

What is a Food Desert? How can I get more involved in growing my own food?

A food desert is an area that has limited access to healthy nutritious food, often in low-income neighborhoods. For an area to be considered a food desert thirty-three percent of the USDA's census tract's population must live more than one mile from a supermarket or ten miles for rural areas to be considered a food desert. Many people often depend on public transportation and may only have a convenience store. These small stores rarely offer the healthy food options families need.

The USDA Economic Research Service website has a food desert locator where you can see if the area where you live is considered to be a food desert. The tri-county area has multiple municipalities that are considered to be food deserts in the North Country.

If you have limited access to agriculture but want to be more involved, here are a few things you can consider doing. Go to your local Cornell Cooperative Extension; they have resources that can direct you to different agricultural practices that you can do on a small scale. For example, the Northeast Beginning Farmers Project Cornell Small Farms Program has a host of online workshops and classes for people considering an agricultural business – visit <http://nebeginningfarmers.org>.

If you don't have access to a green space but just want to grow a little food, make a window garden as simple as a five-gallon bucket, potting soil, a source of light in addition to the sun, water, and some TLC. If you are in school ask your principal or science/biology teacher if you can join a garden or agriculture club, 4-H, or FFA (Future Farmers of America). Attend a local government meeting and bring community members to show support for developing a communal garden in your town or village. To check out the online food desert map go to <http://americannutritionassociation.org/newsletter/usda-defines-food-deserts> or <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data/fooddesert/>. For more information contact Kaitlyn Lawrence at Cornell Cooperative Extension of Jefferson County at 315-788-8450 or kml264@cornell.edu.

By Kaitlyn Lawrence, Local Foods Educator, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Jefferson County

December 3, 2016