

What Works for Georgia Families Living in Rural Communities to get Enough Nutritious and Affordable Food?

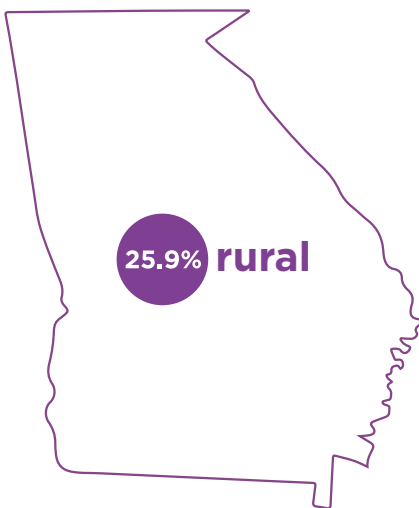
The **Gretchen Swanson Center for Nutrition (GSCN)** collaborated with **No Kid Hungry (NKH)** to lead a study in Arizona, Georgia, Kentucky, Michigan, and Texas. Local practitioners and families in rural communities were asked to identify and rank policy, system, and environment (PSE) strategies that ensure families living in rural communities get enough nutritious and affordable food.¹ PSE strategies are important to create healthier and more equitable communities. This state brief focuses on Georgia.

Hunger and Rurality in Georgia

1 in 9 people in Georgia face hunger²



2,777,922 people in Georgia live in a rural area³



What are PSE Strategies?

- P** = **Policy**
Change is at legislative and organizational levels and include laws, ordinances, regulations, and rules.
- S** = **System**
Shifts are made in the way problems are solved within organizations, institutions, or communities.
- E** = **Environment**
Change is made in economic, social, and physical environments.



¹ Rural health information hub. Policy, systems, and environmental change. Available at: <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/toolkits/health-promotion/2/strategies/policy-systems-environmental>.

² What hunger looks like in Georgia. Available at: <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/georgia>.

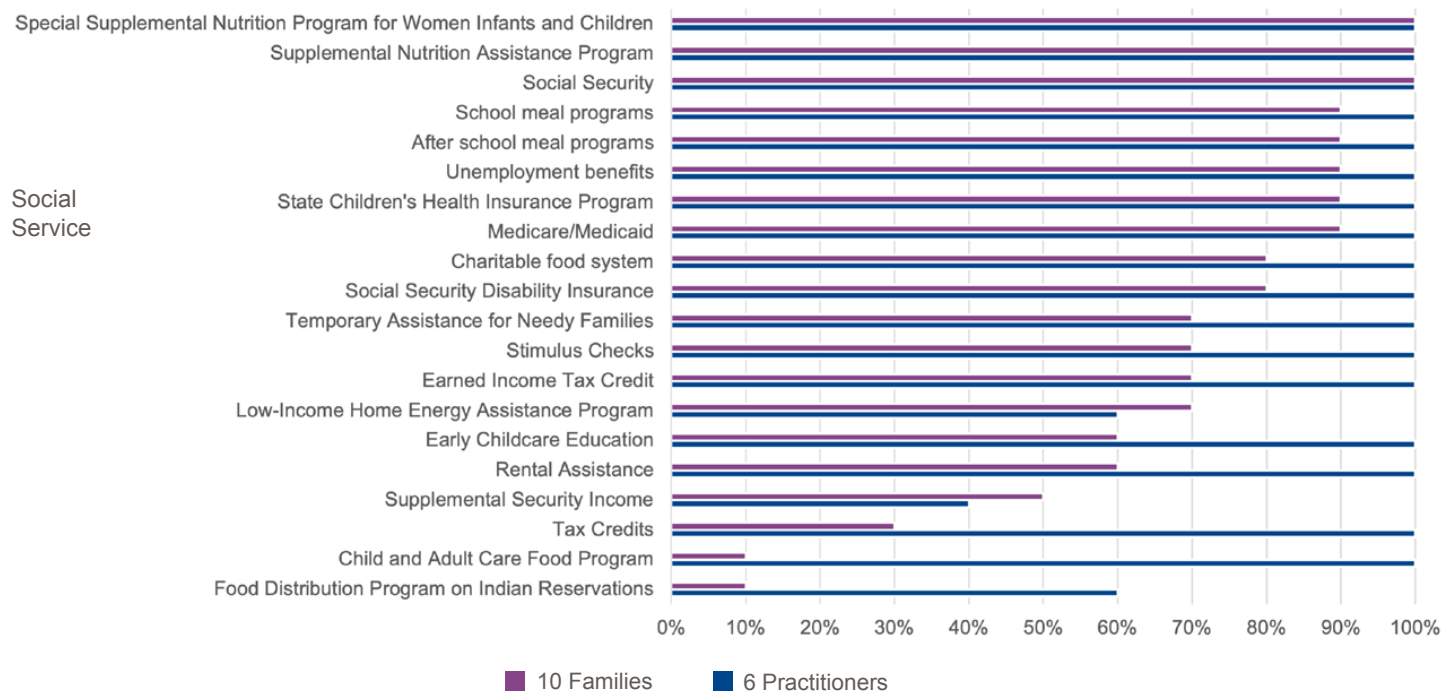
³ Rurality rates in Georgia. Available at: <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/geography/guidance/geo-areas/urban-rural.html>.

Breakdown of Participation by Study Phases

Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
Total Interviews	Total Surveys	Total Focus Group Participants
30 Practitioners 42 Family participants	8 No Kid Hungry (NKH) staff 12 Practitioners 26 Family participants	7 NKH staff 5 Practitioners 10 Family participants
Georgia Interviews	Georgia Surveys	Georgia Focus Group Participants
6 Practitioners 10 Family participants	2 Practitioners 7 Family participants	1 Practitioner 2 Family participants

Awareness of Social Services in Georgia^{4,5}

During the interviews, Georgia practitioners and family participants noted if they were aware of the following social services. Across programs, Georgia practitioners had an average awareness of 93%, and family participants had an awareness of 71%. The programs with greatest awareness among family participants were food assistance programs. The programs with lowest awareness among family participants were food assistance programs that prioritize specific communities like FDPIR and CACFP.



⁴ Practitioners working in Georgia were employed in Extension (2 participants), food banks (2 participants), and school nutrition (2 participants). Family participants living in Georgia self-reported race and ethnicity as Black (1 participant), Hispanic (8 participants), and White (1 participant).

⁵ Family participants met the eligibility criteria if they: had at least one child under age 18 in the household, lived in a rural place, and received support from at least one income-based social service were contacted for an interview.

PSE Strategies for Rural Families to Get Enough Nutritious and Affordable Food

13 PSE strategies were co-developed from all interview participants. Beside those strategies, example quotes from practitioners and family participants in Georgia are listed.

Strategy	Example Quotes from Georgia Participants
Make people more aware of the programs	"We can go to churches for resources... practitioners can direct you to someone who knows it and a lot of times that is a result of it being a small town and people knowing people and people knowing what those options are." — <i>Practitioner</i>
Make it easier to sign-up	"The main barrier is having documents because there are many people without documents... If you come to a food benefits program and are told to show an ID to register, and if you don't have a document, then you can't register you." — <i>Family participant speaking Spanish</i>
Make it trouble free for people to use programs	"When you do have some sort of assistance, people look at you different, they start treating you different at the grocery stores." — <i>Family participant speaking English</i>
Chances for people to suggest changes	"[A program for] the Hispanic population is in this town. They are in charge of informing people, but many times people don't know their rights..." — <i>Family participant speaking Spanish</i>
Expand food banks (e.g. charitable food systems)	"We do bridge bags that are emergency feed bags, and bridge to your next meal." — <i>Practitioner</i>
Expand school nutrition programs	"The most useful [program] is the one at school that helps children to have breakfast and lunch. One [program] that was very useful was the EBT Pandemic and it would be nice if they could offer it again." — <i>Family participant speaking Spanish</i>
Provide more places to get food locally	"There is not much supply of the local products. We have to eat what reaches the markets... For example, apples and pears are grown here, and we understand that when food is exported from other places the price is higher..." — <i>Family participant speaking Spanish</i>
Learn about buying and making healthy foods on a budget	"There could be more financial classes or how to get out of debt or being able to budget a little bit more. Not every family is a two income family like they said one of the the goals is to save up to \$10,000." — <i>Family participant speaking English</i>
More childcare options and early childhood education	"I wish there were more choices, more locations for childcare." — <i>Family participant speaking English</i>
Expand employment	"Implementing more work [would be helpful], because there are very few jobs here and the jobs that there are, they pay very little. They pay very low, at \$8 or \$7 [per hour]; how do you survive on a salary like that per week?" — <i>Family participant speaking Spanish</i>
Increase access to affordable health care	"Some of the biggest challenges are around the medical side as a lot of rural counties don't have hospitals or clinics." — <i>Practitioner</i>
Make housing more affordable	"Housing costs have gone up especially, they've either raised the rents so high that folks can't afford to live, or there's not a place for folks to live in the community." — <i>Practitioner</i>
Make it easier to get from place to place	"Living in a rural area, you don't have access to transportation. Sometimes families ask for rides to the store, and they may or may not be available at the time that they need it. No excess bus lines." — <i>Practitioner</i>

Support for PSE Strategies and Activities: Survey Results from All Study Participants

Very high support
 High support
 Moderate support
 Low support

PSE Strategies and Activities ⁶	Level of Support ⁷
Strategy: Make people more aware of services Activities: Advertising for these programs in creative ways such as through social media; advertising these programs in many locations in the community; local community members sharing how to sign up and use these programs; organizations employing bi-lingual staff members to tell people about programs.	High support
Strategy: Make it easier to sign up for programs Activities: Making sure there are local offices in rural communities where people can go to sign up for these programs; make program applications shorter; allow people to fill out one application that can be used for all of these programs	High support
Strategy: Make it trouble free for people to use programs Activities: Make it faster to start using these programs; change program rules for how people can use money or services; allow people to receive program services on the phone, video, or computer; make it easier to check out at grocery stores when using SNAP and WIC; make it easier to keep using and stay on these programs; make it easier for immigrants to use these programs; follow-up with families that are receiving programs	High support
Strategy: Provide chances for people to suggest changes to programs Activities: Offer ways for people to share their ideas for changes to policies; advocate for an increase in the amount of money that programs can give people; create more programs that help families after WIC ends when kids turn 6 years old	High support
Strategy: Expand food banks (e.g. charitable food systems) Activities: Open food banks for more hours; let people choose the foods they get at the food bank; provide more foods that give people from various cultures a “taste of home”; provide more foods that are good for food allergies or special diets like low sodium; increase funding for food banks; create food banks inside existing community spaces like churches, schools, health care clinics; build food banks in places that are easier to get to; provide more foods that are appealing	High support
Strategy: Expand school nutrition programs Activities: Serve more food during meals at school; provide free school lunch for all students; provide more places for school-age children to get meals; provide more school foods that give people from various cultures a “taste of home”; give leftover foods to students or food banks; make nutrition standards easier; create more summer free-food programs for school-age children; provide after school programs; provide more school supply drives; create more backpack programs that send kids home with food; teach nutrition and food skills to students at school	High support
Strategy: Provide more places to get food locally Activities: Start community gardens; let people donate meat from hunting to food banks; provide discounts at farmer’s markets; make the food at farmer’s markets less expensive; create mobile farmer’s markets; provide prescriptions for fruits and vegetables at health care clinics; work with food banks to offer fresh local foods	High support
Strategy: Provide options for people to learn about buying and making healthy foods on a budget Activities: Provide classes and resources in multiple languages; provide food skills classes online (website, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube); provide cooking classes; provide finance classes (budgeting, saving); provide food preservation classes (canning foods, freezing foods); provide food safety classes	Moderate support
Strategy: Make childcare options and early childhood education better fit the needs of families Activities: Provide bookmobiles and mobile libraries; provide free preschool; open more childcare locations; open childcare facilities for more hours	High support
Strategy: Expand employment Activities: Increase the minimum wage; create more job opportunities; provide people with more help when searching and applying for a job	High support
Strategy: Increase access to affordable health care Activities: Provide more health care options that cost less; provide mobile medical vans; provide more options for affordable mental health services	High support
Strategy: Make housing more affordable Activities: Provide help for paying for gas, electric, water, and other utilities; create limits on how much a family must pay for gas, electric, water, and other utilities; build more places to live that cost less	High support
Strategy: Make it easier to get from place to place Activities: Lower gas prices; provide free public transportation	High support

⁶ This table displays the combined scores of acceptability (the likability of the strategy for your community), appropriateness (whether the strategy is a good match for the community), and feasibility (how possible is the strategy in the community).

⁷ Scores were calculated for overall acceptability, appropriateness, and feasibility and divided into levels of support: low (≤50%), moderate (51-67%), high (68-84%), and very high (≥85%).

Support for PSE Strategies and Activities: Focus Group Results from Georgia Study Participants

“[Making sure there are local offices where people can go to sign up for programs, make applications shorter, allow people to fill out one application that can be used for multiple programs] are great options and I think that that's the right direction that I would think about moving in is, I've never personally filled out an application, but I've heard from folks through programs that I've worked with that the applications are very long and are very tedious...” — *Practitioner*

“[Food banks] ask for too much paperwork. They give us food that is no longer good. They should let us choose what we need so that others can also take what they need because sometimes they prepare a box and seal it with things we don't always need.”
— *Family participant speaking Spanish*

No Kid Hungry Programs Happening Across Georgia

Georgia NKH is working with school districts to expand participation in school and summer meals. This includes offering technical assistance and grant funds to add or adjust programs so that more kids facing food insecurity can easily participate in the meal programs.



Recommendations for Georgia

Build Upon Georgia's Assets

- 1 Leverage Georgia's existing networks like churches, food pantries, grocery stores, healthcare sites, and childcare facilities to implement PSE strategies
- 2 Make people more aware of services using current outreach initiatives like social media
- 3 Implement PSE strategies and activities in rural locations through partnerships and pop up locations to make it trouble free for people to use programs
- 4 Employ and fairly pay community members at local places that implement PSE strategies

Questions about the study? Contact Carmen at cbshanks@centerfornutrition.org