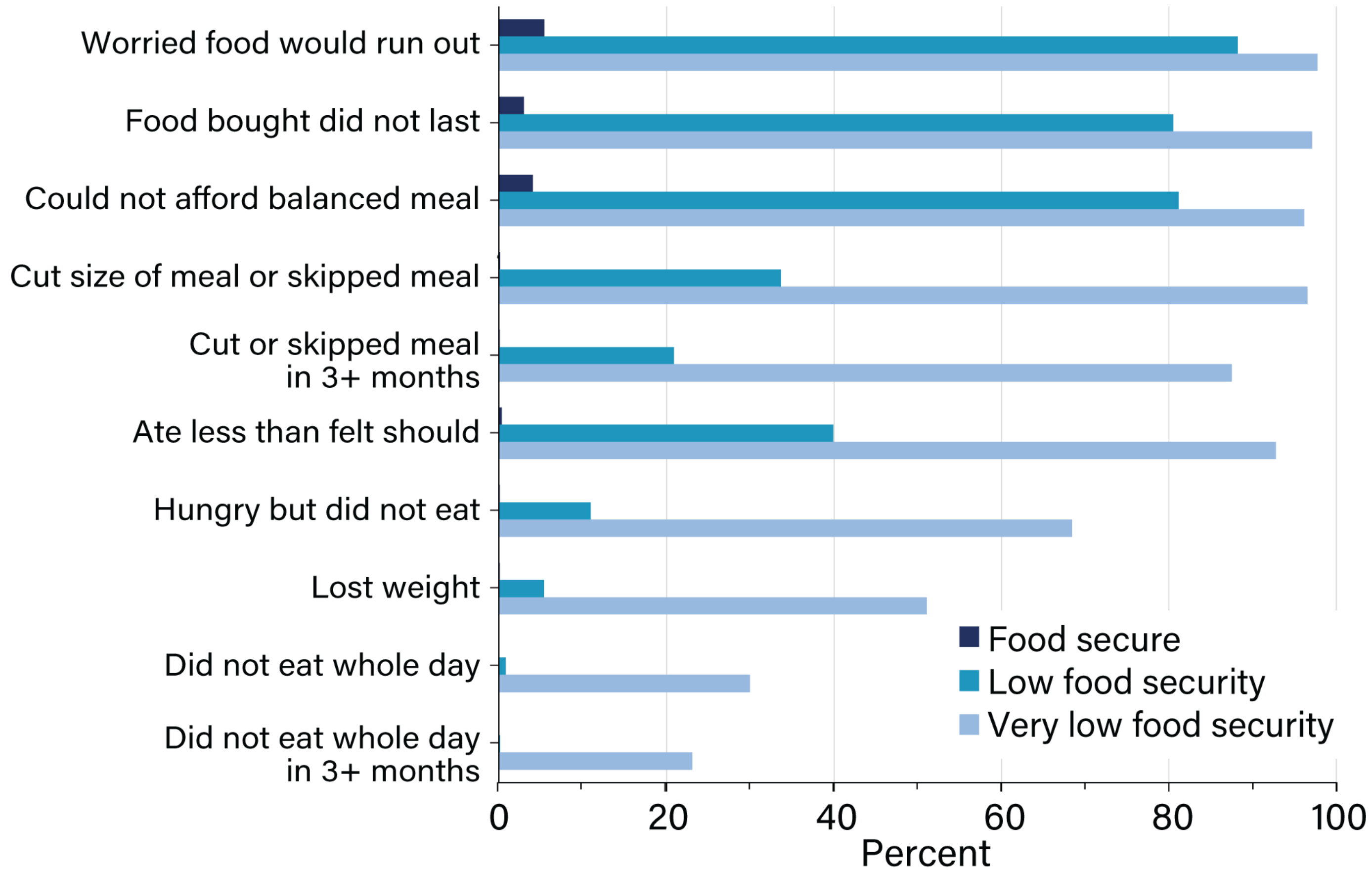
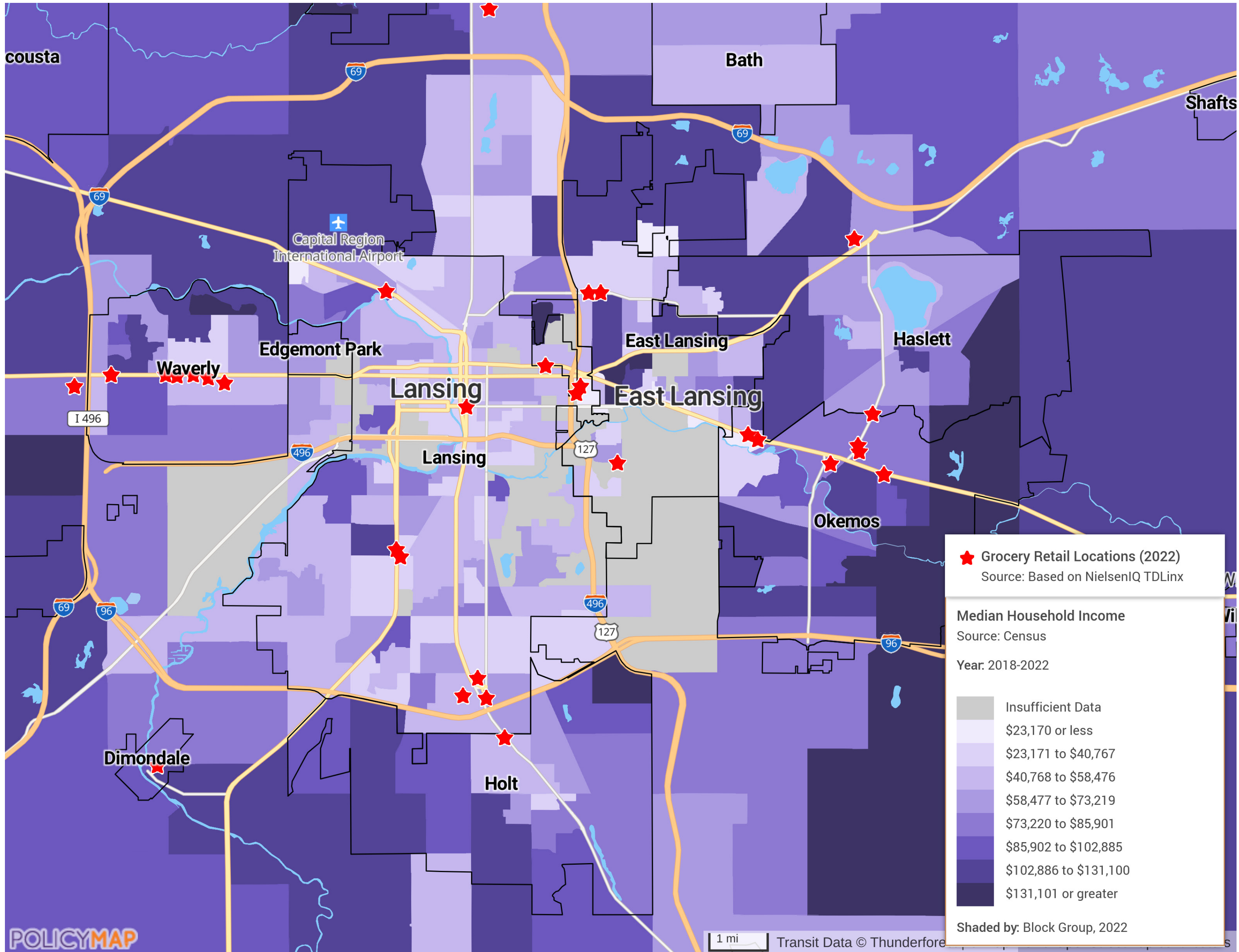


Percentage of U.S. households reporting indicators of food insecurity, by food security status, 2023



Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 2023 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement data.

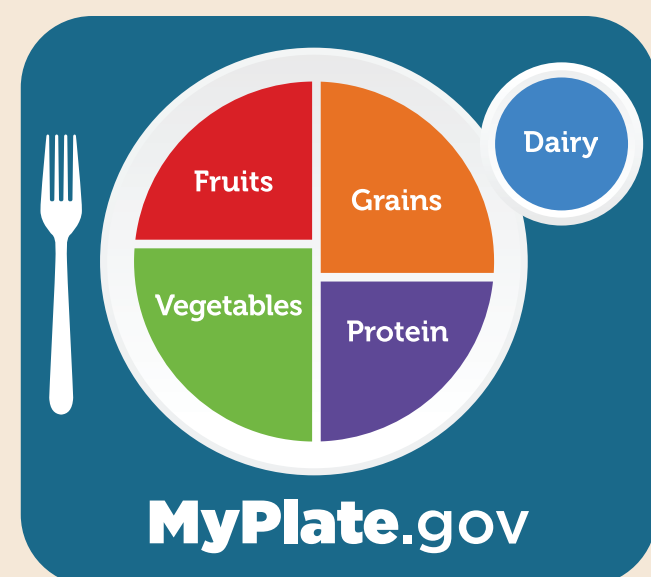


A **food desert** is an area, often in urban or rural settings, where residents have limited access to affordable and nutritious food. This lack of access can be due to the absence of grocery stores, farmers' markets, and healthy food providers within a convenient traveling distance. As a result, people living in food deserts often rely on convenience stores and fast food, which typically offer fewer healthy options.

Food scarcity refers to the lack of sufficient food resources to meet the nutritional needs of a population. This situation can arise due to various factors such as natural disasters, economic instability, conflict, and climate change. When food scarcity occurs, it can lead to hunger, malnutrition, and a host of related health and social issues. Addressing food scarcity involves improving food production, distribution, and access to ensure that everyone has enough to eat.

The food pyramid — introduced by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) in 1992 — once a staple of nutritional guidance, is now considered problematic. It oversimplifies dietary recommendations, suggesting that all fats are bad and all carbohydrates are good, which isn't accurate. This can lead to unhealthy eating habits, such as overconsumption of refined carbs and avoidance of healthy fats. Additionally, the pyramid doesn't account for the quality of foods within each category, failing to distinguish between whole grains and processed grains, or between lean proteins and high-fat meats.

Portion sizes for each food group fails to accurately depict portion sizes, leading to confusion about how much of each food group to eat. Its one-size-fits-all approach also ignores individual dietary needs and cultural differences. These shortcomings have led to the development of more nuanced and personalized dietary guidelines, like **MyPlate**, which offer clearer and more practical advice for healthy eating.



While well-meaning in their intentions, the U.S. government's food and nutrition policies have faced criticism for several reasons. One major issue is the misalignment between agricultural subsidies and nutritional guidelines. Subsidies often favor crops like corn and soy, which are used in processed foods, rather than fruits and vegetables that are essential for a healthy diet. Additionally, programs like SNAP, while crucial for reducing hunger, have been criticized for not sufficiently promoting healthy eating habits.

There are also concerns about the influence of food industry lobbying on dietary guidelines, which can lead to recommendations that do not fully align with the latest nutritional science. Moreover, efforts to integrate sustainability into dietary guidelines have faced significant resistance, hindering progress towards a more holistic approach to food policy. These factors contribute to a policy landscape that sometimes fails to effectively address both public health and environmental sustainability.





Climate change significantly impacts food access, creating a ripple effect that threatens global food security. Rising temperatures, unpredictable weather patterns, and increased frequency of extreme events like droughts and floods disrupt agricultural production. These changes can lead to reduced crop yields, affecting the availability and affordability of food. Small-scale farmers, particularly in developing regions, are hit hardest, as they often lack the resources to adapt to these challenges. Additionally, climate change can exacerbate existing inequalities, making it even more difficult for vulnerable populations to access nutritious food. As we face these growing challenges, it becomes crucial to develop resilient agricultural practices and policies that ensure everyone has access to healthy, sustainable food.

Food colonialism refers to the historical and ongoing practices where dominant cultures impose their food systems, agricultural practices, and dietary preferences on indigenous and local communities. This often results in the displacement of traditional foodways, loss of biodiversity, and economic dependency. Food colonialism can lead to the marginalization of local farmers and the erosion of cultural identities tied to traditional foods. Addressing food colonialism involves recognizing and valuing indigenous knowledge, promoting food sovereignty, and supporting local food systems that respect cultural diversity and environmental sustainability.

Food sovereignty is the right of people to define their own food systems. It emphasizes the importance of local control over food production, distribution, and consumption, ensuring that communities have the power to make decisions about their food and agriculture. This concept prioritizes sustainable practices, fair trade, and the preservation of traditional knowledge and cultural heritage. By promoting food sovereignty, communities can achieve greater food security, environmental sustainability, and social equity.

Sustainable agriculture

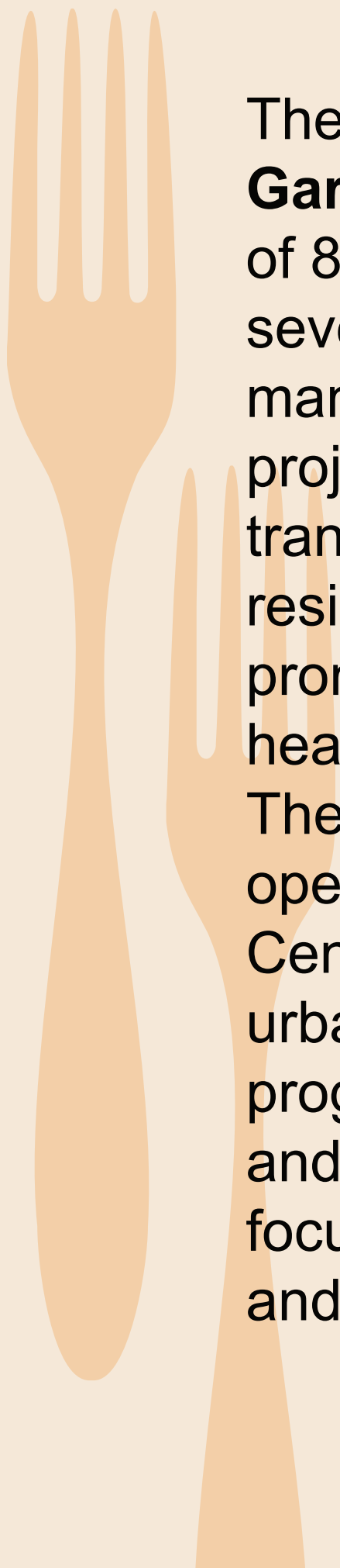
encompasses numerous practices with a goal of farming in a way that protects the environment, meets the current food needs of consumers, and protects resources for the future.

Sustainable agriculture attempts to balance the needs of the community with the needs of the farmers and producers to make the most out of non-renewable resources and improve the environmental quality and economic viability of farm operations. Consumers can support sustainable agriculture by choosing foods that are grown using environmentally friendly methods and supporting local farmers and growers.

Community

supported agriculture

connects consumers directly to farmers to support and share the benefits and risks of food production. It is a form of civic agriculture where food production is closely linked to a community's demands. In addition to providing a source of local food for consumers, it helps boost the local economy by creating jobs and community sustainability.



The **Greater Lansing Food Bank's Garden Project** supports a network of 85 community gardens across seven counties, including 17 directly managed gardens in Lansing. This project provides garden space, seeds, transplants, and education to help residents grow their own food, promoting community building, healthy eating, and self-sufficiency. The **Hunter Park GardenHouse**, operated by the Allen Neighborhood Center in Lansing is a year-round urban farm that offers educational programs, volunteer opportunities, and fresh produce to the community, focusing on sustainable agriculture and food access.

Gastronativism is an interesting concept that explores how food is used as an ideological tool to define and reinforce community boundaries. This term, coined by Fabio Parasecoli, a professor of Food Studies, refers to the way food can be employed to advance ideas about who belongs to a community and who does not. In an era of globalization and neoliberalism, many people seek to return to their culinary roots, embracing local ingredients and traditional dishes. However, this impulse can sometimes be co-opted by nationalist and xenophobic movements, using food to stoke resentment and exclusion. Gastronativism highlights the powerful emotions connected with eating and how these can be manipulated to serve political agendas. By understanding this phenomenon, we can better appreciate the complex interplay between food, identity, and politics in our globalized world.

Gastrodiplomacy, a fascinating blend of culinary and cultural diplomacy, uses food as a powerful tool to foster cross-cultural understanding and improve international relations. The concept is based on the idea that the easiest way to win hearts and minds is through the stomach. Countries like Thailand, South Korea, and Peru have launched successful gastrodiplomacy campaigns, promoting their national cuisines abroad to enhance their global image and attract tourism. For instance, Thailand's "Global Thai" program significantly increased the number of Thai restaurants worldwide, making Thai cuisine a beloved global favorite. By sharing their culinary heritage, nations can create positive associations, bridge cultural gaps, and even influence foreign policy. Gastrodiplomacy showcases the soft power of food, proving that a shared meal can be a step towards greater international harmony.