

EQUITY IN THE FOOD SYSTEM IN SHAWNEE COUNTY



Equity is defined as fairness or justice in the way people are treated. Equity is achieved when all members of a community have opportunity to achieve their highest potential. Inequities are created when barriers prevent individuals or communities from achieving their full potential.

Inequities can be identified in the food system, many of which may contribute to disparities in health outcomes. Aspects of the food system where equity issues are frequently identified include:

Farming and Food Production

- Access to land, capital and financing, especially for young or minority farmers
- Access to water rights
- Farmworker compensation and working conditions, particularly for field hands and immigrant workers

Food System Infrastructure (processing, manufacturing, distribution)

- Hazardous conditions in meat processing facilities, often employing immigrant or minority workers

Food Retail

- Low wages in retail grocery stores
- Low wages in food and beverage operations

Consumer Access to Healthy Food Options

- Underserved locations, food deserts – in urban areas, usually low-income areas. Rural residents may also have challenges accessing healthy food options
- Food pricing differentials, higher prices often in underserved communities
- Food insecurity– rates of food insecurity are markedly higher for minority households, single parent households, disabled individuals.

More than 27,000 Shawnee County residents are struggling to get enough food

Women account for only 12 percent of principal farm operators in Shawnee County

Facts & Trends

- 30,834 people reside in census tracts in Shawnee County that are considered “food deserts”
- In 2014, approximately 15 percent of Shawnee County residents (27,220 individuals) were food-insecure. More than one in five children (22.6 percent, or 9,900 children) in Shawnee County lived in households which were food-insecure.
- 806 principal farm operators in Shawnee County self-identified as White; only 12 (1.5%) identified themselves as Black, and 21 (2.6%) identified themselves as Hispanic or Latino. None self-identified as Asian or American Indian/ Alaskan Native.
- The average annual pay for Shawnee County residents working in Food Service or Drinking Establishments was \$13,973 compared to \$41,617 for all industries.
- 78.7 percent of USD 501 students were eligible for free or reduced-price school meals in the 2016-2017 school year, compared to 48.6 percent of all Kansas K-12 students during the same timeframe.

Strengths

- Farmers Markets and Double Up Food Bucks
- Mobile Food Pantry
- Community Gardens
- Senior Farmers Market
- Nutrition Program

Challenges

- Access to land and financing for female and minority farmers
- Affordability of healthy food
- Access to healthy food and food deserts
- Low wages in many food-sector jobs
- Hazardous working conditions in some food production jobs

Policy Needs

- A process to review the impact on health and equity for all local and state policies before they are passed
- Establishment of a Food and Farm Council
- Zoning, tax, and incentives for food retail and processing
- Comprehensive review of planning, licensing and zoning to ensure inclusivity of health, equity, hunger and agriculture
- Improved transportation infrastructure to food access points (bus, bike, and sidewalks)
- Remove State sales tax on food
- Investment in a Community Health Planner that leads food system planning

Community Needs

- Private sector buy-in for healthy guidelines and farm-to-fork food purchasing as well as food waste reduction and donation practices
- A local-minded approach to development
- A system-wide approach to healthy food
- Strategic investment in areas of greatest need to improve equity in the food system
- Support for young people, women, and minority farmers to buy and operate farms and ranches
- More robust, safe, and convenient transportation options to food retail outlets, food pantries, and employment opportunities