

The U.S. Food Environment Atlas

Food environment factors—such as store/restaurant proximity, food prices, food and nutrition assistance programs, and community characteristics—interact to influence food choices and diet quality. Research is beginning to document the complexity of these interactions, but more is needed to identify causal relationships and effective policy interventions.

Objectives of the Atlas:

- To assemble statistics on food environment indicators to stimulate research on the determinants of food choices and diet quality
- To provide a spatial overview of a community's ability to access healthy food and its success in doing so

What information is included in the Atlas?

The Atlas assembles statistics on three broad categories of food environment factors:

- Food Choices—Indicators of the community's access to and acquisition of healthy, affordable food, such as: access and proximity to a grocery store; number of foodstores and restaurants; expenditures on fast foods; food and nutrition assistance program participation; quantities of foods eaten; food prices; food taxes; and availability of local foods
- Health and Well-Being—Indicators of the community's success in maintaining healthy diets, such as: food insecurity; diabetes and obesity rates; and physical activity levels
- Community Characteristics—Indicators of community characteristics that might influence the food environment, such as: demographic composition; income and poverty; population loss; metro-nonmetro status; natural amenities; and recreation and fitness centers

The Atlas currently includes 90 indicators of the food environment. The year and geographic level of the indicators vary to better accommodate data from a variety of sources. Some data are from the last Census of Population in 2000 while others are as recent as 2009. Some are at the county level while others are at the State or regional level. The most recent county-level data are used whenever possible.

See [Documentation](#) for complete list of indicators, definitions and data sources.

What can users do with the Atlas?

- Create maps showing the variation in a single indicator across the U.S.; for example, variation in the prevalence of obesity or access to grocery stores across U.S. counties
- View all of the county-level indicators for a selected county
- Use the advanced query tool to identify counties sharing the same degree of multiple indicators; for example, counties with both high poverty and high obesity rates