



Healthy Communities Platform

A Path Toward Greater Food Equity

June, 2024

Part II: The Food Equity Ecosystem



What Should Corporations Know About the Food Equity Ecosystem?

CEO Action for Racial Equity defines Corporate Engagement as the involvement of corporations in promoting and supporting causes and initiatives that improve societal well-being for Black Americans. As Corporations consider how they may engage, clarity on key differences and connections in the food security ecosystem is crucial.

Food equity is the ability to grow, access, afford, and consume nutritious food that also meets cultural and religious practices and beliefs.

Food Insecurity vs Food Security

Hunger is a crucial issue in America and in the world. The presence of hunger can range from significant to non-existent. **Food insecurity is a household's inability to provide enough food for each person to live an active, healthy lifestyle.** Low food security is a lack of foods with nutritional value and diversity. Very low food insecurity is evidenced by multiple instances of an inability to have three meals a day or more or going a day or more without food. Food insecurity can appear at any time, affecting any household. Conversely, **food security means there are no reported indications of food access problems or limitations.** ¹ Individuals and families experiencing high food security have no fear or concern around consistently being hungry because they do not lack the money or access to food.

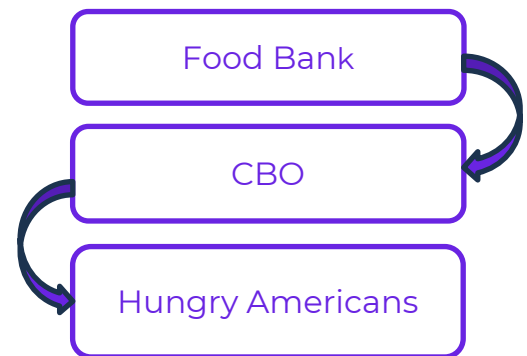
Food Deserts vs Food Swamps

A neighborhood's infrastructure contributes greatly to lived experiences. **Food deserts are geographical areas in which residents lack access to affordable, healthy foods.** These areas typically have no large affordable grocery stores due to the economic situation experienced within the neighborhood. The result is that in urban areas most of the population lives over 1 mile away from an affordable grocery store, and in rural areas it's 10 miles. ² A lack of reliable transportation is an obstacle for many residents seeking to obtain enough, or any, healthy and affordable foods consistently. One solution would be to work with retailers in these neighborhoods to provide, for example, both fresh produce and whole grains, at reasonable prices to properly serve these communities.

Food swamps often have a high availability of liquor and tobacco products and stores that offer nutrient deficient food options. Black Americans with lower incomes and lack of private transportation are more likely to report living in a food swamp, with older adults and children being the most vulnerable. ³

Food Banks and Food Pantries

Connecting food and hungry Americans is a multi-layered process. **Food banks are often non-profit, charitable organizations that store and distribute food typically through a Community Based Organization (CBO). CBOs are non-profit organizations established and operated at the local level to address specific needs and issues within a particular community.** Food pantries, soup kitchens and community gardens, are examples of community-based organizations. **Food pantries are centers where hungry families directly receive food supplied from food banks, grocery stores and donors in the community.**



The Power in Community

Collaborating with Community Based Organizations can be an effective way corporate America can drive change. These organizations have intimate knowledge of the issues in their communities as they are led by residents of those communities. Food equity gaps are identified and prioritized, and strategies to address these gaps are determined with the those on the ground. As a result, CBOs can have a force multiplier effect by solving the right problems with solutions identified by those with lived experience.

1. USDA, Household Food Security in the United States in 2022, October 2023, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/107703/err-325.pdf?v=6314.6>
 2. Poverty USA, Homelessness & Food Deserts in Los Angeles, [Homelessness & Food Deserts in Los Angeles \(povertyusa.org\)](https://www.povertyusa.org/)
 3. Healthline, What Are Food Swamps? All You Need to Know, [Food Swamps: Definition, Examples, Health Impacts, Solutions \(healthline.com\)](https://www.healthline.com/health/food-swamps/)

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