



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE



ASCEND

FOR BETTER HEALTH

Agricultural Science Center of Excellence for Nutrition and Diet (ASCEND) for Better Health

**BUILDING A HEALTHY
COMMUNITY TOGETHER!**

LISTENING SESSION REPORT



ABOUT THE [UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE \(USDA\)](#)

USDA provides leadership on food, agriculture, natural resources, rural development, nutrition, and related issues based on public policy, the best available science, and effective management. USDA's vision is to provide economic opportunity through innovation, helping rural America to thrive; to promote agriculture production that better nourishes Americans while also helping feed others throughout the world; and to preserve our Nation's natural resources through conservation, restored forests, improved watersheds, and healthy private working lands.

ABOUT THE [SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH AND EXTENSION CENTER \(SUAREC\)](#)

SUAREC is located on the Southern University and A&M College campus in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Its mission is to conduct basic and applied research and disseminate information to the citizens of Louisiana in a manner that is essential in addressing their scientific, technological, social, economic, and cultural needs. SUAREC encompasses the Center for Small Farm Research, the Cooperative Extension Program, the SU Livestock Show and its state-of-the-art arena, a 385-acre agricultural research experiment station, and the Southwest Center for Rural Initiatives, a satellite entity located in Opelousas.

ABOUT THE [1890 CENTER OF EXCELLENCE FOR NUTRITION, HEALTH, WELLNESS, AND QUALITY OF LIFE](#)

This Center of Excellence (COE) was established within SUAREC to strengthen 1890 institutions' capacities in research, teaching and extension to address diet-related health disparities in African Americans. The COE is funded by the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) and represents a collaborative effort among SUAREC, North Carolina A&T State University, and Tuskegee University. These 1890 universities have complementary strengths in research, teaching, and extension, and are in a unique position to help improve the health and well-being of underserved and minority populations.

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BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

What we eat affects our health and well-being.¹ Eating healthy, among other lifestyle factors like active living and quality sleep, can increase quality of life and reduce the incidence of diet-related chronic diseases such as obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart disease and stroke, and certain types of cancer.² Despite our understanding of this relationship between food and health, diet-related chronic diseases are on the rise, and underserved communities are often at greater risk.³⁻⁶ According to the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 6 out of 10 adults in the United States have a chronic disease and 4 out of 10 adults have 2 or more chronic diseases.²

Research indicates that diet-related chronic diseases often co-exist with food insecurity.⁷ Without question, Coronavirus COVID-19 brought to the forefront how too many individuals and families in our great Nation do not have access to healthy, affordable food.⁸ Researchers also estimate that nearly two-thirds of COVID-19 hospitalizations in the United States were related to diet-related diseases including obesity, diabetes, hypertension, and heart failure.⁹ One of the most disturbing aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic was the disproportionate harm that it caused to historically underserved groups.¹⁰⁻¹³ Indeed, Black, Hispanic, and Asian people have substantially higher rates of infection, hospitalization, and death compared with White people.¹³ While disparities in food insecurity and diet-related diseases were highlighted by COVID, these are longstanding problems that are associated with decades of structural inequities in education, employment, and housing, among others.¹⁴

An estimated 18.8 million people, or 6.1 percent of the U.S. population, lived in low-income and low access neighborhoods and were more than 1 mile or 10 miles from a food store in 2019.¹⁵ Having limited access to healthy and affordable food, because of a lack of resources or living far from a store, can be considered worrisome for underserved, predominantly low-income areas, which can be disproportionately subject to health and income disparities.¹⁶

At the USDA, one of our core priorities is advancing food and nutrition security.¹⁷ Nutrition security means having consistent and equitable access to healthy, safe, affordable foods essential to optimal health and well-being.¹⁸ Our approach to tackling food and nutrition security aims to: (1) Recognize that structural inequalities make it hard for many people to eat healthy and be physically active; and (2) Emphasize taking an equity lens to our efforts.¹⁸ Our work aims to accelerate progress on the historic [White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health](#) and corresponding [National Strategy](#) goals to end hunger, improve nutrition and physical activity, and reduce diet-related diseases and disparities by 2030.¹⁹

USDA is committed to ensuring all we do is driven by research, grounded in science, and informed by analysis and evaluation.¹⁷ We also aim to ensure our actions are informed by lived experience and developed in partnership with those we aim to serve.¹⁷ To accelerate our efforts in developing community-informed and data-driven approaches, Secretary of Agriculture Thomas Vilsack announced the launch of the USDA's Agricultural Science Center of Excellence for Nutrition and Diet (ASCEND) for Better Health on December 5, 2022.

“At USDA we are passionate about learning more about the tools and support communities need to increase access to healthy, safe, and affordable food. Hearing about lived experiences from diverse communities is integral to our efforts as we work together with partners like Southern University to retool the way our society approaches healthy eating.”

Dr. Chavonda Jacobs-Young
USDA Undersecretary for Research,
Education, and Economics
USDA Chief Scientist



[ASCEND for Better Health](#) is a virtual science center that brings together scientists, partner organizations, and communities to develop and deliver science-based solutions that improve the health and well-being of every individual, family, and community in this country. The primary goal for ASCEND is to reduce the incidence and burden of diet-related chronic diseases, especially in historically underserved populations.

Critical to the success of ASCEND is engaging with communities to better understand the real-world opportunities and challenges around addressing food and nutrition insecurity and diet-related chronic diseases. On January 31, 2023, USDA partnered with the SUAREC to hold a community engagement event focused on food, nutrition, and health-related outcomes in African American communities. The event was attended by more than 120 community members, small farmers, and students who shared feedback on a variety of questions. During the listening session, participants had opportunities to

interact with USDA and SUAREC staff during a Share Fair, which provided information on Federal and local nutrition programs, healthy eating, and relevant community activities.

This report summarizes the information captured at the event. The goal is to use this information to inform future research, education, extension, and program efforts and ensure that the USDA's science-based solutions are impactful and relevant to the communities they serve.

We are very grateful to the community members for their time, input, and passion. We all have a role to play in the shared goal of improving health through food and nutrition, and by working together, we can truly make a difference.

“Nutrition is one of the core values of the Cooperative Extension Program at the Southern University Agricultural Research and Extension Center and our 1890 Center of Excellence for Nutrition, Health, Wellness, and Quality of Life has a mission of contributing to solutions to improve the health and well-being of underserved and minority populations. Our partnership with the USDA enables the Ag Center’s staff to go into communities and schools to teach nutrition and wellness and we are glad to be able to bring the members of our community together to discuss their needs with us and the USDA.”

Dr. Orlando F. McMeans
Chancellor of the Southern University Ag Center
Dean of the College of Agriculture



INFORMATION COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Appendix 1 provides the meeting agenda, detailing how the day included a mix of activities designed to stimulate community discussions and share information on food, nutrition, and health-related outcomes. A World Café format was used to gather feedback from the community, where community members discussed a series of questions in small groups at round tables, a table host captured the main discussion points on templates, then information was shared verbally with the larger group. Information was also captured by asking participants to answer questions on posters, and a “Story Booth” was available to record “Stories for Better Health,” which are short video segments that capture lived experiences in relation to food, nutrition, and well-being.



The information gathered on World Café templates and posters was reviewed by a small group of staff members and scientists from USDA and SUAREC. For each question asked, responses of a similar type were first organized into topic areas, then within each topic area, individual responses were represented using summary statements. Both topic areas and summary statements are listed in order of most frequently to least frequently discussed, with the total number of responses provided in parentheses. In this manner, the most frequently discussed topics and summary statements are listed first.



SUMMARY OF RESPONSES FROM WORLD CAFÉ QUESTIONS

Question 1. What is your understanding about the relationship between food, the accessibility and availability of foods, physical activity, and health? Why are these important to you and your community?

This question was designed, in part, to be an icebreaker to help build rapport at tables, create a safe and comfortable environment for sharing information, and stimulate discussion about food and health. A total of 175 responses were captured on templates from 21 small-group round tables. While there was clearly an appreciation for the benefits of healthy eating and living, most discussion focused on the challenges around accessibility and availability of nutritious foods. Increasing nutrition education was also identified as an important priority, and the cost of nutritious foods was identified as a barrier.

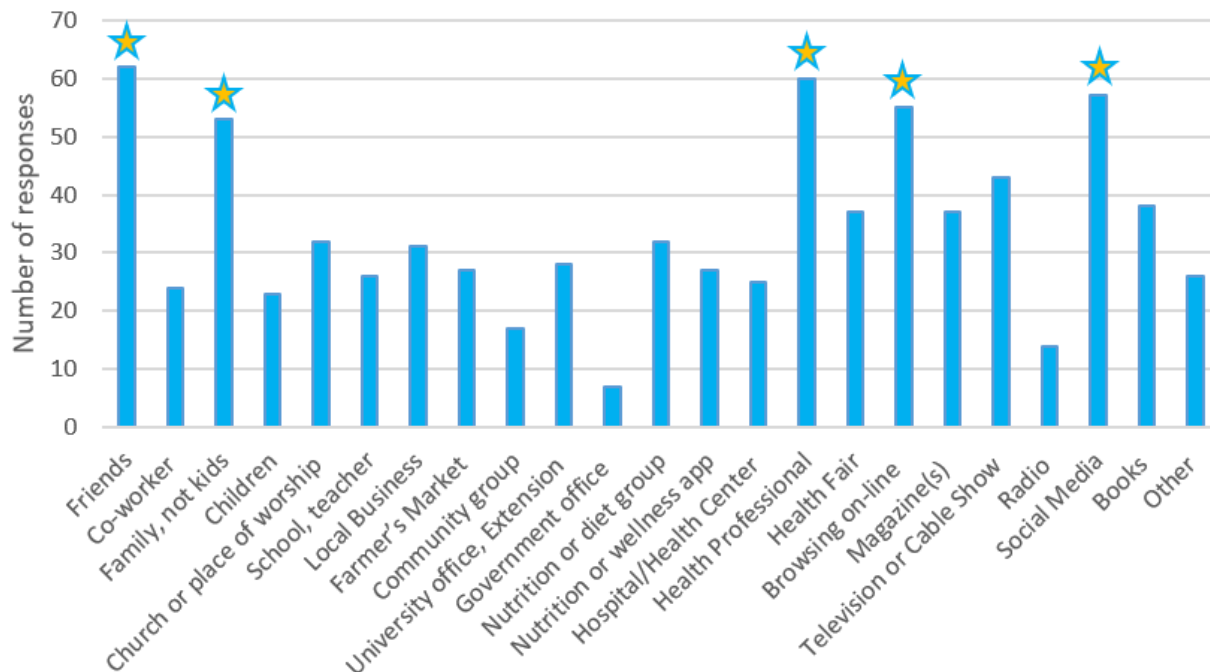
“In many communities there is a gap for people to make food choices. That gap is the nutrition equity that does not exist. As these gaps linger, people within those communities are not making a true choice. The availability of food is the choice.”

Topic	Summary Statements
Accessibility/Availability of Healthy Foods <i>(66 responses total)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of accessibility or availability limits the ability to choose healthy food options in many communities. The availability of food “IS” the choice. <i>(32 responses)</i> • In addition to fewer stores selling fresh produce, or local stores closing, there has also been a reduction in alternative local options such as farmers markets, fruit stands, and mobile food trucks. These losses have been accelerated by the pandemic. <i>(13 responses)</i> • Home gardening, community gardening, or gardening through organizations such as churches has the potential to increase production of fresh foods locally. <i>(10 responses)</i> • Needing to travel outside of the community can discourage healthy eating. The distance may be too far and inconvenient. Fresh produce quality is also reduced by storage, requiring more frequent trips. <i>(7 responses)</i> • Some organizations are helping to fill the food and nutrition gaps, and they can be successful if properly resourced. <i>(4 responses)</i>
Relationships of Food and Health <i>(28 responses total)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having a poor diet can decrease quality of life and increase the incidence of chronic diseases. <i>(13 responses)</i> • Food is essential for life and a key ingredient that contributes to our physical and mental well-being. <i>(9 responses)</i> • Food is important for our relationships, including building healthy families, social bonding, and cultural events. <i>(6 responses)</i>
Education <i>(25 responses total)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It’s important to educate people about food and the benefits of food, including improvements in health and quality of life through better nutrition. <i>(8 responses)</i>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to cook/prepare nutritious meals, recipes, and simple ways to improve health through nutrition (e.g., less soda, more fruit). (7 responses) • Teach younger generations about food, nutrition, health, and agriculture. (6 responses) • Community gardens: what and how to grow. (4 responses)
Money <i>(23 responses total)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The high cost of nutritious foods is now a driving factor for the underconsumption of healthy options. (13 responses) • Federal, State, and local policies and funding such as market matching for fresh produce, SNAP benefits with 50% off nutritious foods, and gift cards for seniors are important for increasing access to healthy foods. (6 responses) • Producing nutritious foods through gardening reduces the costs associated with fresh produce and enables bartering for expanded food access. (4 responses)
Exercise <i>(12 responses total)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exercise, proper nutrition, and rest are key ingredients to living a healthy lifestyle. Exercise is dependent in part on food and having a poor diet and lack of exercise often go hand in hand. (6 responses) • Exercise can be free, but it's important to have access to safe recreation areas, gyms, or other facilities, which may be limiting in low economic areas. (4 responses) • Older adult community members might not want to get out of their house to exercise, but organizations can help by providing both a healthy meal and an opportunity to exercise in a social environment. (2 responses)
Transportation <i>(11 responses total)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of personal transportation, especially for older adults, increases dependence on local food options only. (7 responses) • Commercial delivery of groceries is an option, but this was negatively impacted during the pandemic. (4 responses)
Culture/Community <i>(4 responses total)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community members are tired of talking and want to see results; a grass roots initiative focused on developing healthy food resources acceptable to and supported by the community is one way to address this. (4 responses)
Family <i>(3 responses total)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eating together as a family can encourage healthy eating, help break or change bad eating habits, and establish healthier eating habits that can be carried forward by children into adulthood. (3 responses)
Advertising/Marketing <i>(1 response total)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marketing of foods, both healthy and unhealthy, influences decisions. (1 response)
Taste <i>(1 response total)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Craving food is a normal response to hunger; can we develop healthy foods that we crave? (1 response)
Time/Convenience <i>(1 response total)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking time to cook is not easy. (1 response)

Question 2. Where do you get your information about food and health?

Community members were given a sheet with a list of common sources of information and asked to check all that were used. A total of 121 forms were collected. The graph below shows the number of responses for each category, and the top five sources of information are highlighted with a star.



Participants were also asked to provide specific details* on sources of information within generic categories, and identities of sources which are described below when three or more participants identified the same information source within a category.

- **Social Media:** Facebook (15 responses); TikTok (12 responses); Instagram (7 responses); YouTube (4 responses); USDA.gov (3 responses)
- **Magazine:** Food-related magazine (4 responses); American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) publication (3 responses)
- **Browsing online:** Google search for something to cook (6 responses)
- **Community group:** Local community center (4 responses)
- **Nutrition or diet group:** Weight Watchers (4 responses)
- **Television or Cable Show:** Cooking Channel (4 responses); Food Network (4 responses)
- **Local Business:** Rouses Markets; a major grocery store chain in the Southern U.S. (3 responses)

*Mention of trade names or commercial products in this public information release is solely for the purpose of providing specific information and does not imply recommendation or endorsement by the USDA.



Question 3. What are the barriers to healthy eating?

A total of 163 responses were collected, with the primary challenge identified as complacency and the difficulty of breaking bad habits. Even with a commitment to initiating lifestyle change, there is often an overwhelming amount of information that can be confusing and contradictory. Additional barriers and opportunities are described below.

“Our culture is food. If we get to know the culture, we may get closer to solving the existing health issues.”

Topic	Summary Statements
Complacency/Bad Habits <i>(32 responses total)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No desire to eat healthy and it is not a priority. No accountability or willpower to change. <i>(20 responses)</i> • Bad habits form at an early age and are difficult to break. They can be a generational curse (fried chicken, sweets, starches, etc.). <i>(7 responses)</i> • Making a conscious decision to change is difficult, especially voluntary life changes. Diet-related chronic diseases are slow to develop, and we don't think about the consequences until it is too late. <i>(6 responses)</i>
Education <i>(28 responses total)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling overwhelmed with too much information and not having enough practical tools and applicable, approachable information. <i>(14 responses)</i> • Teaching by show and tell and educating kids and adults about healthy foods and how to cook healthy meals. <i>(10 responses)</i> • Growing own foods (fruits and vegetables, etc.) and trying different crops through community gardens or backyard gardening and sharing food with others can be helpful. <i>(4 responses)</i>
Money <i>(20 responses total)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthy foods often cost more and have smaller portion sizes in comparison to less healthy alternatives; for example, sweetened cereals are often less expensive than healthier options, and the amount of unhealthy foods (e.g., French fries) is more than healthy foods (e.g., salad). This trend decreases the appeal and affordability of healthy food. <i>(20 responses)</i>
Accessibility/Availability <i>(19 responses total)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People will generally eat what is available in the community, and if the local food sources focus on convenience rather than health, then opportunities for healthy meals will decline. <i>(15 responses)</i> • Living in a bad neighborhood and not having access to healthy foods at grocery stores contribute to an unhealthy lifestyle. <i>(4 responses)</i>
Time/Convenience <i>(14 responses total)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The fast pace of life and being busy with work, school, and taking care of others does not leave much time to prepare healthy meals. The fastest option is the choice because as it says, “fast food”; it does not take that much time, is convenient, and does not take that much energy to prepare. <i>(14 responses)</i>

<p>Culture/Community <i>(12 responses total)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social eating, holidays, traditions, festivals, hurricane snacks, environment (air, land, water, etc.). If we get to know the culture, we may get closer to solving the existing health issues. <i>(8 responses)</i> • Community togetherness and closeness can be a positive factor in combating unhealthy behaviors. On the other hand, peer pressure and lack of sense of community can have negative effects. <i>(4 responses)</i>
<p>Family <i>(11 responses total)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Living alone and not close to family, friends and the world around can trigger bad eating habits. <i>(6 responses)</i> • Family issues such as family resistance, other family matters, or not cooking and eating together can also be factors for not following a healthy diet and as a result a decline in health status. <i>(5 responses)</i>
<p>Transportation <i>(10 responses total)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reliable public transportation to travel from one point to another, for example, shopping centers, grocery stores, health cares, gym, and doctors, are very limited in these communities. Even if some form of transportation such as a city bus is available, they are often not reliable. <i>(10 responses)</i>
<p>Taste <i>(8 responses total)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to find healthy alternatives that are enjoyable, taste good, and satisfy cravings. As an example, people crave sweets. There are ways that foods can be modified and prepared to make them healthier while retaining tastes that are culturally sensitive and so would be acceptable to the taste. <i>(8 responses)</i>
<p>Exercise <i>(4 responses total)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the past people had three big meals because they worked outside a lot. Now they eat three big meals but no outside work or exercise (sedentary). Adults used to play sports as youth but don't any longer. <i>(2 responses)</i> • There are sometimes no sidewalks, or light at night for security to walk, or gyms close to several communities which makes it difficult to be physically active. <i>(2 responses)</i>
<p>Mental Health <i>(3 responses total)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental health is a very important issue. People may not be eating at all or are emotionally disturbed and troubled, and these can have negative effects on eating patterns and physical health. <i>(3 responses)</i>
<p>Advertisement/Marketing <i>(2 responses total)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unhealthy food marketing which is targeted toward children, teens, and adults can contribute to having a poor diet. <i>(2 responses)</i>



Question 4. What helps you lead a healthy lifestyle?

A total of 127 responses were collected, with personal accountability and consistency as the greatest opportunity, followed by a need for increased awareness and education on food and health, and practical advice on what to do and how to do it. Additional barriers and opportunities are described below.

“Small changes become lifestyle changes.”

Topic	Summary Statements
<p>Overcoming Complacency/Bad Habits (52 responses total)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holding myself accountable and consistent with healthy habits. Discipline and self-control. (24 responses) • Changing eating habits. Making small changes that become lifestyle changes. (9 responses) • Being prepared and planning ahead of time. (4 responses) • Receiving a poor health diagnosis or knowing someone who had a health problem. (4 responses) • Self-care. Inspiration from seeing healthy lifestyle changes and having a better quality of life. (5 responses) • Being more creative and opened minded when it comes to food options or physical activity. (3 responses) • Having a support system. (2 responses) • Being a role model to my children. (1 response)
<p>Education (32 responses total)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing awareness around food through nutritional education such as education programs for all ages; development of simple, factual information on food, nutrition, and health; and generating interest in communities through increased awareness of the relationships between food and health, and events. (26 responses) • Develop an increased understanding of how to read food labels. (6 responses)
<p>Accessibility/Availability (16 responses total)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having increased access to healthier options through grocery stores, grocery delivery, organic grass-fed options, restaurant choices, and food vendors. (11 responses) • Growing our own food or teaching people how to grow their own food. (4 responses) • Knowing your farmer or the person that is growing your food. (1 response)
<p>Culture/Community (10 responses total)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having an accountable community and supportive environment where people care about one another. (3 responses) • Having open discussions where everyone comes to the table. (3 responses) • Raising awareness to and for the community. (3 responses) • Knowing that healthy food makes healthy communities. (1 response)
<p>Exercise (5 responses total)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical activity. (5 responses)

Family <i>(5 responses total)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breaking generational cycles and being a good role model by exposing myself and family to healthier choices. <i>(3 responses)</i> • Having a family member with health problems or had a health scare. <i>(1 response)</i> • Faith. <i>(1 response)</i>
Money <i>(4 responses total)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having enough income to allow greater flexibility in food choices and being able to budget for healthier meals. <i>(4 responses)</i>
Time/Convenience <i>(2 responses total)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finding a time during the day to exercise and make healthier eating decisions. (ex. meal prep) <i>(2 responses)</i>
Advertisement/Marketing <i>(1 response total)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing communication. <i>(1 response)</i>

SUMMARY OF RESPONSES FROM POSTERS

Poster 1. Food is...

Participants were asked to complete the phrase “Food is...” then responses were represented as a word cloud as illustrated below, with words occurring more frequently in larger font size. *(34 responses total)*



Poster 2. What would encourage/discourage you from participating in a food/nutrition research study?

What would encourage you? (23 responses total)

Topic	Summary Statements
Helping Others <i>(5 responses total)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having a positive impact on the health of others in the community. <i>(4 responses)</i> • Increase representation of African Americans in nutrition research to better inform treatment options. <i>(1 response)</i>
Financial incentive <i>(3 responses total)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding to help incentivize participation. <i>(2 responses)</i> • Free lab work. <i>(1 response)</i>
Receiving Results <i>(3 responses total)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desire to stay healthy and know your health status. <i>(2 responses)</i> • Results provided back to community to benefit them. <i>(1 response)</i>
Addressing Structural Issues <i>(2 responses total)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand how issues such as racism/poverty impact health. <i>(1 response)</i> • Strengthen programs that connect people with local farmers. <i>(1 response)</i>
Having a Partner <i>(2 responses total)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participating with other community members or partners. <i>(2 responses)</i>
Access to Learning Tools <i>(1 response total)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having a learning tool that assists with getting and staying healthy. <i>(1 response)</i>

What would discourage you? (7 responses total)

Topic	Summary Statements
Being Labeled as Unhealthy <i>(3 responses total)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear of being identified as not healthy. <i>(2 responses)</i> • A framework that blames the individual for their diet. <i>(1 response)</i>
Time <i>(2 responses total)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not enough time to participate. <i>(1 response)</i> • Time of year relative to local or national holidays/observances. <i>(1 response)</i>
Fear of failure <i>(1 response total)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not having enough focus and discipline to complete the study. <i>(1 response)</i>
Lack of trust <i>(1 response total)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People using my data for research. <i>(1 response)</i>



Poster 3. Share a piece of advice regarding food and health that was passed down to you.



SUMMARY OF CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

From the outset of discussion, it was clear from community members that food is more than just an essential source of nutrients and energy. They shared how food is woven into every facet of their lives, playing a key role in social interactions, physical and mental well-being, and culture. They also shared how food can be a source of great joy and pleasure, but it can also contribute to poor health and diet-related chronic diseases. They understood that where people are born, live, learn, work, play, and age, can have an impact on their health and quality of life outcomes and risks. The two sections below summarize the key challenges and opportunities identified by community members in regard to improving health through food and nutrition.

Challenges to Healthy Eating

The food environment, including availability and accessibility of food, family eating patterns, social interactions and shared interests in food, and cultural factors such as traditional meals, holidays, and festivals, all contribute to shaping the eating patterns of individuals and communities. Once eating patterns and habits are established, they can be very difficult to change. Primary barriers to healthy eating include low availability and accessibility of healthy foods, a lack of interest and willpower to change established eating habits, and a lack of education on healthy options and how to prepare them. People generally eat what is available in the local community, and in addition to a decline in the number of stores selling fresh produce, there has also been a reduction in alternative local options such as farmers markets, fruit stands, and mobile food trucks. These losses have been accelerated by the pandemic.

Lack of personal transportation, especially for older adults, decreases opportunities to travel to purchase food, and healthy foods often costs more and provide smaller portion sizes than less healthy options. It's important to identify healthy alternatives that are enjoyable, taste good, and are socially and culturally acceptable. But the fast pace of life and being busy with work, school, and taking care of others does not leave much time to prepare healthy meals.

Opportunities for Improving Health Through Food and Nutrition

The greatest opportunity identified by community members for improving health through food and nutrition is to increase the availability and accessibility of healthy and affordable foods. It's also important to have a personal commitment to living a healthy lifestyle and staying accountable and consistent with healthy eating habits. Making small changes can lead to lifestyle changes, and seeing improvements in quality of life can be motivating. Having a supportive community or relationships is important for consistency and eating together as a family can encourage healthy eating patterns carried forward by children into adulthood. There is a significant need for increased education at all levels, including for children, in order to improve awareness and generate interest in the importance of food and health. There is often an overwhelming amount of information available, which can be contradictory and confusing. Simple, related, and practical information, as well as recipes and instruction on how to prepare healthy, culturally, and regionally acceptable meals, is needed.

To address local food accessibility and availability, the ideal solution is to increase availability of healthy foods at both stores and restaurants. Alternative options can also be considered, including farmers markets, community gardens, or meal delivery. In many cases, these, and other resources, such as non-

profits and other organizations, are already filling the gaps in communities; they just need to be properly resourced to be more effective and sustainable. Federal nutrition assistance programs are helpful and important for providing financial assistance for purchase of healthy foods. Finally, exercise, proper nutrition, and rest are key ingredients to living a healthy lifestyle, but it's important to have access to safe recreation areas, gyms, or other facilities, which has been a limiting factor in low economic areas.

SHARING INFORMATION AND CONDUCTING RESEARCH

A key goal for this engagement event was to build trust and establish two-way communication between those working to support food and nutrition security in communities, and community members themselves. Achieving this goal provides greater insight to the real-world challenges around food and nutrition and how to address them. In many cases, there is scientific information already available that can inform and support community needs. To increase effectiveness of sharing information with communities, it is helpful to know what sources of information are used most frequently to find information on food, nutrition, and health. A survey of community members revealed that the top five most used sources were friends, family, health professionals, browsing online, and social media.

In other cases, community needs are best served through new research efforts that deliver results that are tailored specifically for them. From our analysis of responses provided on posters, factors that motivate community members to participate in research include the opportunity to have a positive impact on the health of others in the community and increasing representation of African Americans in nutrition research to better inform treatment options. Factors that would discourage their participation include being labeled as unhealthy, participating in a study that blames individuals for their diet, and not sharing the study results with them.

NEXT STEPS

Information gathered through this engagement will be used by SUAREC to improve and enhance their programs and activities that support health and well-being in the local community; USDA will use the information to inform future research, education, Extension, and other program efforts; and others in the broader research and nutrition security area, including funding organizations, can use the insights and lived experience captured here to develop more impactful programs and solutions that improve community health and well-being. By partnering together, with a foundation built on trust, understanding the culture, and fostering effective two-way communication, we can accelerate progress towards a shared goal of improving health through food and nutrition and reducing the burden of diet-related chronic diseases for all individuals, families, and communities in this country.



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APPENDIX 1 – Meeting Agenda.

7:00 to 8:00 AM	Host teams arrive / Exhibitors set up Share Fair tables
8:00 to 9:00 AM	Doors open for participants / Registration / Share Fair open
9:00 to 9:20 AM	Meeting begins
9:00 to 9:10 AM	Welcome from Southern University <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dennis J. Shields, System President• Dr. Orlando F. McMeans, Chancellor-Dean
9:10 to 9:20 AM	Welcome from USDA <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dr. Chavonda Jacobs-Young, Under Secretary for Research, Education, and Economics
9:20 to 10:00 AM	World Café Round 1
10:00 to 10:30 AM	Context talks (10 minutes each. Moderated by USDA Deputy Under Secretary for Research, Education, and Economics Sanah Baig) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Alana Rhone, M.A., USDA Economic Research Service, “A Closer Look into Food Access and Health Disparities”• Dr. Fatemeh Malekian, SUAREC, “Center of Excellence for Nutrition, Health, Wellness and Quality of Life”• Dr. John Dyer, USDA Research, Education, and Economics, “USDA Programs and Resources that Support Food and Nutrition Security”
10:30 to 10:45 AM	Break / Share Fair open
10:45 to 11:30 AM	World Café Round 2
11:30 to 11:50 AM	Lunch
11:50 to 12:20 PM	Stories for Better Health <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dr. Jacobs-Young shares personal story about food and health• Invites other audience members to share.• Promotes Story Booth for recording personal stories
12:20 to 1:00 PM	World Café Round 3*
1:00 to 1:40 PM	World Café Round 4
1:40 to 2:00 PM	Final observations <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Drs. Renita Marshall, Vice Chancellor, and De’Shoin York, Vice-Chancellor, Southern University• Dr. Jacobs-Young, USDA
2:00 to 2:30 PM	Meeting ends <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Crowd exits• Share air and Story Booth remain open until 2:30 PM• Time for participants to visit with University/USDA staff

***Note** – In a subsequent engagement with a different community, a cooking demonstration by a local chef was included between World Café Rounds 3 and 4 and the meeting was extended by one hour. This addition was well received.



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