



An Issue Guide for

Feeding Florida: How do we ensure Floridian's have the food they need for healthy, productive lives?



Introduction

The nation's food system touches every aspect of our lives, offering both benefits and challenges. On the positive side, our farms, ranches, and fisheries produce an abundance of food—more than enough to feed the entire population. Experts often praise the safety of our food supply, and most people have access to a wide variety of fresh produce and groceries year-round, often just a short distance from home. Yet, despite this abundance, many families still face food insecurity.

Children arrive at school hungry, and individuals on fixed incomes are forced to choose between buying food and meeting other basic needs. Beyond simply having enough to eat, we must ensure that food is nutritious, culturally meaningful, and accessible through available transportation. People need the knowledge, skills, and time to prepare healthy meals, and we all depend on a food system that is both responsible and sustainable for future generations.

FOOD ACCESS FACTS



The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) estimates that by the year 2050, the world will need 70% to 100% more food because of population growth and higher incomes¹.



Not having enough food can lead to serious health problems like diabetes, high blood pressure, and heart disease.



In 2023, about 13.5% of households in the United States said they didn't always have enough food². This is called food insecurity, which means a family doesn't have enough food because they don't have enough money or resources. Things like poverty, rising prices, and lack of education can make food insecurity worse.



Another reason people may not have access to healthy food is because they live in food deserts. The USDA defines food deserts as low-income areas where at least one-third of the people live more than a mile away from a grocery store³.

¹United States Department of Agriculture. N.D. Retrieved August 13, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/bdfzd42x>.

²U.S.D.A. Economic Research Service. N.D. Retrieved August 13, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/2t5fxsjz>.

³U.S.D.A. Economic Research Service. N.D. Retrieved August 13, 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/rwb43b6z>

WHAT IS THE FOOD SYSTEM?

The food system encompasses all the activities associated with producing, distributing, selling, and consuming food, including the actors—individuals, businesses, and organizations—doing those activities; the resources those activities use; the policies and other factors that influence those activities; the outcomes and impacts of those activities; and the complex relationships and interactions between the components in the system.

OVERARCHING ELEMENTS: FOOD POLICIES, CULTURE, ENVIRONMENT & CLIMATE

1. FOOD PRODUCTION

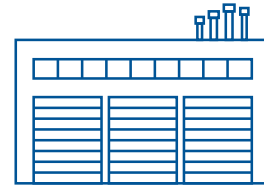


- Farm inputs
- Farms
- Farm workers



2. FOOD SUPPLY CHAINS

- Transportation
- Processing & packaging
- Warehouses & storage



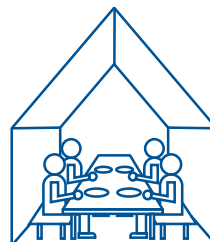
3. COMMUNITY FOOD ENVIRONMENTS

- Retail sales & marketing
- Farmers markets
- Restaurants



4. INDIVIDUALS & COMMUNITIES

- Community resources
- Individual resources
- Consumer behavior
- Nutrition awareness
- Food purchasing & cooking



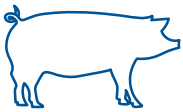
5. NUTRITION & DIET-RELATED HEALTH STATUS

- Food security
- Hunger & malnutrition
- Weight status
- Diet-related disease



6. FOOD WASTE & LOSS

- Supply chain losses
- Food spoilage
- Composting



Option 1: Improve Access to Nutritious Food

Despite our nation's abundance of food, some people still don't have enough to eat, which undermines their health, productivity, and overall well-being. We need a food system that ensures everyone has a stable source of affordable, nutritious food. We must strengthen our school nutrition programs and food assistance for low-income families, as well as improve access to fresh food in rural and low-income communities.



Examples of what might be done	Some trade-offs and consequences to consider
<p>1. Expand funding, visibility, and availability of food assistance and nutrition support programs.</p>	<p>Food assistance programs meet urgent needs but don't solve the underlying issue—insufficient income to afford enough food.</p>
<p>2. Start a local group to share ideas and resources about growing food—like community gardens and home gardens. Change HOA rules so people in planned neighborhoods can grow their own food too.</p>	<p>Individuals may not have the time, resources, or desire to grow their own food.</p>
<p>3. Team up with the school district's food director and local groups to make school meals healthier, use local food, and serve meals kids will actually eat.</p>	<p>National programs like school lunches often use big farms to save money, instead of buying food from local farmers.</p>
<p>4. Find new ways to bring food into neighborhoods, like starting small local markets or using carpools to help people get to grocery stores regularly.</p>	<p>Some programs cost a lot and might not work well unless the community has a leader to support them and the food matches the culture and tastes of the people.</p>
<p>Additional actions?</p>	

Option 2: Learn to Make Better Food Choices



Some of the old traditions and ideas that helped people eat healthier have been forgotten. To make good choices about what we eat, we need to learn more about our food—like what's in it, how it's made, and where it comes from. Instead of letting ads tell us what to eat, we should think about what's really important: staying

healthy, enjoying our food, and keeping the traditions that matter to us.

Examples of what might be done

1. Help families get good, easy-to-understand information about food by sharing it in different languages and ways, like videos, pictures, and stories that match their culture.
2. Teach people how the food they eat can affect their body and mind by improving nutrition lessons in schools and helping communities learn more about healthy eating.
3. Food brings people together, so it's important to make sure traditional foods are easy to find and reflect what communities enjoy.
4. Conduct a community food assessment to learn what your community is eating and growing, and where there are knowledge gaps.

Additional actions?

Some trade-offs and consequences to consider

Tailoring the food system to individual needs and customs may be a luxury we can't afford with a growing world population and problems that threaten food production.

Some companies promote unhealthy foods or ones that harm the environment, and it's tough for communities to speak up when those companies also provide local jobs.

The foods we enjoy aren't always healthy, and poor eating habits can lead to health problems that raise medical costs for everyone.

It may be time and resource-consuming.

Option 3: Be Good Stewards of the Food System

We need to protect our food for the future. That means taking care of the land, using smart ways to grow food, wasting less, and supporting the people who help bring food from farms to tables.



Examples of what might be done

1. Keep food out of landfills at every step along the chain—from farm to table—by collecting and redistributing surplus foods, composting, creating food sharing programs.

2. Strengthen the food-system workforce by supporting food worker advocacy groups and addressing farm labor wages and safety.

3. Develop a local food policy council to create localized food policies and sharing of resources and ideas.

4. Engage policymakers to enhance their understanding and support of urban farming as a valuable means of producing and selling food within the broader food system.

Additional actions?

Some trade-offs and consequences to consider

Maintaining quality and safety is essential, additionally people prefer their food to be “perfect.”

Might increase food costs.

Government institutions might be reluctant to engage with non-government organizations.

Increasing land use for urban agriculture might reduce tax revenue and acreage that can be used for housing, green spaces, or business.

CIVIC is an Extension program of Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University and the University of Florida IFAS Extension. Through deliberative discussions and town hall meetings, CIVIC gives people useful information and encourages them to talk about tough issues that affect their community. Learn more at: <https://programs.ifas.ufl.edu/civic/>

About This Issue Guide

This guide was adapted from the National Issues Forum Institute's Land of Plenty: How Should We Ensure that People Have the Food They Need? <https://nifi.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/NIF-Land-of-Plenty.pdf>. The purpose of this document is to help us talk productively about how to ensure everyone has access to safe, nutritious food.

Deliberative Dialogue

It's not a debate. It's not even about reaching agreement. It's about looking for a shared direction and seeking common ground for action by carefully listening to one another while sharing our thoughts and what we care about.

What can we expect from a deliberative forum?	What should we not expect?
A civic and respectful atmosphere	Minds to be changed
Listening to understand diverse ideas and differences of opinion	Consensus
Welcoming atmosphere for participation	An action plan
Exploring the nuances and ambiguities of the issue	Quick solution
Deepened understanding	
Realizing areas of agreement and disagreement	
Identifying possible next steps for decision makers and/or citizens	
Future dialogue considerations	

PRE-Forum Survey



POST-Forum Survey



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