



Fresh Ideas for Healthy Food

Good Nutrition on Colorado's Menu

MARCH 2016

It's easier to buy burgers and fries than fruits and vegetables in many Colorado communities. Residents of low-income neighborhoods and rural areas, in particular, often don't have access to affordable, nutritious food. Supermarkets may be too far away, especially for people without a car, and neighborhood corner stores may not have many healthy items on their shelves.

It's well documented that a poor diet can lead to obesity and other health problems. That's one reason governments, nonprofit groups, volunteers and community residents are taking steps to make healthy food options part of the built environment. They are recruiting grocers, supporting farmers' markets and encouraging residents to grow their own food in community and backyard gardens.

One of seven Coloradans struggles with food insecurity, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) reports.

The state's "food deserts" — defined as areas where urban residents are more than one mile from a supermarket and rural residents more than 10 miles — are primarily concentrated on the Eastern Plains, the San Luis Valley and U.S. Census tracts bordering western and eastern Denver County, according to the USDA.

Areas in Colorado with the highest concentration of food deserts have an average obesity rate of almost 29.5 percent. That's 8.2 percentage points higher than the statewide rate of 21.3 percent.



Farmers' markets offer a way to introduce fresh food into communities that lack access to grocery stores.

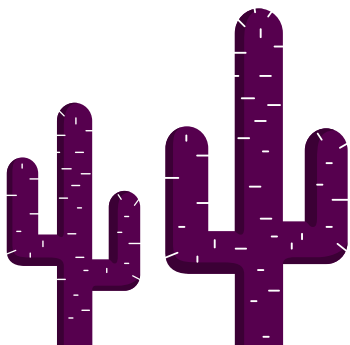
Colorado's population is projected to increase by almost 50 percent by 2040, growing from 5.4 million in 2015 to almost 8 million. The number of Denver residents is expected to climb by more than 30 percent, from about 650,000 to almost 870,000 by then. Providing fresh, healthy options to all those people will be a challenge.

759,000 Coloradans

lived in a food desert in 2010

This included 80,000 children

Sources: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Colorado Children's Campaign



SPOTLIGHT
COMMUNITY

Westwood: A Food Desert in Bloom

Leaders of a Denver nonprofit started their search for a low-income neighborhood in need of a health overhaul by counting trees.

The two University of Denver graduates who founded the nonprofit, Re:Vision, were inspired by a study indicating a relationship between a sparse tree canopy and low-income neighborhoods. So they pulled up satellite images of Denver and noticed that Westwood stood out.

Westwood fit the profile of a community in need. The neighborhood, bounded by four major roads in west Denver, has a large immigrant population where roughly one of three residents live in poverty and the obesity rate is higher than the state average.

Westwood hasn't had a grocery store since the 1990s, one reason why it is considered a food desert.

But Westwood is literally changing that from the ground up.

With help from Re:Vision, the community has spent the past six years developing a network of 400 or so backyard gardens and more than a dozen promotoras — residents hired by Re:Vision to provide health screenings and education about urban agriculture and healthy living. The project is one of the largest urban farming programs led by a low-income community in the nation, according to Re:Vision.

Re:Vision received \$1.3 million from the Denver Office of Economic Development in 2014 to acquire a 1.7-acre former junkyard along Morrison Road that will be the site of the WestwoodHUB. It will include the Westwood Food Co-op, a 2,200-square-foot grocery store; a 3,000-square-foot greenhouse; a fitness center and outdoor recreation area; a kitchen available for public use; and even a place to cultivate nutritious edible insects such as crickets.

This year the project will focus on fundraising and converting buildings into the kitchen, community plaza, education center and greenhouse.

The co-op, scheduled to open sometime next year, is projected to create 30 local jobs, generate \$2.5 million



PHOTO BY RE:VISION

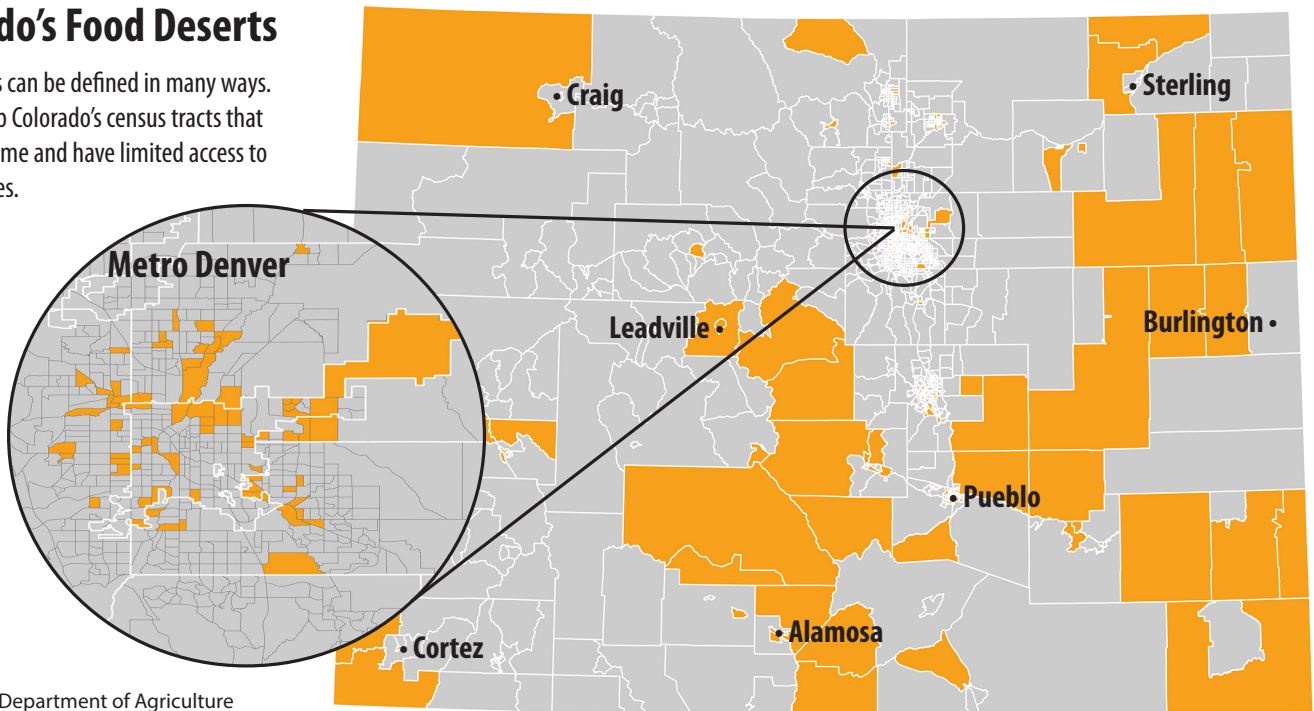
A former junkyard along Morrison Road is being transformed into WestwoodHUB, which will include a food co-op, a recreation center, a greenhouse and a kitchen open for public use. The southwest Denver neighborhood hasn't had a grocery store since the 1990s.

in annual revenue and increase access to healthy food for 20,000 residents. Residents can pay \$40 annually or \$200 for a lifetime membership. The perks? They'll receive an ownership share in the project, a dividend and discounts on fresh foods. So far the co-op has 225 members with a goal of 1,500 members by the time the grocery store opens.

Re:Vision co-founder Joseph Teipel said by promoting community leadership and demonstrating how people can create change for themselves, Westwood will fulfill Re:Vision's mission of building self-sustaining, resilient neighborhoods.

Colorado's Food Deserts

Food deserts can be defined in many ways. Here we map Colorado's census tracts that are low-income and have limited access to grocery stores.



Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture

Ongoing Efforts in Colorado and the U.S.

Several organizations are leading the charge for better nutrition. Among them:

The **Colorado Fresh Food Financing Fund (CO4F)**, funded by the Colorado Health Foundation and the Colorado Enterprise Fund, provides financing to help retailers offer nutritious options in underserved communities. CO4F was developed in response to *"Healthy Food for All: Encouraging Grocery Investment in Colorado,"* a report published in 2011 by the Denver Food Access Task Force, a group composed of leaders from the food industry, state and local governments, public health agencies and nonprofit organizations. The report highlighted policy recommendations to promote economic development and healthy food access for all.

The **Colorado Enterprise Fund**, established in 1976, uses federal Healthy Food Financing Initiative (HFFI) grant money to support local food production, small grocery stores and healthy food projects such as farmers' markets. HFFI was put forth by the Obama Administration in 2010 to increase food options in underserved communities.

The White House launched the **Local Foods, Local Places initiative** in 2014 to help communities integrate

locally sourced food into economic development projects. Six federal agencies are supporting 27 communities across the nation, including Denver and Greeley. **Denver** will focus on revitalizing the National Western Center to create a greener area with farmers' markets and outdoor space. **The University of Northern Colorado** in Greeley is partnering with the city and local businesses to promote sustainable, local food systems and address food deserts in the area. A more detailed plan will come this spring.

Other efforts to promote healthier eating include:

- **Urban Gardens.** Denver Urban Gardens, established in 1985, operates more than 145 community gardens, with 40 on school grounds.
- **Farmers' Markets.** More than 15 markets operate in the metro Denver area during the warmer months. You can find one in your community at www.ColoradoFarmers.org.
- **Healthy Corner Store Initiatives.** The Denver Healthy Corner Store Initiative (HCSI) provides technical assistance and funding to 13 stores to encourage owners to promote and expand their fresh food options. HCSI plans to aid 50 stores by the end of 2017.