



WILLIAMSON COUNTY FOOD ACCESS COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Central Texas Food Bank (CTFB) conducted a Food Access Community Needs Assessment in Williamson County, TX, from February to September 2024. Here, we share the key learnings from the Williamson County community.



CTFB is the largest hunger-relief organization in Central Texas. For over 40 years, it has worked to help people experiencing food insecurity in 21 counties. CTFB believes that everyone in Central Texans should have access to nutritious food. This can be accomplished in two ways: by providing immediate access to nutritious food, and by providing the resources necessary for all Central Texans to access food on their own. Together with stakeholders and neighbors across Central Texas, we can build a better food system throughout our region — a system that works for everyone.

WHAT IS “FOOD INSECURITY” AND “NUTRITION INSECURITY”?

FOOD INSECURITY: Not always having enough food for everyone in a home to live a healthy, active life. It’s not the same as hunger, which is the feeling you get when your body needs food.

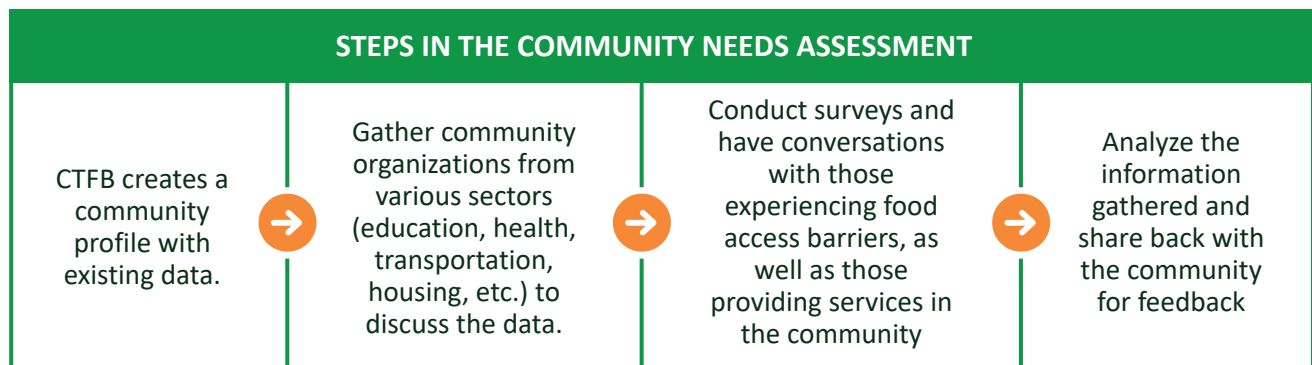
NUTRITION INSECURITY: Not having regular and fair access to healthy, safe, and affordable food that helps you stay well.

Situations of food or nutrition insecurity can be brief or last a long time.

WHAT IS A FOOD ACCESS COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT (CNA)?

WHAT: CTFB uses CNAs to learn about what food access looks like in the community — where it is hard to get food and what is working well. CNAs also share real stories from people, not just numbers, to help CTFB understand what’s really happening.

WHY: CNAs help CTFB and other partners decide: 1) what programs to support, 2) where to spend money and build partnerships to make the most long-term impact, and 3) opportunities to support changes in policies and systems.



DATA COLLECTION



Surveys:
312
respondents



Focus Groups:
41 participants
across 5 groups,
including a Spanish-
language session



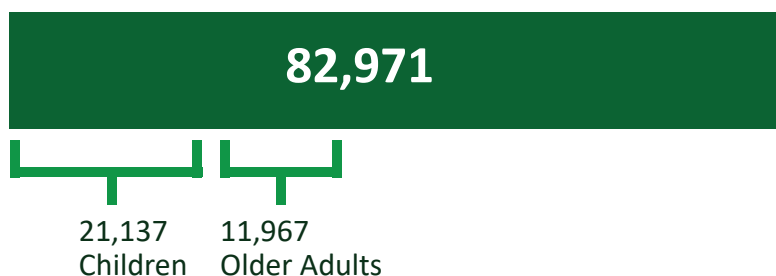
**Stakeholder
Interviews:**
34 partners
representing
10 sectors



**Community
Events:**
4 events with
71 stakeholders

LEARNINGS FROM COMMUNITY PROFILE ²

FOOD INSECURE POPULATION IN WILLIAMSON COUNTY, TEXAS



Almost 83,000, or 13.4% of residents, experience food insecurity in Williamson County. Of those, over 21,000 are children and almost 12,000 are older adults.

KEY FINDINGS FROM COMMUNITY PROFILE:

- **Fast Population Growth**
 - Williamson County is one of the fastest-growing counties in Texas. Over **90,000 new people** moved in between 2018 and 2023.
 - Many came from Austin and other nearby cities, looking for lower living costs.
- **Gaps in Income and Resources**
 - While the county as a whole appears wealthy, **not everyone shares in that wealth:**
 - Some neighborhoods spend far less on food and make far less money.
 - The wealthiest households earn **2.7x more** and spend **1.6x more** on food than the lowest-income areas.
- **Loss of Farm and Food Production**
 - Williamson County lost **35% of its farmland and ranches** in the last 20 years. Today, less than **0.3%** of that land grows fruits or vegetables.
 - **Most agricultural land is used for livestock.**
 - **Only 1 facility** processes meat; **none** process fruits or vegetables.
 - **Farmers markets and small producers face challenges** with rising land costs and lack of support.
- **Few Grocery Stores, Lots of Fast Food**
 - In many areas, especially rural towns, grocery stores are hard to reach or too expensive.
 - Convenience and fast-food stores outnumber grocery stores 8 to 1, which creates what's called a "food swamp."
 - In places like Taylor, Barlett, and Granger, there are **high food insecurity rates** but few places to get healthy food.
- **Transportation is a Major Barrier**
 - Many rural areas have **no public buses**. Some towns only offer limited on-demand rides, and Georgetown recently **discontinued its fixed bus route**.
 - **1 in 8 neighbors without enough food has no car.**
 - Even short grocery trips can take hours or cost more than some people make in a day
- **Health Challenges**
 - In areas with high food insecurity, more people report poor health. In Taylor and parts of rural Williamson County, rates of adults reporting **"fair" or "poor" health are 5–10% higher than national average of 14.5%** — meaning greater health concerns.
 - Neighbors with chronic illness, disabilities, or special diets often can't afford the food that fits their needs — especially if they don't qualify for help.

KEY FINDINGS FROM COMMUNITY VOICE

STRENGTHS



Williamson County has many strong local organizations, committed neighbors, and trusted community spaces like schools, libraries, and churches. Bright spots include mobile food programs, school meals, health clinics, farmers markets, and committed faith communities.

“They had the FARMacy [...] that was nice because we did get a lot of vegetables there.”

“The library, I believe, is one of the greatest resources out there [...] If the library can’t provide it itself, they always point you in the right direction.”

DRIVERS OF FOOD AND NUTRITION INSECURITY



- **Rising prices** for food, rent, healthcare, and transportation
- **Rapid growth and development**, pushing out longtime residents
- **COVID-19’s lasting impact** on income and stability
- **Gaps in public investment** — food insecurity is often invisible in wealthy areas

“[We need] some help, the low-income families, [to] survive in this increase... What happened to my little town?”

Food insecurity is especially felt in the **northern rural areas, Taylor, communities along the I-35 corridor, Black and Hispanic neighbors, single-parent households, older adults on fixed incomes, neighbors with disabilities and chronic health conditions, and migrant and refugee populations.**

- **2 in 5 neighbors experiencing food insecurity would be unable to afford an unexpected \$400 emergency.**

(FOOD) SYSTEM CHALLENGES



- **Small farms and ranches are disappearing.** 77% of local producers operate at a loss.
- **Few processing facilities.** No large-scale produce processing exists locally.
- **SNAP/WIC at markets is limited.** Not all farmers markets accept benefits.
- **Limited public investment.** Most solutions fall on nonprofits or volunteers.

“It really shrinks the pool of resources [...] It largely falls on the faith community and the nonprofit community.”

FOOD ENVIRONMENT CHALLENGES



Rising food prices and costs of living present significant challenges for neighbors. Neighbors shared that while they strongly prefer nutritious options, healthy food is often “out of reach” — too expensive or far away for their household. Instead, many supplement with cheaper, calorically-dense alternatives.

“When it comes to grocery stores in particular, the options aren't [there ...] We just have to go with what we've got.”

Grocery stores are especially sparse in rural areas, where neighbors either travel far or rely on dollar or convenience stores. The lack of public transportation makes it even harder — especially for people who don't have a car.

COMMUNITY RESPONSE



- Only 1 in 3 neighbors experiencing food insecurity report feeling confident about where to find help.

INDIVIDUAL RESPONSE



Neighbors are doing their best to get by. Some skip meals or rely on others. Many use creative strategies like:

- Sharing food with friends or family
- Growing their own food
- Couponing or buying in bulk
- Meal planning and freezing

“I'll only go to [the food pantry] like if I have to a lot of times. [...] I don't even want to have to come here. And so, it's a struggle for me to have to go, and asking for help.”

School meal programs are a crucial lifeline for many neighbors.

KEY TAKEAWAY: CYCLICAL STRESSORS

In Williamson County, food insecurity isn't just about money or groceries — it's a cycle of stress and gaps in the system.

- **Food insecurity isn't visible**, so it's difficult to get public investment.
- **Public investment is low**, so nonprofits do the heavy lifting.
- **Resources are limited**, so neighbors don't always know where to go.
- **When programs are under-used**, it reinforces the myth that food insecurity isn't a problem.

“People think we're fine here because they don't see the struggle.”

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTION



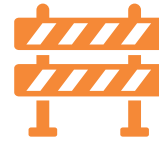
Make it Easier for People to Get Help:

Help neighbors learn where and how to get food support, including through community navigators, and multi-language resources.



Bring Healthy Food Closer to Home:

Support more grocery stores and farmers markets in areas that need them; improve food delivery options for older adults and those without transportation.



Address Gaps in Public Services:

Improve public transportation, housing, and healthcare access; offer more free or low-cost children and job training programs; build strong safety nets.



Support Programs that Let Neighbors Choose What Works for Them:

Offer food that fits people's culture and health needs, expand programs like produce prescriptions, nutrition classes, and home delivery, make sure programs protect people's dignity and choice.



Protect Farms and Ranches:

Preserve land for farming and ranching, help small growers stay in business and sell food locally, create more partnership between schools, hospitals, and local growers.



Raise Awareness:

Share real stories to show that food insecurity is a serious issue. Help decision-makers understand what neighbors are facing. Advocate for stronger support through programs like SNAP, WIC, and Medicaid.

CONCLUSION

Williamson County is growing fast — and so are the food access challenges. Many people are working hard to meet the need, but they can't do it alone.

By taking these steps together, Williamson County can build a future where everyone has access to healthy, affordable, and culturally meaningful food.



TO READ THE FULL REPORT

Visit: <https://www.centraltexasfoodbank.org/Wilco-CNA-Report>
or scan this QR code to download the full report in PDF.



SCAN QR CODE
TO DOWNLOAD
THE REPORT

RESOURCES IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Here are some places you can find resources in Williamson County (scan the QR codes with your phone or click on the link):



[www.centraltexasfoodbank.org
/find-food-now](http://www.centraltexasfoodbank.org/find-food-now)



www.findhelp.org/



[www.yourtexasbenefits.com
/Learn/Home](http://www.yourtexasbenefits.com/Learn/Home)

CONTACT US

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