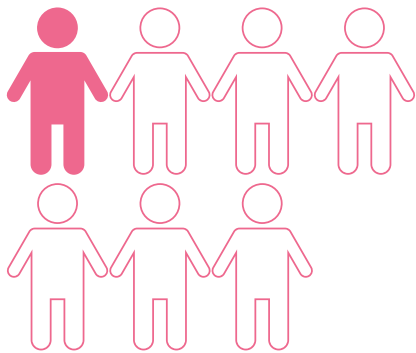


# What Works for Texas Families Living in Rural Communities to get Enough Nutritious and Affordable Food?

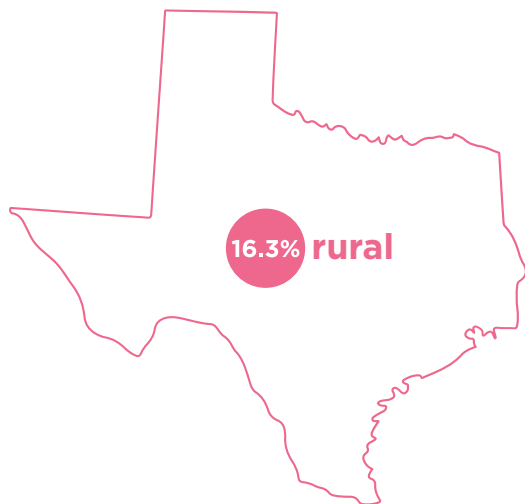
The **Gretchen Swanson Center for Nutrition (GSCN)** collaborated with **No Kid Hungry (NKH)** to lead a study in Arizona, Georgia, Kentucky, Michigan, and Texas. Local practitioners and families in rural communities were asked to identify and rank policy, system, and environment (PSE) strategies that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

## Hunger and Rurality in Texas

1 in 7 people in Texas face hunger<sup>2</sup>



4,744,808 people in Texas live in a rural area<sup>3</sup>



## 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.



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

<sup>2</sup> What hunger looks like in Texas. Available at: <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/texas>.

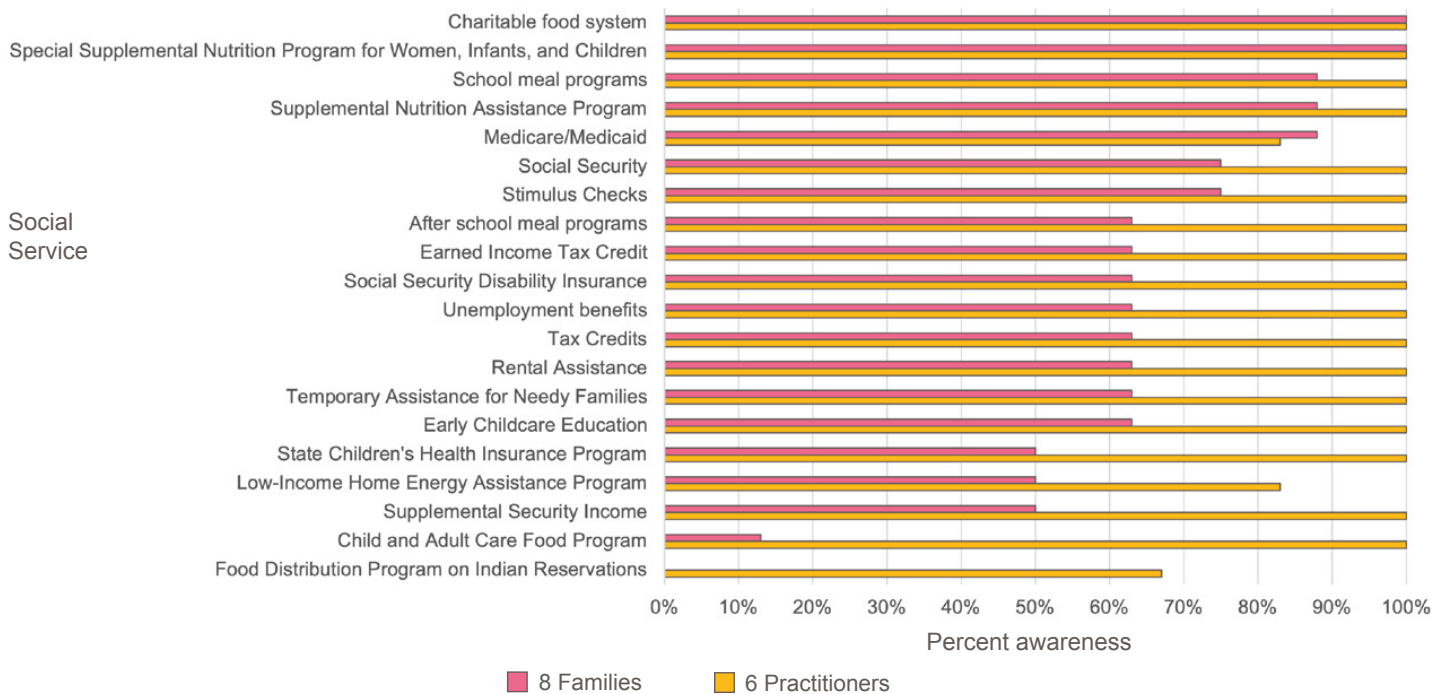
<sup>3</sup> Rurality percentage by state. Available at: <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/geography/guidance/geo-areas/urban-rural.html>

## Breakdown of Participation by Study Phases

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

## Awareness of Social Services in Texas<sup>4,5</sup>

During the interviews, Texas practitioners and family participants noted if they were aware of the following social services. Across programs, Texas practitioners had an average awareness of 97%, and family participants had an awareness of 64%. 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.



<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> Practitioners working in Texas were employed in community family resources (5 participants) and school nutrition (1 participant). Family participants living in Texas self-reported race and ethnicity as Black (2 participants), Hispanic (4 participants), and White (2 participants).

# 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 Texas are listed.

Strategy	Example Quotes from Texas Participants
Make people <b>more aware</b> of the programs	"Having a one stop shop if you need rental assistance, you can go to a website that will tell you, the agencies that will help you. If you need utility service, instead of calling 211, maybe have another one stop shop for people, because a lot of times they have to call around." — <i>Practitioner</i>
Make it <b>easier to sign-up</b>	"Everybody wants to have somebody to talk to. Not that thing where it's like, press one, press two, press three, well, they never get through." — <i>Family participant speaking English</i>
Make it <b>trouble free for people to use programs</b>	"WIC put a store in next to the WIC office that I go to... You give them your card... and it prints out a thing that says what all you can get. They ask you do you want everything that you could get for this month or just a certain amount and then they give you a menu of all the things you could pick out, how much it costs... It's a lovely experience." — <i>Family participant speaking English</i>
<b>Chances for people to suggest changes</b>	"The only thing I would change is that there would be a little more opportunities to offer to the entire community equally...we pay our taxes, we work for the community and make the community strong." — <i>Family participant speaking Spanish</i>
<b>Expand food banks (e.g. charitable food systems)</b>	"Every month there's a food bank..the food is often close to expiration, for example, with meat and fruits, they're almost expired. The fruit is very ripe, so it doesn't last much longer than two days, and then it's gone." — <i>Family participant speaking Spanish</i>
<b>Expand school nutrition programs</b>	"...We do have free breakfast, free lunch, and we have free after school snacks... we run the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program...we do a farmer's market for our kids in the school." — <i>Practitioner</i>
Provide more places to <b>get food locally</b>	"It'd be really cool if the farmers market had a day where it was reduced price items...for families that do struggle, it would be nice to be able to go and get some fresh produce grown by locals..." — <i>Family participant speaking English</i>
<b>Learn about buying and making healthy foods</b> on a budget	"Texas A&M has...nutrition education, and they do cooking classes, even for kids to try to help help with the food issues...it's free..." — <i>Practitioner</i>
<b>More childcare options and early childhood education</b>	"Offering... a 24 hour childcare [would be helpful] if a mom can only get a job in the evening, and she's got three kids at home... they have places where you can get reduced childcare..." — <i>Practitioner</i>
<b>Expand employment</b>	"They need to make minimum wage more than \$7.25 [per hour] in the state of Texas...I think that the minimum wageshould match the cost of living." — <i>Family participant speaking English</i>
Increase access to <b>affordable health care</b>	"Here you have to plan your day, or plan your time because the town I'm in to the nearest hospital or ER is like 20 minutes away... but the doctor could be 30 miles away." — <i>Family participant speaking English</i>
Make <b>housing more affordable</b>	"I personally live in government assisted housing...without that housing, I'd be up a tree because there's three complexes, but there's always a list. So let's say I moved and I needed it again, I have to wait at the bottom of the list." — <i>Family participant speaking English</i>
Make it easier to <b>get from place to place</b>	"Specific to Texas, it's a very large state... and things are spread out, and there's no public transportation, and it's quite a long distance. Some of the counties there are not a lot of grocery stores, kind of the food desert." — <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 <sup>6</sup>	Level of Support <sup>7</sup>
<b>Strategy:</b> Make people more aware of services <b>Activities:</b> 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
<b>Strategy:</b> Make it easier to sign up for programs <b>Activities:</b> 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
<b>Strategy:</b> Make it trouble free for people to use programs <b>Activities:</b> 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
<b>Strategy:</b> Provide chances for people to suggest changes to programs <b>Activities:</b> 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
<b>Strategy:</b> Expand food banks (e.g. charitable food systems) <b>Activities:</b> 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
<b>Strategy:</b> Expand school nutrition programs <b>Activities:</b> 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
<b>Strategy:</b> Provide more places to get food locally <b>Activities:</b> 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
<b>Strategy:</b> Provide options for people to learn about buying and making healthy foods on a budget <b>Activities:</b> 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
<b>Strategy:</b> Make childcare options and early childhood education better fit the needs of families <b>Activities:</b> Provide bookmobiles and mobile libraries; provide free preschool; open more childcare locations; open childcare facilities for more hours	High support
<b>Strategy:</b> Expand employment <b>Activities:</b> Increase the minimum wage; create more job opportunities; provide people with more help when searching and applying for a job	High support
<b>Strategy:</b> Increase access to affordable health care <b>Activities:</b> Provide more health care options that cost less; provide mobile medical vans; provide more options for affordable mental health services	High support
<b>Strategy:</b> Make housing more affordable <b>Activities:</b> 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
<b>Strategy:</b> Make it easier to get from place to place <b>Activities:</b> Lower gas prices; provide free public transportation	High support

<sup>6</sup> 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).

<sup>7</sup> 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 Texas Study Participants

“I think make it easier to sign up, is absolutely probably priority. Hearing the different scenarios in our communities, a lot of our folks don't have wifi, but they do have phone service and they've learned to do a lot of their activities via their phone. So, I think making it easier to sign up to where they can upload documents from their phone, that it doesn't have to be a printed paper copy that goes with an application to a facility, making it easier is the key.” — *Practitioner*

“Here, at food banks, some of them [are] open during the week and require too much paperwork to access them.... It's practically a socioeconomic study.”  
— *Family participant speaking Spanish*

## No Kid Hungry Programs Happening Across Texas

**NKH Texas** supports rural communities in two ways.

**The Texas Rural School District Cohort** provides rural school districts with grant funding to fund community led ideas to addressing childhood hunger. This team helps schools build and improve upon their skills, build and strengthen community partnerships, and expand their professional network in a way that will help them build a strong child nutrition program for years to come.

**NKH Texas** partners with statewide associations that focus on supporting rural schools to share information on SNAP enrollment and school meals that can be utilized by rural superintendents to increase community awareness of the supports that are available to them.

## Recommendations for Texas

### Build Upon Texas' Assets

Activities to accomplish a PSE strategy will differ depending upon each rural community's needs, which should be determined by local residents and invested practitioners. During surveys, focus groups, and interviews, families and practitioners shared ideas about how to implement PSE strategies in Texas by building on assets that exist.

- 1 Leverage Texas' 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](mailto:cbshanks@centerfornutrition.org)