centered in Steamboat Springs- the resort community. The national average for unhealthy retail options to healthy food options is 5:1 or 6:1, but in Steamboat Springs, this ratio is approximately 17:1. Although healthy food options are available through the form of
grocery stores (though potentially not affordable) these options are far outpaced by unhealthy options.

**Figure 6** highlights healthy and unhealthy food zones in Steamboat Springs, public transportation systems, and population and income distributions by Census Tract. This map shows that the two full service grocery stores and the supercenter are clustered together, whereas only unhealthy food retail zones (a food swamp) exist as one travels northwest along Highway 40.

**Figure 6: Map of Steamboat Springs' Food Environment**

**Tables 1, 2, and 3**, below, outline a variety of healthy and unhealthy food environment indicators for Routt County and its municipalities using data provided by the local Department of Public Health and Environment. These tables most clearly demonstrate the different food environments that exist in Routt County and underscore the presence of a “food swamp” in Steamboat Springs.

**Table 1: Healthy Food Environment Indicators (Routt County Dept. of Public Health, 2011)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Steamboat Springs</th>
<th>Hayden</th>
<th>Oak Creek</th>
<th>Routt County</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># Grocery stores</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In contrast to the food swamp concept, is the idea of a food desert - an area void of any retail grocery outlet. According to the USDA, no part of Routt County is considered a food desert. **Table 4** includes measures that the USDA takes into account when determining “deserts”, and this table shows an insignificant number of residents living a considerable distance from a grocer without a car. However, the common definition of a food desert does not take into account economic accessibility and does not take into account characteristics that are unique to rural food environments. Economic and physical access are explored in more detail in Chapter III, Section B - Assessment of Food Availability and Prices.

### Table 2: Unhealthy Food Environment Indicators (Routt County Dept. of Public Health, 2011)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Steamboat Springs</th>
<th>Hayden</th>
<th>Oak Creek</th>
<th>Routt County</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># Convenience stores</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convenience stores/ 1,000 pop</td>
<td>0.971</td>
<td>0.552</td>
<td>1.170</td>
<td>0.638</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Fast food restaurants</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fast food restaurants/ 1,000 pop</td>
<td>3.156</td>
<td>0.552</td>
<td>2.339</td>
<td>1.787</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 3: Ratio of Unhealthy Outlets to Grocers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ratio of Unhealthy Outlets to Grocers⁶</th>
<th>Steamboat Springs</th>
<th>Hayden</th>
<th>Oak Creek</th>
<th>Routt County</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>17:1</td>
<td>2:1</td>
<td>3:1</td>
<td>7:1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4: Food Access Indicators (USDA ERS, 2006)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Routt County</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># Households no car &amp; &gt; 1 mi to store, 2006</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Households no car &amp; &gt; 1 mi to store, 2006</td>
<td>1.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Low income &amp; &gt; 1 mi to store, 2006</td>
<td>2243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Low income &amp; &gt; 1 mi to store, 2006</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Households no car &amp; &gt; 10 mi to store, 2006</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Households no car &amp; &gt; 10 mi to store, 2006</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

⁶ Calculated as the sum of fast food restaurants and convenience stores divided by the sum of grocery stores and supercenters. Full service restaurants and specialty stores are excluded from this calculation due to limited economic accessibility and affordability to all residents. The national average ratio is estimated to be approximately 5:1.
C. Food Security and Food Assistance

Not just the availability of food, but also food costs, availability of transportation, and the use of food assistance programs can all indicate whether or not a community is food secure. Figures 7, 8, and 9, below, outline available data from the USDA’s Food Environment Atlas, Feeding America’s Map the Meal Gap\(^7\), and the Routt County Department of Human Services in regards to community food security rates, food assistance utilization, and average meal prices.

Many food assistance programs are income-based, meaning that gross annual household income must fall below a certain threshold in order for a family to qualify for federal programs such as SNAP (130% of Federal Poverty Level) and Free and Reduced Lunch Program (130% and 185% of Federal Poverty Level, respectively). The specific income qualifications for 2012 are provided in Appendix E. In some communities, additional charitable food assistance programs may be available for families in need, regardless of income.

Figures 7 and 8 specifically identify the percent of food insecure people who qualify for income-based programs. For example in Figure 7, 27% of the 3,180 food insecure people in Routt County qualify for SNAP and free school lunches, 17% qualify for reduced price lunches, and 54% of food insecure individuals do not qualify for any Federal food assistance programs. This means that 1,717 (54% of 3,180 food insecure individuals) people are struggling to get enough to eat, and must rely on family, friends, and charitable contributions to make ends meet.

Similarly, Figure 8 shows that 408 children (53% of 770 children) do not qualify for food assistance programs such as the Free and Reduced Lunch program, and are potentially more insecure than children of lower income families because they are not being served by such programs. As Figure 8 shows, this gap (food insecure children who are not eligible for some programs) still exists even though more and more students are indeed eligible for Free and Reduced Meals (FRM). Figure 9 shows that there has been a generally increasing trend in those who are eligible over the past several years, only slightly leveling off this year\(^8\).

Regarding participation in FRM programs, there is a need for more consistent data from school districts on participation rates of eligible children. As an example, however, Hayden School District reported 143 FRM-eligible students (41% of the student body) in the 2011-12 school year, with an average number of 103 FRM lunches (breakfasts N/A) being served daily. This indicates a 72% participation rate on average. When examining just the


\(^8\) In Colorado, Reduced-price lunches cost the student $0.40 and breakfasts are free for all Reduced-price eligible students due to recent Colorado legislation eliminating the “reduced” category for breakfasts.
elementary schools, the participation rate (53 FRM lunches served on average, 82 FRM students) is 65%. See Appendix F for Routt County’s known FRM numbers. Additional data is needed from other districts and concerning breakfast participation as well to tell a complete story of the “reach” of these programs.

In addition to signifying how well a community is doing in providing consistent, healthy meals to students who need it most, participation rates in Free and Reduce Priced Meal programs (both breakfast and lunch) have significant financial impacts on school districts. The percentage of eligible students in a district, and that district’s track record in getting them fed, determine what grant and funding opportunities districts might be eligible and competitive for. For the 2010-11 school year, Food Research and Action Center\(^9\) estimated that if participation in Free and Reduced Price Breakfasts alone (not including lunches) were to increase from 41% to 60% in Colorado, the state would bring in almost $11 million additional federal dollars.

Collectively, Figures 8 and 9 demonstrate a significant need to better understand the programs available to families with children and to maximize them to their utmost potential. As shown in Figure 8, the discrepancy between overall food insecurity rates for Routt County (13.9%) and the childhood food insecurity rate (17.7%) indicates that food assistance programs are underserving families with children.

### Figure 7: Overall Food Insecurity Rates and Food Costs in Colorado and Routt County (Feeding America, 2010)

#### Colorado

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food Insecurity Rate</th>
<th>Income Bands Within Food Insecure Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15.5% of state population</td>
<td>37% below SNAP threshold of 130% poverty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of food insecure people: 783,380</td>
<td>9% between 130-185% poverty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National average food insecurity rate: 16.6%</td>
<td>53% above other nutrition program threshold of 185% poverty</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Additional Money Required to Meet Food Needs in 2009:** $327,668,270

**Average Cost of a Meal:** $2.43

**Five counties with the highest food insecurity rates:** Dolores, Huerfano, Crowley, Lake, Costilla

---

#### Routt

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food Insecurity Rate</th>
<th>Income Bands Within Food Insecure Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13.9% of county population</td>
<td>27% below SNAP threshold of 130% poverty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of food insecure people: 3,180</td>
<td>17% between 130-185% poverty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National average food insecurity rate: 16.6%</td>
<td>54% above other nutrition program threshold of 185% poverty</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Additional Money Required to Meet Food Needs in 2009:** $1,707,800

**Average Cost of a Meal:** $3.12
Figure 8: Child Food Insecurity Rates for Colorado and Routt County (Feeding America, 2009)\textsuperscript{10}

### Colorado

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHILD FOOD INSECURITY RATE</th>
<th>ESTIMATED PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY AMONG FOOD INSECURE CHILDREN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>22.7%</strong></td>
<td><strong>CHARITABLE RESPONSE</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of food insecure children: 694,760</td>
<td>Income eligible for the federal nutrition programs (above 185% of the federal poverty level) 43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National child food insecurity rate: 23.2%</td>
<td>Income eligible for federal nutrition programs (below 185% of the federal poverty level) 57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>AVERAGE COST OF A MEAL</strong> $2.56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Routt

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHILD FOOD INSECURITY RATE</th>
<th>ESTIMATED PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY AMONG FOOD INSECURE CHILDREN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>17.7%</strong></td>
<td><strong>CHARITABLE RESPONSE</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of food insecure children: 770</td>
<td>Income eligible for the federal nutrition programs (above 185% of the federal poverty level) 53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Income eligible for federal nutrition programs (below 185% of the federal poverty level) 47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>AVERAGE COST OF A MEAL</strong> $3.18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{10} This figure contains two typos. For both the state and county data, the percentage of the food insecure population receiving only “charitable responses” should read as “income Ineligible” not “income eligible”.

* National average cost of a meal is $3.64

$2.56

* National average cost of a meal is $3.64

$3.18
In general, these figures above show that Routt County has lower poverty rates than the state and comparable rates to other resort communities, but, the cost of food is significantly higher than the state average, and is comparable to other resort communities - see Figure 7, above, and Appendix G. This is mostly due to the tourism dependent nature of the Routt County economy. Compounding the issue is that Routt County is ranked 24th (of only 25 counties ranked) for SNAP participation rates in Colorado. Eagle County is 25th, however, Summit County is 7th. Although food insecurity rates are relatively low, the combination of low SNAP participation rates and high food prices is probably leaving a fair amount of the population "underserved" because federal standards and definitions do not capture regional characteristics and the effects that a tourism-based industry has on permanent residents.

Current, local data can provide an even finer-grain picture of what access to and use of food assistance looks like in Routt County. Figures 10 and 11, below, show a dramatic increase in SNAP use; however, this is not a clear indication of need. Certainly the economic collapse in 2008 and the following recession have had a significant affect on households and their ability to provide for themselves. However, Colorado has made several changes to the way the state determines food assistance eligibility, including eliminating face-to-face interviews in favor of electronic applications and phone interviews, streamlining the application process, and updating the computer system increase processing speed. All of these changes have increased the ease of applying for food assistance in Colorado and the

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11 Public school children qualify for free lunch if their family household income is less than 130% of the Federal Poverty Line. Public school children qualify for reduced lunch if their family household income is less than 185% of the Federal Poverty Line.
time it takes Department of Human Services to process applications and distribute funds. Given these factors, it is impossible to disentangle if increased SNAP participation is a result of increased need and decreased food security, or a result of the process being easier for all involved.

**Figure 12**, further below, showcases the number of households serviced by a local emergency food service provider, Lift-Up of Routt County. Unlike the SNAP data, the emergency food assistance data does not trend up over time. Instead, it trends seasonally, indicating that more families rely on emergency food assistance during the holiday season when other constraints are placed on the household budget.

**Figure 10: Monthly SNAP Benefits Expended in Routt County Over Time, (Routt County Department of Human Services, 2011)**
Figure 11: # of Households Receiving SNAP Benefits in Routt County Over Time, 2008-2011 (Routt County Department of Human Services, 2011)

Figure 12: # of Households Receiving Emergency Food Assistance Through Lift-Up of Routt County Over Time (Lift-Up of Routt County)
III. Understanding Food Access and Consumer Behavior: A Community Listening and Survey Approach

The following section provides an overview of the primary data collection efforts for the Northwest Colorado Community Food Assessment and also summarizes findings from these various efforts. These included:

- Targeted Community Outreach to Assess Food Insecurity: Guided conversations with community members and surveys based on assessment tools outlined in the USDA’s Community Food Assessment Toolkit
- Assessment of Food Availability and Prices: A survey of local stores to determine availability and prices of 87 common foods used in the USDA’s Thrifty Food Plan
- County Wide Survey: Paper and Internet surveys in order to engage the whole community

A. Targeted Community Outreach to Assess Food Insecurity

Guided conversations and surveys were conducted in order to acquire a deeper understanding of the following:

- Community food insecurity looks like in Routt County
- How food assistance programs are being utilized or not, and why
- Factors affecting food shopping habits and food choices
- Household food insecurity

The following sections summarize the methodology associated with each outreach approach and the primary findings.

1. Community Food Insecurity in Routt County Focus Group

In order to begin to explore whether or not community food security is an issue in Routt County, what factors are causing any insecurity, and what programs and policies are in place to mitigate any insecurity, a key informant focus group was convened. This focus group was hosted by LWNW, and discussion questions were based on the USDA’s Community Food Assessment Toolkit’s Community Food Assessment Discussion Guide. These questions are available in Appendix J. Key informants were identified through Human Resources Coalition and were asked to participate because of their involvement in providing human services in Routt County.

Overview of Participants

20 Executive Directors and leaders from the following organizations participated in this conversation:

- Lift-Up of Routt County Food Pantry
- Health and Human Services
- Council on Aging
- Integrated Community
- Horizons
- 1st Impressions
- Grand Futures
Early Childhood Center
Habitat for Humanity
United Way
Rocky Mountain Youth Corp

Is Food Insecurity an Issue in Routt County? What are the contributing factors?
- Yes, food insecurity affects all age ranges in the county; however, it is a hidden problem.
- Cost of living, unemployment and underemployment, and wages all contribute the household food insecurity
- The climate and the short growing season limit local food production

Is Food Affordable and Accessible?
- Food is accessible in most communities, however the outlying communities have little access to fresh foods and store hours are limited.
- Affordability is an issue across all the communities in the county
- The quantity and variety of foods is limited

What Programs and Policies Are in Place to Support Community Food Security?
- Families rely on Federal Food Assistance- SNAP, WIC, Free and Reduced Lunch Program
- Local food pantry- Lift-Up of Routt County - offers emergency food assistance
- LiveWell NorthWest supports the community garden
- Farmland preservation programs support local agriculture

What Else Could Be Done to Support Community Food Security?
- Increase participation in Federal Food Assistance programs
- Address social stigma associated with using food assistance programs
- Support and increase local food production
- Support nutrition and cooking education programs for all ages
- Additional integration of food related priorities into the community planning process

2. The Use of Food Assistance: Community Surveys
In order to determine whether or not there are barriers to accessing food assistance programs, a select group of people were asked to fill out a food assistance survey. These individuals were clients of food assistance organizations and were asked to take this survey during their regularly scheduled appointments. They were provided a $25 gift card to Wal-Mart for participating in this study. A list of questions were adapted from the USDA’s Community Food Assessment Toolkit’s Household Food Assistance Instrument. These questions are available in Appendix J. A summary of responses is as follows:

Overview of Participants
- 26 participants answered the survey questions for their households (5 male, 21 female)
- 20 surveys were completed in English, 6 in Spanish
- 23 household incomes were less than $33,000
- 14 households use SNAP, 13 households use WIC, 12 households use free and reduced school lunches, 10 households use Lift-Up of Routt County, 2 households use Meals on Wheels, and 2 households use a food pantry
25 participants indicated that these food assistance programs were “very important” their family, while 1 participant indicated that they are “somewhat important”

Benefits Associated with Food Assistance Programs

- The majority of respondents indicated that these programs are important because they help cover the costs of food and alleviate stress associated with feeding the family healthy and balanced meals.
- When asked specifically about SNAP and WIC, participants indicated that the program was convenient, easy to use, and that the benefits were widely accepted. Other indicated that the best part of the program was that it allowed them to purchase and eat healthier foods.
- WIC recipients listed child care, cooking, and health advice as the best features of the programs.
- Households using free and reduced lunch programs reported that these programs help enhance or “stretch” their SNAP or WIC benefits.

Barriers Associated with Food Assistance Programs

- Most people indicated they don’t have any issues with participating in SNAP.
- Several people indicated that store clerks regularly do not know how to process the transaction, making check outs embarrassing and burdensome.
- A couple of people stressed the challenges of not being able to use the benefits if their store bill was more then the amount on the SNAP benefits card, or of losing the remaining WIC benefit if the bill was less then the benefit.
- All families using the free and reduced lunch programs or Meals on Wheels reported no issues with doing so, however one person complained about the quality of food served at school.
- Some people indicated that they do not use food assistance because of the embarrassment associated with it or because “others need it more.”
- Six people indicated that they didn’t know about WIC, two people didn’t know about Meals on Wheels, and six people indicated that they didn’t know about emergency food assistance such as Lift-Up of Routt County.

What Could Make These Programs Better

Participants were asked how they would invest time and money in order to help people these programs to the best degree possible. Here are their responses in order of frequency:

- One application for all programs (12)
- Outreach and information about programs (5)
- Application assistance programs (5)
- Transportation improvements (2)
- Training for professional staff (1)

3. Food Shopping Patterns and Sources: Community Surveys

In order to determine whether or not there are barriers to accessing food, a select group of people were asked to fill out a food shopping survey. These individuals were identified through the Routt County Department of Human Services, and were provide a $25 gift card to Wal-Mart for participating in this study. A list of questions were adapted from the
USDA’s Community Food Assessment Toolkit’s Food Shopping Patterns. These questions are available in Appendix J. A summary of responses is as follows:

**Overview of Participants**
- 10 participants answered the survey questions for their households (3 male, 7 female)
- All 10 household incomes were less than $25,000, 6 household incomes were less than $11,000

**Where Food is Obtained**
Respondents were asked to indicate their primary and secondary sources for groceries. The results are as follows in order of popularity:
- City Market (Steamboat Springs): 9
- Safeway (Steamboat Springs): 7
- Wal-Mart (Steamboat Springs): 3
- Select Super (Oak Creek): 1

Additional questions were asked about home gardens, community gardens, farmers’ markets, hunting, fishing, and neighbors. These sources are used as follows, in order of popularity:
- Home Garden: 3
- Community Garden: 1
- Farmers’ Market: 1
- Hunt/Fish: 1
- Neighbors: 1

**Transportation to Getting Food**
- 8 people use their own car, 2 people use the bus
- 8 people indicated that transportation is not a problem; 2 people indicated that it was, but did not explain why.
- It takes 4 people 10-20 minutes to get to the store, 4 people 20-30 minutes, and 2 people 30-60 minutes.

**Factors in Determining Where to Get Food**
Respondents were asked to indicate why they shop at certain locations. The results are as follows in order of popularity:
- Convenient (easier, closer, familiar, etc.): 8
- Prices, sales, or specials: 8
- Items available (variety, store brand, quality): 3

Respondents were asked about their level of satisfaction with several factors associated with their primary shopping location.
- The majority were “very satisfied” with the quality of food available, the location of stores, the cleanliness of stores, and the variety of foods available.
- The majority of respondents were “somewhat satisfied” with food costs
Options for Places to Get Food That Aren’t Currently Available

- 2 people indicated that they would like to shop at other stores such as Bamboo, Healthy Solutions, or Costco, but that these locations don’t accept SNAP benefits.
- Most people who don’t use alternative forms of food sources (gardening, hunting, etc.) indicated that they didn’t know, didn’t have the time, or didn’t have the equipment.

What Could Make These Programs Better

Participants were asked how they would invest time and money in order to help people have an easier time getting the foods they want. Here are their responses in order of frequency:

- Create outreach programs for other resources: 5
- Try to get the foods wanted in the stores: 5 (more gluten free!)
- Bring stores closer to homes: 4
- Start a food co-op: 3
- Provide public transportation to large supermarkets: 2

4. Household Food Security

In order to determine the magnitude of household food insecurity for some families, how they cope with it, and their perception of community support, a select group of people were asked to fill out a household food security survey. These individuals were identified through the Routt County Department of Human Services, and were provide a $25 gift card to Wal-Mart for participating in this study. This survey was adapted from the USDA’s Community Food Assessment Toolkit’s Household Food Security Instrument. These questions are available in Appendix J. A summary of responses is as follows:

Overview of Participants

- 10 participants answered the survey questions for their households (3 male, 7 female)
- 8 household incomes were less than $18,000, 2 household incomes were between $26,000 and $33,000.
- Most of the participants (7-8) report experiencing some level of food insecurity within the last 12 months
- Participants report limited income, limited capacity to work, or issues access food assistance programs as the main causes of their food insecurity

Coping with Household Food Insecurity

- Participants make existing food resources last longer by saving all leftovers, making larger meals at a time, freezing extra food, skipping meals, and eating less.
- Most respondents (7) rely on the local food pantry, Lift-Up of Routt County, for emergency assistance. Others rely on family (4) and friends (2).
- When asked why some sources of emergency food assistance work well, most respondents indicated that Lift-Up of Routt County is the best because its instant, convenient, located on a bus route, and the people are friendly.

Summary of Community Outreach Findings

Across focus groups and surveys, some common themes include the following:
Status of programs to address food insecurity:
- Respondents report a high degree of satisfaction and convenience with the federal and community programs that do exist (SNAP, Free and Reduces Meals, Lift-Up). They report few challenges in using these programs and report that they are critical to support healthier eating.
- Respondents report most often shopping at the large grocery retailers (e.g., City Market, Safeway) and overall feel very satisfied with the quality of available foods, though less satisfied with the prices.
- Respondents express interest in having other alternative (wholesale, natural grocers) food retailers, but do not express using – or knowing how to use – other alternatives such as gardening or hunting.

Barriers to addressing food insecurity:
- Respondents report a “hidden” problem of food insecurity in the County due to high cost of living, underemployment, and low wages.
- Participants discussed challenges of local food production, but think it is worth exploring more.
- Participants reported barriers for the outlying communities to access fresh foods.
- There was general feedback that affordability is a concern and variety of foods available is poor.
- Participants who do use a food assistance programs reported know knowing about other food assistance programs.
- There were some concerns about the stigma of using food assistance programs.

Opportunities for promoting food security:
- Increase participation rates across all food assistance programs.
- Address the social stigma of using food assistance programs.
- Promote cooking and nutrition education.
- Explore one common application for all food assistance programs.
- Conduct more outreach and education about existing programs.

B. Assessment of Food Availability and Prices
As mentioned above, the resort-based economy of Steamboat Springs is likely the cause of increased food prices and the rural nature of the rest of Routt County likely limits the availability of healthy foods. In order to examine the extent to which prices and availability are barriers to consuming a healthy, balanced diet in for residences of Routt County, the assessment team gathered primary data from select grocery stores in the county using a food store survey developed by the USDA ERS for the Community Food Security Assessment Toolkit. This survey is based on the USDA’s Thrifty Food Plan (TFP). A list of food items, their prices, and whether or not the specific item was available in Routt County, is shown in Appendix K. A detailed methodology of this assessment is available at http://www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/EFAN02013/, Chapter 8.

The Thrifty Food Plan is a week’s worth of meals for a reference family of four that fulfills the USDA’s dietary guidelines and also serves as a reference for food stamp allotment. In addition to being a guide for households with limited food budgets, the national average
weekly cost of this meal plan is tracked in order to give a basis of comparison for determining availability and prices of 87 common foods in a specific community. The availability of foods required for the Thrifty Meal Plan and its weekly costs for each grocery store in Routt County are summarized in the following Tables 5 and 6:

Table 5: Availability of Common Food Items at Select Grocery Stores in Routt County

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># of Missing Items</th>
<th>Steamboat Springs 1</th>
<th>Steamboat Springs 2</th>
<th>Steamboat Springs 3</th>
<th>Rural Town 1</th>
<th>Rural Town 2</th>
<th>County Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% of TFP Items Available</td>
<td>95.4%</td>
<td>97.7%</td>
<td>81.6%</td>
<td>92.0%</td>
<td>98.9%</td>
<td>93.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of TFP Items Available, National Average by Store Type</td>
<td>81% (large grocer)</td>
<td>81% (large grocer)</td>
<td>95% (supercenter)</td>
<td>51% (small grocer)</td>
<td>51% (small grocer)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most Common Missing Food Category</td>
<td>Fresh Meat/Meat Alternatives</td>
<td>Frozen/Canned Meat/Meat Alternatives</td>
<td>Fresh Vegetables</td>
<td>Other/Misc.</td>
<td>Fresh Meat/Meat Alternatives</td>
<td>Fresh Vegetables/Meats &amp; Meat Alternatives</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Costs of Thrifty Food Plan by Grocery Store for Routt County (Primary Data, 2011)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Average Weekly Cost of TFP</th>
<th>Steamboat Springs 1</th>
<th>Steamboat Springs 2</th>
<th>Steamboat Springs 3</th>
<th>Rural Town 1</th>
<th>Rural Town 2</th>
<th>County Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$213.81</td>
<td>$172.66</td>
<td>$161.22</td>
<td>$232.26</td>
<td>$186.68</td>
<td>$193.33</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Difference from County Average Cost of TFP</td>
<td>+10.6%</td>
<td>-10.7%</td>
<td>-16.6%</td>
<td>+20.1%</td>
<td>-3.4%</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Difference from National Average Cost of TFP for 2011</td>
<td>+48.5%</td>
<td>+19.9%</td>
<td>+12.0%</td>
<td>+61.3%</td>
<td>+29.6%</td>
<td>+33.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Cost of Fresh Fruits</td>
<td>$12.59</td>
<td>$11.86</td>
<td>$11.49</td>
<td>$17.22</td>
<td>$14.68</td>
<td>$13.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Cost of Fresh Vegetables</td>
<td>$13.39</td>
<td>$12.76</td>
<td>$10.12</td>
<td>$22.67</td>
<td>$12.90</td>
<td>$14.37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As outlined in Table 5, the majority of food items outlined in the Thrifty Food Plan are available at most of the food outlets surveyed in Routt County. Compared to the national averages (by store category), food availability in grocery stores is not a particularly large issue. Even the small grocers, Rural Town 1 and 2, which normally do not carry a wide variety of good items, scored well on this food availability assessment. The most common

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12 The average price for specific items was used if a store was missing that particular item. For example, Steamboat Springs 3 was missing several fresh items. The average price from the other stores was used in place of missing items to calculate the cost of the Thrifty Food Plan for Steamboat Springs 3.

13 The reference family for the national average cost of TFP is a family of four with two children between 6 and 11 years old. The weekly national average cost of this plan was $144.00 in December, 2011.
missing items were ground turkey and frozen fish. Appendix K lists all the Thrifty Food Plan items, their prices, and whether or not they were missing, by store.

Table 6, on the other hand, clearly demonstrates how expensive common food items are when compared to the national average ($144.00 per week). The county average cost of the Thrifty Food Plan is 34.3% higher than the national average for 2011. Although availability of food items is fairly consistent across grocery outlets in Routt County, prices vary widely. Even Steamboat Springs 1 and 2, both typical large grocers, show a 23.8% difference in total cost of the Thrifty Meal Plan. Not surprising, Steamboat Springs 3, a supercenter, offers the greatest value.

C. County Wide Consumer Survey
Essentially, the focus groups and surveys, summarized above, were a community participation-based approach to helping community members identify key issues and articulate what questions should be addressed in order to better understand healthy food access for low income populations, how best to strengthen the food environment, and how to increase fruit and vegetable consumption for a very small subsector of the county population. In order to assess the broader community, a county-wide survey was developed to focus on a narrow set of questions regarding shopping habits and preferences, barriers to fruit and vegetable access, and interests in the local food system.

Survey Development
The feedback gathered from the focus groups and coalition meetings served as the lens through which other community food assessment surveys from across the country were viewed during the formation of the Routt County survey. While Routt’s survey was tailored to address unique local circumstances, at least three other Colorado communities have implemented a very similar survey. Communities have implemented common assessment tools in order to facilitate county-to-county comparisons of barriers and solutions to promote healthier eating. Survey results can help contextualize local data (how we do compare to others?), can help contribute to a broader body of knowledge in the state about issues of healthy food access, and can potentially support collaborative strategies moving forward.

WPM Consulting, LiveWell Northwest, and colleagues in public health and nutrition vetted all survey questions before the survey has finalized. A Spanish student at Colorado State University translated the final survey into Spanish and the student’s Spanish professor reviewed this translation. Surveys were available in both English and Spanish for both the Internet- and paper-based surveys. Surveys included a brief overview paragraph describing the survey and offered two $100 gift certificates to a local food outlet to randomly-selected survey respondents as an incentive for completing the survey. The full instrument is included in Appendix M.

Survey Dissemination
Both web-based and paper surveys were disseminated over a 2.5-month period. The goal of this survey was to include as many households in the county as possible (the number of households in 2010 totaled 10,146). County-wide survey dissemination included multiple
web and paper-based methods of distribution, as outlined in Appendix L. Both English and Spanish paper surveys were developed to reach populations with little to no access to, or familiarity with, computers. Demographic data was regularly checked and compared to Census data in order to guide survey dissemination and to support the collection of representative data.

Survey Analysis
Paper surveys were returned to the LiveWell coordinator in order to be entered into a web-based format. Survey results from all four surveys (Internet English, Internet Spanish, Paper English) were pooled into one data set with the additional variable of “type of survey”. Six surveys were disregarded due to respondents indicating residency outside of Routt County. An additional seven paper surveys were entered manually. The Internet survey was programmed to require an answer to all questions other than demographic questions. This style eliminated the need to disregard survey responses that were incomplete or obviously inconsistent.

All “other” statements provided in the survey were reviewed and sorted back into the major answer categories when appropriate. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze all results, but data was organized to facilitate more intricate econometric analysis, should this become an interest to the community. Since the purpose of this assessment was to explore food access issues, ways to increase individual consumption of fruits and vegetables, and general interest in the local food system, the survey results were reviewed in summary for the whole survey population and also by rates of fruit and vegetable consumption. Differences across rates of fruit and vegetable consumption are called out separately, where they exist.

Survey Results and Discussion
Who Took the Survey?
In total, 706 surveys were completed- two in Spanish and forty in English on paper, and 636 in English on the Internet. Of completed surveys, 700 were kept for analysis. This represents 6.9% of the total county households. As with most surveys, a majority of respondents was from middle to upper income brackets; reported middle to upper educational level attainment; and, were female (typically head of household affairs). Since survey outreach efforts were focused in Steamboat Springs, the majority of respondents was from Steamboat Springs. Full demographic survey results are available in Appendix M, select demographic survey data are compared to 2010 American Community Survey data in Table 711. A full demographic profile based on Census data is available in Appendix C.
Table 7: Select Survey Demographic Data Compared to Census Data\textsuperscript{14}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zip Code, Area of Residence</th>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Census/ACS Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Steamboat Springs</td>
<td>70.8%</td>
<td>52.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hayden</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oak Creak</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Routt</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yampa</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stagecoach</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>34.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*answered question 699*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household Income</th>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Census/ACS Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than $10,000</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$10,000-$14,999</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$15,000-$24,999</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$25,000-$34,999</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$35,000-$49,999</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50,000-$74,999</td>
<td>25.1%</td>
<td>23.9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$75,000-$99,999</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100,000-$149,999</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$150,000-$199,999</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$200,000 or more</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choose not to respond</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*answered question 673*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Census/ACS Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>94.4%</td>
<td>96.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black, African American</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino/Spanish Origin</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian or Alaska Native</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choose not to respond</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*answered question 639*

\textsuperscript{14}The survey results shown in this table and presented in Appendix K are raw results that reflect the full response pool of 699 people, as provided by SurveyMonkey. It does not include the additional 7 surveys entered manually. The results highlighted in the summaries throughout this report reflect the sorted and reviewed survey responses, where the total pool includes 700 community residents and “other” statements have been sorted back into answer categories, when appropriate. Because of this, some presented results may vary from results shown in Appendix K.
Educational Attainment Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Census/ACS Report</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than high school graduate</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school graduate/GED</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>20.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college, no degree</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate’s degree</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>42.8%</td>
<td>31.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate or professional degree</td>
<td>28.5%</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*answered question* 673

Summary of Key Survey Results

Rates of consumption of fruits and vegetables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Servings/day</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 or more</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Primary sources of general food items

1. Grocery Stores
2. Natural Food Stores
3. Wholesale Stores

Primary sources of fruits and vegetables

1. Grocery Stores
2. Direct From Grower
3. Natural Food Stores

Desired primary sources of fruits and vegetables

1. Direct From Grower
2. Grocery Stores
3. Natural Food Stores

Primary barriers to getting fruits and vegetables

1. None
2. Prices
3. Distance to Stores

---

15 Servings were defined as ½ cup, per 2010 USDA guidelines. Several examples of a serving were provided. Current recommendations suggest nine servings of fruits and vegetables a day.
Primary barriers to consuming fruits and vegetables

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Amount of time available to prepare them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Tastes and preferences of household members</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Strategies to make consuming fruits and vegetables easier

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>More direct from grower outlets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Less expensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Better selection of fruits and vegetables at grocery stores</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Strategies to make consuming LOCAL fruits and vegetables easier

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Sold at grocery stores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>More affordable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>More direct from grocers outlets</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most important factors for selecting fruits and vegetables

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Freshness and quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Prices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Health and nutrition</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fruit and Vegetable Consumption Rates
As shown above, Routt County residents are falling well below the current dietary recommendations for fruit and vegetable consumption. Current recommendations are nine servings a day (with a serving size defined as ½ cup), while only 15% of survey respondents come close, at 6 or more a day. Almost half of respondents (48%) report eating 3 or fewer a day – the equivalent of a large apple and a small carrot stick or less.

Where Food is Obtained
As with most communities, the majority of respondents use grocery retail outlets as primary sources of fruits and vegetables and other foods. Somewhat unique to Routt County is a deviation from the typical secondary source of food purchases. When respondents are sorted by fruit and vegetable consumption rates, households with really low consumption rates (two or less servings per day) rely on wholesale grocery outlets or restaurants as their secondary source of food items and make up 21% of the survey sample. In contrast, households with relatively higher rates of fruit and vegetable consumption (three or more servings per day) rely on natural grocery outlets and direct from producer outlets as their secondary source and make up 79% of the sample. Similarly, when asked where they would like to get more fruits and vegetables, the former indicated a preference for the grocery store, while the latter group indicated a preference for direct-from-producer outlets.

Transportation to Getting Food
As expected, car use is the dominant form of transportation, with 94% of households reporting driving as a primary mode of transportation. A significant percentage of households -- 41% -- did also report using a bicycle as a secondary form of transportation.
Half of survey respondents live within three miles of their primary grocery outlet, with 27% of respondents living outside of the USDA’s ten-mile standard for rural food access.

Barriers that Affect Healthy Food Access and Consumption
As listed in survey summary results, above, the #1 response concerning barriers to both accessing and consuming fruits and vegetables was “not applicable, no barriers”. Forty-two percent (42%) of respondents reported no barriers to accessing fruits and vegetables and 62% report no barriers to consuming them.

This coincides with reported rates of food security as well – in general, survey respondents report very low levels household food insecurity, though this was expected given demographics of the survey sample. Even so, it is still critical to examine differences in reported barriers across income levels. When barriers were examined for those reporting incomes of under $50,000 (168 respondents) versus over ($444), no statistically significant differences were seen. Barriers are consistent across incomes.

For those who did report barriers to access and consumption, the most common barriers reported were food prices (29%, consistent across reported incomes) for access, and time available to prepare foods (16%) for consuming fruits and vegetables. Figures 13 and 14, below, show results of all reported barriers as a function of fruit and vegetable consumption rates.

Figure 13 shows a breakdown of barriers to consuming fruits and vegetables by servings consumed per day as a function of percent of sample size. This figure shows that barriers do not vary significantly across consumption rates. The most significant differences come from those who report no fruit and vegetable consumption, as they report slightly elevated barriers regarding time to prepare foods and tastes and preferences of household members.

Similarly, Figure 14 shows a breakdown of barriers to accessing (or getting) fruits and vegetables. Barriers such as price and time remain semi-constant across rates of consumption. Again, the biggest differences are seen from those who report no fruit and vegetable consumption, as they report slightly elevated barriers regarding time available and store hours.
Figure 13: % of Individuals Experiencing a Barrier to Consuming Fruits and Vegetables versus Fruit and Vegetable Consumption

- Not applicable- I do not find it challenging to eat fruits and vegetables
- Allergies or food restrictions
- Available kitchen
- Available cooking utensils and equipment
- Tastes and preferences of household members
- Knowledge of how to prepare and cook meals with fruits and vegetables
- Amount of time available to prepare them
- Physical disabilities
What Opportunities Exist for Residents to Access Fruits and Vegetables and Increase Consumption?

When asked what would make it easier to consume fruits and vegetables, respondents indicated less expensive (37%), more direct-from-producer market outlets (16%), and better selection (15%) as primary means. This coincides with other survey questions, which indicate that the most important factors considered when selecting fruits and vegetables were freshness/quality (46%), prices (18%), and organic production practices (14%). Also, as shown below, locally grown/made food items were valued higher than organic grown/made items. Collectively, the survey data indicates that consumer demand for quality, fresh, produce is going unmet, and additional direct market outlets and higher quality produce at grocery stores may help increase consumption.

Are Routt County Residents Interested in Local Foods?

When asked to rank price, organically grown, and locally grown in order of importance, survey respondents showed a clear preference for locally grown produce over organic produce, after first considering price. This interest in the local food system shows up in other questions, especially ones about shopping preferences:

- Ninety-five percent (95%) of the survey sample indicated that locally grown/made items are important to them.
Survey respondents consider “local” items to be made or grown within Colorado (67%) or within Routt County (26%).

44% of respondents indicate that they are willing to pay more for Colorado grown items and 40% said they would consider it.

Despite a willingness to pay more for Colorado-grown produce, most survey respondents said they would eat more local produce if it was more affordable or was available at grocery stores.

IV. Summary: Understanding the Food Environment, Policies, and Programs that Affect Healthy Food Access

A. Economic Access – Are Healthy Foods Available and Affordable?
Answer: yes and no – healthy foods are available, but not affordable for all residents.

Although a standard variety of healthy foods are available in most food outlets in Routt County (as discussed under physical and nutritional access), the prices of these foods and an inability for food assistance programs to reach or cover all those who are food insecure significantly impair some populations’ economic access to a healthy diet.

Across community listening efforts, high prices of food and affordability of food were listed as primary barriers to healthy food access, across all income levels. Although Routt County poverty rates and food insecurity rates are lower than state averages, the cost of food is significantly higher than state and national averages (see Chapter II-Section C, Figures 7 and 8). Food prices even vary widely across the county, where more rural residents pay significantly more for food (see Chapter III-Section B, Table 6).

The high cost of food could create hardship for households that would normally be considered food secure based on income and are ineligible for federal food assistance programs. These households fall through the cracks, so to speak, and may experience more elements of food insecurity than households with incomes below the federal poverty limit. Increasing dependence on food pantries, increasing enrollment for federal food assistance programs (see Chapter II-Section C, Figures 10, 11, and 12), and increasing food prices nationally indicate that prices and affordability of healthy food options will become a greater barrier to some populations in the Routt County community.

This problem may be particularly acute for children, as they make up a substantial part of the food insecure population. Other local data corroborates increasing challenges in meeting the needs of Routt County’s children, with increasing rates of overweight and obesity and rising numbers of Free and Reduced Price students.
B. Physical Access - Do Residents Have Access to Food Outlets?

Answer: Yes

Despite the potential challenges that exist in rural food environments (access to public transportation, long distances, etc.) residents report very low levels of challenge accessing food outlets. According to the USDA, no part of Routt County is considered a food desert and a very small percentage of the population has “low food access” to a grocery retailer. The consumer survey indicates that car ownership is higher than the national rural average and that very few consumers consider distance or access to transportation as a barrier, even when they do report other challenges in accessing fruits and vegetables (see Chapter III-Section C). Only one person indicated that better access to transportation would make it easier for him/her to consume more fruits and vegetables (see Appendix M). Therefore, it can be concluded that most residents of Routt County have physical access to appropriate food outlets and a healthy diet.

The community listening activities did reveal some disparities in convenient food access within Steamboat Springs. As indicated in Figures 5 and 6 (Chapter II-Section B), the major grocery retailers are clustered together, surrounded by Census Blocks with higher average incomes, leaving the route as one travels northwest along Highway 40 barren of healthy food options despite being closer to Census Blocks with relatively lower income groups. Furthermore, households relying on community food assistance through Lift-Up of Routt County food pantry, report difficult accessing assistance due to location, operations of operation, and access to transportation (see Chapter III-Section A).

The collective results of this community food assessment, however, suggest that physical access to food outlets is not an issue in Routt County or a significant barrier to making healthy food choices. What warrants further investigation, is the issue of too much access, particularly in Steamboat Springs, which is considered a “food swamp” of unhealthy choices. The effect this “swamp” has on residents and if/how it sways their choices towards more unhealthy options that replace fruits and vegetables could be assessed further.

C. Nutritional Access - Are Varied, Healthy Food Options Available?

Answer: yes and no – healthy options are available, but residents are unhappy with local selection and report low rates of fruit and vegetable consumption

It is impossible to evaluate on a case-by-case basis whether or not specific diet-accommodating foods are available to meet the demands of individual people. However, a noted desire for more quality and variety were common themes throughout this assessment. Despite this consumer feedback, the assessment of food availability and prices indicates that a standard variety of healthy foods are available at all the grocery outlets inventoried. Even the smaller grocers offer a greater selection of standard items than their national counterparts (see Chapter III-Section B, Table 5).

Although residents may not be satisfied with the quality of fruits and vegetables at their local grocery outlets, there are at least fruit and vegetables options available. However, fruit and vegetable consumption rates are still rather low in Routt County and may be
decreasing. Rising rates of obesity and particular of overweight rates in the County indicate a need for healthier eating overall. Residents may be able to get to a grocery store – but they are not choosing to buy produce once they get there.

Many participants indicated that a lack of quality or variety of produce prevents them from eating the healthy diets they desire. The general, prominent interest in the local food system suggests that consumers would also be interested in produce that varies according to seasonality (and could come from across the state, not just locally), instead of just a standard set of options (e.g., apples, oranges, carrots, potatoes, etc.) (see Chapter III-Section C). It important to note that resident’s levels of satisfaction may be based on the perception of what is fresh or high quality, and residents may also have the perception that local foods may be fresher. The assessment tools used reveal only this – residents’ perceptions – not true comparisons to freshness and quality that one may find in other parts of the state.

A large number of survey comments indicate that most available fresh produce is overripe, spoils quickly, and cannot be kept around the house for several days. These conditions may put additional pressure on busy households to visit the grocery store several times a week in order to maintain healthy, balanced diets. This may not be an option for more rural residents that may have to drive considerable distances to the closest grocery store. Second to making fruits and vegetables less expensive, survey respondents indicated that more direct-from-producer retail outlets and better selection/quality would make eating more fruits and vegetables easier (see Chapter III-Section C).

**D. Social and Cultural Access - Does Consumer Demand for Healthy Foods Exist and is it Being Met?**

*Answer: yes and no – local demand for fresh and local produce exists, but the demand is going unmet*

Even when a food environment is rich, robust, and affordable, people still might not make healthy food choices. Overall, the results of this community food assessment indicate that a fair amount of the population is interested in choosing more healthy foods from local sources more often and that this demand is largely unmet. Findings indicate that residents want their fruits and vegetables, they just want them differently than what is available.

Residents express a strong interest in direct-from-grower foods, and believe that this could be satisfied from Colorado products and products sold in area grocers, not necessarily through developing more local gardens or farms. The findings indicate that residents view “direct from grower” differ from other communities in Colorado, where supporting more very-local food production is seen as important. In Routt County, the interest seems more in having or identifying, Colorado-grown produce in existing stores or markets.

Additionally, this interest in the state and local food system (across all respondents) and a general willingness to consider paying more for local produce suggests that increasing access to local foods to meet consumer demand may also increase consumption of fruits
and vegetables. The strong interest in bringing in a Whole Foods indicates a local, cultural demand for a certain type of shopping experience.

The lack of local, seasonal outlets and fresh produce in grocery stores may prevent some from eating a diet they desire. For others, however, eating fruits and vegetables is not a priority, either due to their own tastes and preferences or due to other budget pressures (see Chapter III- Section C, Figures 13 and 14). Survey results reveal that those with very low fruit and vegetable consumption rates report slightly elevated challenges around time (lack of it), store hours, and tastes/preferences (see Chapter III- Section C, Figures 13 and 14). These barriers are, however, surmountable and can often be addressed through community-based nutrition education programs focusing on cooking and shopping skills.

E. Is Healthy Food Access an Issue in Routt County?
Answer: Yes, for some

The results for this assessment indicate that physical access (access to transportation, distance to grocery outlets, etc.) to fruit and vegetables is not an issue for most residents in Routt County. Instead, financial access should be considered as a primary factor affecting some Routt County residents’ ability to choose healthy food and this may become an increasing issue. Additional factors include a lack of quality or variety in available foods; lack of (or lack of awareness of) Colorado-grown produce; and barriers of time and taste/preferences to consume fruits and vegetables.

Assessment findings point to three primary areas for future exploration and work:
1. Increase awareness of the “hidden” food insecure population and issues of high food prices and work to eliminate food insecurity in the County through federal and community food assistance programs.
2. Support the increase of both the supply and the demand of fresh, high-quality produce across the County.
3. Enhance direct market sales of local and Colorado produce throughout the County through better labeling of food sources and the creation of new markets for Colorado produce at existing retailers.

Organizations wishing to increase access to and consumption of healthy foods in Routt County will have to think beyond typically urban intervention strategies (i.e. build another grocery store). Successful strategies will focus on characteristics that are unique to rural food environments and particularly characteristics that are unique to Routt County, such as a widespread interest in supporting the local economy and purchasing directly from local producers. This interest in local food systems and the local economy offers a means to co-market or co- coordinate healthy food access initiatives, including increasing support for local food production and procurement, increasing participation in federal food assistance programs (which brings more money into the local economy and provides qualifying families with additional financial resources) and food education courses.
F. Summary of Key Findings

In sum, the Northwest Colorado Food Coalition has agreed on the following key findings. These findings provide guidance for identifying policy and project recommendations, which are listed further below in Chapter V.

Key Finding #1
It is clear that physical access to healthy food in Routt County is sufficient. This finding is based on the availability of healthy fruit and vegetables at all area grocers and the results of surveys showing that most residents have access to a local grocery store and food pantry.

Key Finding #2
There is a community desire for affordable, local food.

Key Finding #3
A larger than expected percentage of residents (including children) are food insecure and a significant number of these residents do not qualify for income-based food assistance programs.

Key Finding #4
Meal and food costs are generally high in Routt County, though there is significant variability within the County on food costs at area grocers.

Key Finding #5
The average Body Mass Index (BMI) of children in Routt County is increasing. There is also a visible trend of increasingly higher percentages of overweight adults.

Key Finding #6
Rates for consumption of healthy food in Routt County fall significantly short of USDA recommendations. Common barriers to consumption of fruit and vegies are time, skill, and taste preferences.

Key Finding #7
While barriers to accessing fruits and vegetables in Routt County were relatively low, price and time were the most common access barriers across all rates of consumption.

Key Finding #8
Freshness and quality of produce is a concern voiced by many residents.

Key Finding #9
Community residents desire locally grown produce be available for purchase in the places they already shop (primarily their local grocers). Locally grown produce is defined, in this case, as produce grown in the state of Colorado.
V. Policy and Project Recommendations

In order to address the key findings summarized above, the Northwest Colorado Food Coalition recommends the following next steps and action items.

Recommendation Regarding Education & Outreach

Educate local policy makers, organizations, businesses, schools and the public about critical health and nutrition issues in Routt County. Primary issues include overweight and obesity trends; “hidden” food insecure populations, including high local food and meal costs; how to eat healthier to reach USDA Dietary Guidelines and more affordably; and, about local produce options.

Action Steps Could Include:

- Provide cooking classes/demonstrations (e.g. prepping vegies your family will eat; pack a healthy lunch; healthy eating on a budget)
- Support the USDA "Know your Farmer, Know your Food" effort in the County
- Presentations to local policy makers, organizations, businesses, schools and public
- Fruit/vegies offered at convenience stores/ fast food as part of a "complete" meal
- Develop educational plan for food insecure populations
- Continue with communication campaign including 5210

Recommendation Regarding Advocacy

Advocate for and support projects to: address barriers to access (price/time) fruits/vegies amongst food insecure; address barriers to consumption of fruits/vegies (time/skill/taste) with specific focus on family's eating behaviors; and, support local food production expansion.

Action Steps Could Include:

- Convene food assistance providers and food insecure to strategize on stronger coordination and overcoming barriers
- Utilize sponsors and participants of Bridges Out of Poverty to identify strategies for improving nutritional status of the underserved.
- Promote nutritional standard tools with food insecure populations
- Work with Markets Division of the Colorado Department of Agriculture to develop locally-relevant marketing strategies
- Develop a tool for producers to understand rules for selling products in various venues
- Partner with other organizations to host a Bringing Local Foods to Market workshop
- Continue to support Yampa Valley Coop
- Continue to support greenhouse projects (schools/community)
- Continue to offer Weigh and Win
- Continue to offer programming at the 4 County elementary schools

Recommendation Regarding Policy

Assist community groups to develop guidelines/policies for healthy eating.

Action Steps Could Include:

- Develop general guidelines
VI. Appendices

A. Organizations, Staff, and Supporters
B. 5210 Findings
C. Socioeconomic Profiles
D. Agriculture Profile
E. Income Eligibility Guidelines
F. Routt County School Districts Free and Reduced Price Meal Data
G. Food Security Profiles for Eagle and Summit Counties
H. Definitions of Food Retail Outlets
I. Childhood Overweight and Obesity Rates in School Districts
J. Community Listening Surveys
K. Thrifty Meal Plan Food Items and Average County Costs
L. County Wide Consumer Survey Dissemination Plan
M. County Wide Consumer Survey and Raw Results
N. Bibliography