



GWINNETT COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

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Nicole L. Hendrickson, Chairwoman
Kirkland Dion Carden, District 1
Ben Ku, District 2
Jasper Watkins III, District 3
Matthew Holtkamp, District 4

Official

Informal Presentation Minutes

Tuesday, February 18, 2025 – 3:00 PM

Present: Nicole L. Hendrickson, Kirkland D. Carden, Ben Ku, Jasper Watkins III, Matthew Holtkamp

1. Board of Commissioners

USDA and Urban Farmers

Douglas Deveaux and Handy Kennedy of AgriUnity and Marlina Tonge with USDA provided the Board an overview of vulnerabilities in Gwinnett, the importance of farming in the community and eligibility requirements to establish new farms. No official action taken.

Strengthening Our Farmers



**Strengthens Our
Food System**

Vulnerabilities in Gwinnett County

1. Food insecurity rates vary across Gwinnett County – affecting children, seniors, and those with disabilities at higher rates.

- A 48.6% increase in 1 year for rate of those experiencing food insecurity. An estimated 10.7% of Gwinnettians were food insecure in 2022, whereas in 2021 that rate was estimated at 7.2% - *Source: Feeding America (data used by Atlanta Community Food Bank).*
- A 12.2% increase in 1 year for the average meal cost in Gwinnett. In 2022 an average meal cost was \$4.14, whereas in 2021 the cost was \$3.69 – *Source: Feeding America.*





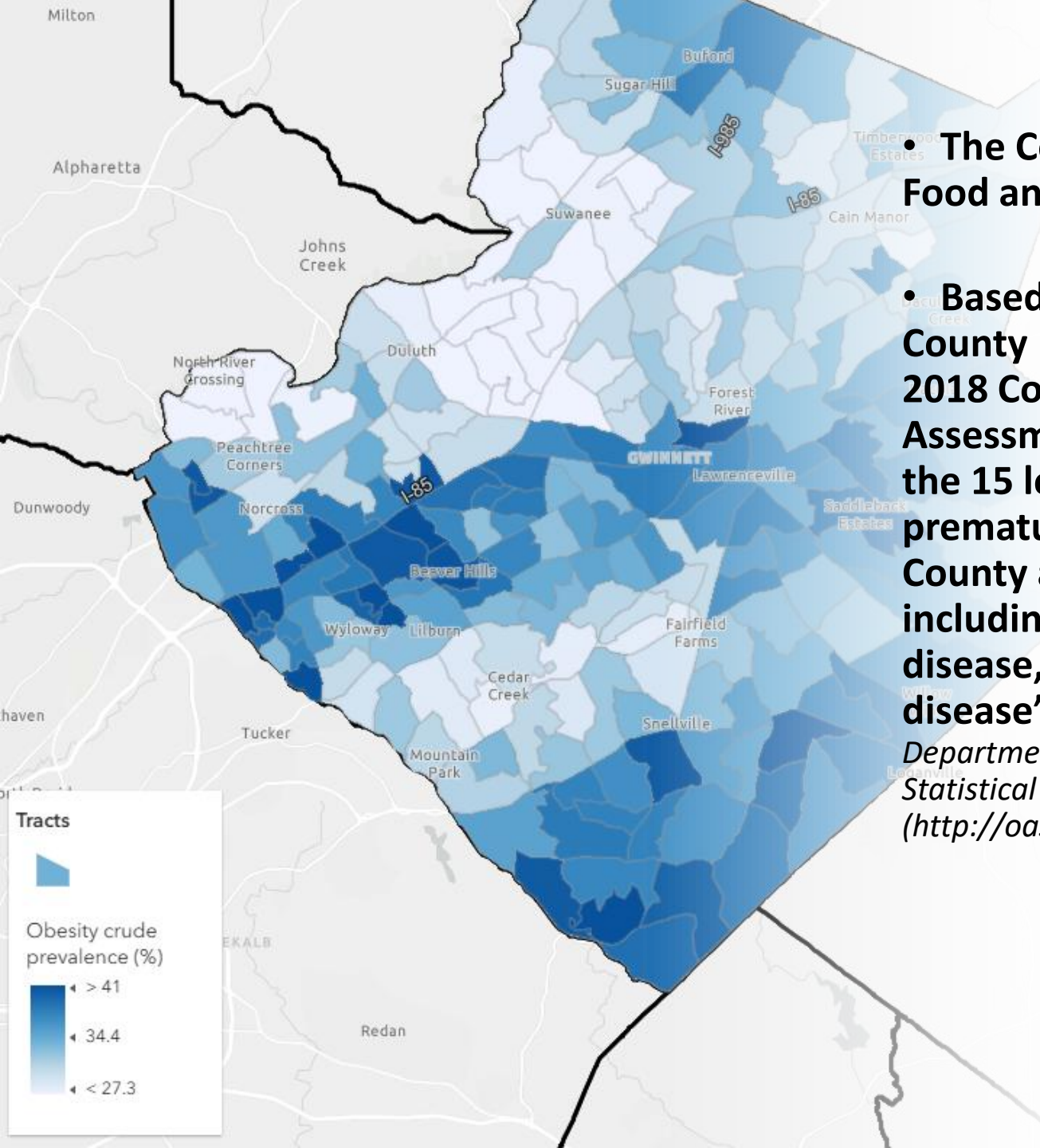
Gwinnett County

- SNAP Beneficiaries in 2022 was 10.0%, an 8.7% increase from 2021 which was 9.2% .

Source: USDA Food and Nutrition Service

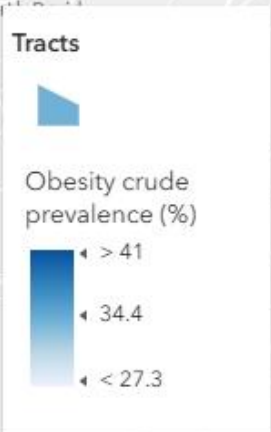
- WIC Beneficiaries in 2018 were 191,277.

Source: most recent data from GNR Health Department Community Health Assessments (CHA) and Community Health Improvement Plans (CHIP) published in April 2019.



• The Connection Between Food and Health

• Based on the Gwinnett County Health Department’s 2018 Community Health Assessment, “more than half of the 15 leading causes of premature death in Gwinnett County are chronic conditions, including cardiovascular disease, cancer, and neurologic disease”. *Source: GNR County Health Departments, Georgia Online Analytical Statistical Information System (<http://oasis.state.ga.us/oasis/>).*



ESSENTIAL ADVISORY

Medicine: A Presidential Advisory American Heart Association

D, FAHA, Chair; Seth A. Berkowitz, MD, MPH, Co-Vice Chair; Shreela V. Sharma, PhD, MPH, MS, FAHA; LaPrincess C. Brewer, MD, MPH, FAHA; Mitchell S.V. Elkind, MD, PhD, FAHA; Julie E. Gervis, PhD; Robert A. Harrington, MD, FAHA; Mario Herrero, PhD, MS, FAHA; Mark McClellan, MD, PhD; Jen Muse, MS, RD; Christina A. Roberto, PhD, MPH, FAHA

Low diet quality in the United States reflects a multitude of factors, 2 of which are food insecurity and nutrition insecurity. Food insecurity is defined as having insufficient access to enough food needed for a healthy, active life.⁷ Nutrition security is an emerging complementary concept that focuses more on the nutritional composition of available foods. The goal of nutrition security, as described by the US Department of Agriculture, is that “all Americans have consistent and equitable access to healthy, safe, affordable foods essential to optimal health and well-being.”⁸

- According to a Circulation published by the American Heart Association in 2023, healthy diets help prevent chronic disease such as: heart disease, obesity, and diabetes.
- Increasing access to fresh, local food can reduce healthcare costs and improve community well-being.

...recognize that FIM... ways to improve population health... nutrition policy and programs. FIM is... to, and does not replace, broader policies... health nutrition; food marketing, advertising, ... regulations; nutrition standards; and other work... is done and should remain outside of health care. In... general, more coordination between health care profes... onals and food and nutrition programs is likely to be... beneficial. The possibility of impact is significant: An estimated 90% of the \$4.3 trillion annual cost of health care in the United States is spent on medical care for chronic diseases, and for many of these diseases, diet is a major factor.¹⁰⁻¹² Thus, it is important to evaluate the potential of FIM as a cost-effective approach to improve health outcomes for patients with or at risk for diet-related me...

...ture on FIM and the broader literature... between diets and health...

How Local Farmers Can Help?

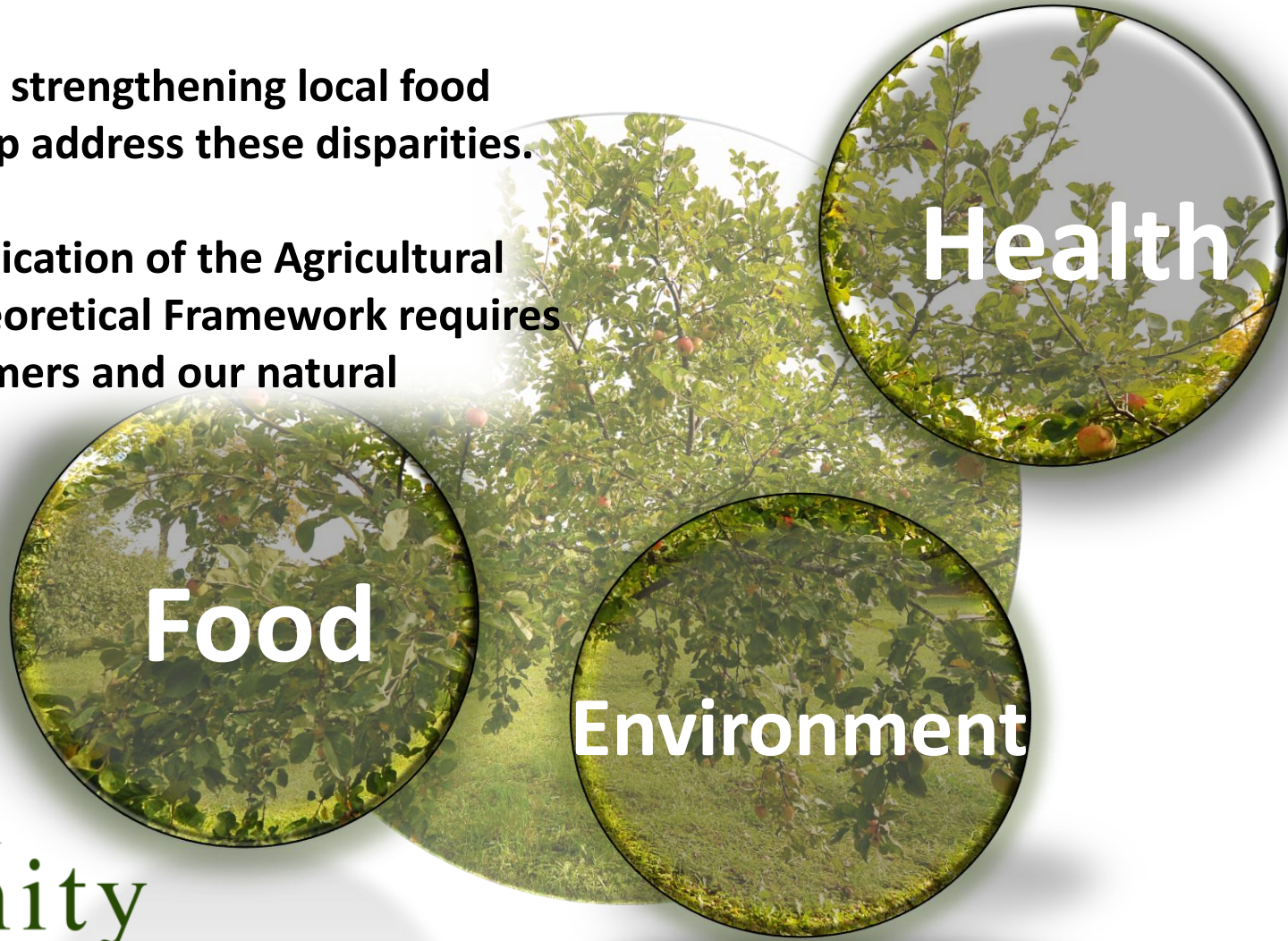
1. Filling in the gaps to Gwinnett County's Human Services Five-Year Strategic Plan - Objectives 1.01 and 1.02.
2. AgriUnity is a partner and seeks to meet these goals by connecting a network of certified farmers who grow local and regional food to fill the gap in the food system. By access to small producers, Gwinnett can help increase access to fresh, culturally relevant food for the community.
3. Expanding market access for small farmers strengthens food security.
4. Local agriculture supports economic development and sustainability.
5. Connecting small farms to institutional buyers (hospitals, schools, food programs) improves food distribution.



Economic barriers, transportation challenges, and limited fresh food access make healthy eating difficult.

Research shows strengthening local food systems can help address these disparities.

AgriUnity's application of the Agricultural Value Chain Theoretical Framework requires inputs from farmers and our natural resources.



AgriUnity

Strengthening Our Farmers, Strengthens Our Food System



From 2017 to 2022, an estimated 34% of farms in Gwinnett stopped producing.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2022); U.S. Census of Agriculture (2022)





AgriUnity

Small Farmer
Produce
Program

Presentation for
Gwinnett County Board
of Commissioners



Overview of AgriUnity

AgriUnity is a nonprofit organization committed to empowering small farmers by creating pathways to commercial markets that value high-quality, locally grown products.



Mission

We are committed to empowering small farmers by:

- Expanding fair market access to connect farmers with viable commercial opportunities.
- Promoting sustainable agricultural practices that ensure conservation efforts and long-term productivity with a focus on quality products and environmental responsibility.
- Strengthening local food networks to build community-driven food systems.



AgriUnity



Goals and Objectives

- Assist 63 of the 117 farms in Gwinnett.
- We aim to equip small farmers with the technical skills necessary to produce high-quality products that meet market standards.
- Our efforts are for expanding small farmers to connect and access regional commercial markets while promoting conservation practices that ensure long-term economic sustainability, protect the environment, and strengthen local food security for healthier communities and overall well-being.

Challenges Faced by Small Farmers



Limited access to commercial markets



Economic and social barriers



The decline of family-owned farms



High logistical and distribution costs

Key Objectives of AgriUnity



- Expand Market Access: Connect farmers with commercial buyers and direct-to-consumer channels.



- Provide Business & Agricultural Education: Training on farming, business management, compliance, and conservation.



- Strengthen Distribution & Logistics: Transportation, cold storage, and cooperative networks.



- Support Economic Growth & Sustainability: Fair pricing, waste reduction, conservation and environmental practices.



- Advocate for Policy & Community Engagement: Partnerships with governments and organizations.



Alignment with Gwinnett County's Objectives



1. Complementing Gwinnett County USDA - NRCS Extension Service efforts for our natural resources.
2. Creating an access point for producers to contribute to food security initiatives by connecting local farmers with underserved communities.
3. Opportunities for collaboration in food & health initiatives to expand equitable food access.
4. Potential benefits to the local economy and community health with small business market development and strengthening local food systems.

Questions for the Board

- What potential partnership opportunities can be explored between AgriUnity and Gwinnett County?
- How can Gwinnett County support local farmers through policy and programs?
- What steps can be taken to integrate AgriUnity's efforts with existing agricultural initiatives?





USDA – United States Department of Agriculture (Contains)

**Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS)
(NASS)**

**Agricultural Research Service (ARS)
(NIFA)**

Animal & Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) **Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)**

Economic Research Service (ERS)

Farm Service Agency (FSA)

Food & Nutrition Service (FNS)

Food Safety & Inspection Service (FSIS)

Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS)

Forest Service (FS)

National Agricultural Statistics Service

National Institute of Food & Agriculture

Risk Management Agency (RMA)

Rural Development (RD)

Rural Utilities Service (RUS)

Rural Housing Service (RHS)

Rural Business – Cooperative Service (RBS)



Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS)

- We are a technical agency
- *(Provides science-based technical assistance addressing on-farm environmental resource concerns.)*
- Also financial assistance programs
- *(Provides financial assistance to farmers to address natural resource concerns.)*
- “Helping People Help the Land”

Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS)

- Founded during the dust bowl to address soil erosion on cropland in 1930.

(Was called the Soil Conservation Service SCS)

- Now addresses natural resource concerns on:

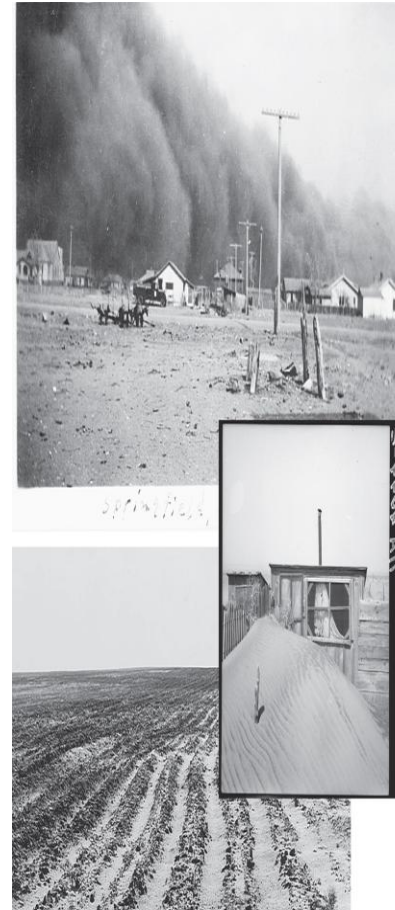
Cropland(including row crops, orchards, sod, hay, nursery, etc.)

Pasture (introduced forage) & **Range** (native forage)

Non-industrial private forest

Farmsteads (such as dairy and poultry facilities)

Natural areas



Resource Concerns

SWAPA + E

-
- **Soil** (prevent erosion, improve soil health)
 - **Water** (protect water quality, water conservation)
 - **Air** (minimize emissions of greenhouse gasses)
 - **Plants** (increase biodiversity, eradicate invasive species)
 - **Animals** (livestock, wildlife, T&E species)
 - **Energy** (



Financial Assistance

Programs

- Environmental Quality

Incentives Program is a voluntary conservation program that offers technical and financial assistance for working lands, including field crops, specialty crops, organic, confined livestock and grazing, and non-industrial private forest land to address a resource concern.

2-3 Year program

- Crop Land
- Forest Land
- Pastureland



Financial Assistance Programs

Conservation Stewardship Program

CSP is also a voluntary conservation program that offers technical and financial assistance that helps farmers maintain and improve their existing conservation systems and move to a higher level of conservation.

5-year program

- AG Land
- Forest Land
- Pastureland



Program Eligibility

- The applicant.
- The land.
- The resource concerns addressed.





Program Applicants Eligibility

- ✓ *A Person (individual)*
- ✓ *Legal Entity- LLC, INC, GP*
- ✓ *Indian Tribe*
- ✓ *Alaska Native Corporation*
- ✓ *Joint Operation (with signature authority)*



Program Applicants Eligibility Establishing Records Farm Service Agency (FSA)

Eligibility Forms

- Must establish farm records with local Farm Service Agency (FSA) & obtain a farm and tract number.
 - Proof of Identity – you may be required to show a valid state driver's license, passport or other personal identification, as well as provide your Social Security or Employer Identification (EIN) numbers, address and other related information.
 - Copy of the recorded deed, plat, or lease
 - Copy of the articles of incorporation, bylaws, legal power of attorney or partnership paperwork, if applicable
- *Form AD 1026-Highly Erodible Land Conservation and Wetland Conservation Determination.*
 - *Form CCC 941- Adjusted Gross Income Certification and Consent to Disclosure of Tax Information.*
 - *Form AD 2047-Customer Data Worksheet for New Producers.*
 - *Form CCC 901-Member's information for entity and joint operations only.*
 - *Form CCC 902-I Farm Operating Plan for an Individual*
 - *Form CCC 902-E Farm Operation Plan for an Entity*



Land Eligibility

- ✓ Own or rent and operating agricultural land

Agricultural operation may include:

- ✓ Conventional and Organic
- ✓ Commodity crops or Specialty Crops
- ✓ Livestock operations
- ✓ Forestry and Wildlife

Practice Specific requirements

- ✓ A site must be irrigated for at least 2 of the last 5 years to qualify for irrigation-related conservation practices or activities to improve water conservation.

Resource Concerns

- To be eligible for NRCS programs:
 - At least one resource concern must be addressed with an eligible conservation practice.
 - Ex. Inefficient Irrigation water use
Watering but hand (water hose, buckets)





United States Department of Agriculture

NRCS Planning & Practice





Funding Categories

- Limited Resource Farmer or Rancher (LRF) 90%
- Beginning Farmer or Rancher (BF) 90%
- Social Disadvantaged Farmer or Rancher (SD) 90%
- Veteran Farmer or Rancher (must be BF) 90%
- General 75%

Conservation Plans:

- **Considers the current management of your operation.**
(Site assessment.)
- **Are based on your goals and your site's resource needs.**
- **Are site-specific.**
- **Lists the future practices you want to adopt in your operation to improve conservation and to minimize environmental risks.**
- **Identify conservation alternatives that can protect natural resources and improve the sustainability of your agricultural operation.**



Practices that have small acreage scenarios

Low Tunnel System - protects crops from cold weather. (Small and mobile.)

High Tunnel System - extend the growing season & protects crops from cold weather. (6 ft. minimum height.) **May require a building permit.**

Micro-irrigation system (for cropped areas meeting irrigation history requirements).

Water Harvesting Catchment (ex. Catching water from a roof to use in a garden.)

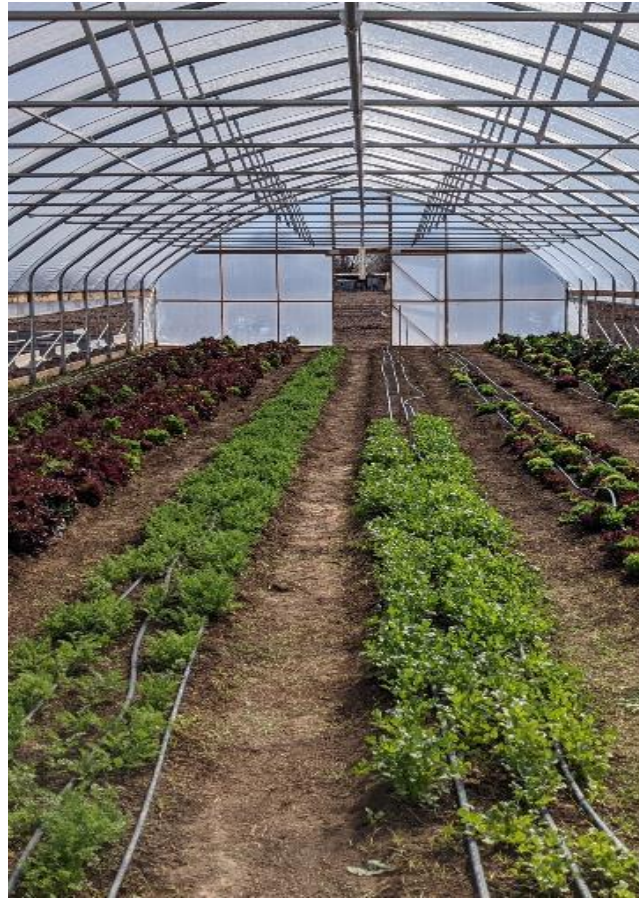
Raised Beds – for growing vegetables, fruit, etc.

Soil Amendment with lime-for

Composting Bins-

Seasonal High Tunnel vs Low Tunnel Considerations

- City zoning.
- Kit purchase costs.
- Crop height.
- Construction & repair.
- Operation & Maintenance.
- Irrigation.
- Year-round or seasonal crops



Conservation Practices



Composting Facility





Connecting with urban communities





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Our Theoretical Framework for Action

Guiding Frameworks for Sustainable Solutions

1. Agricultural Value Chain Theory

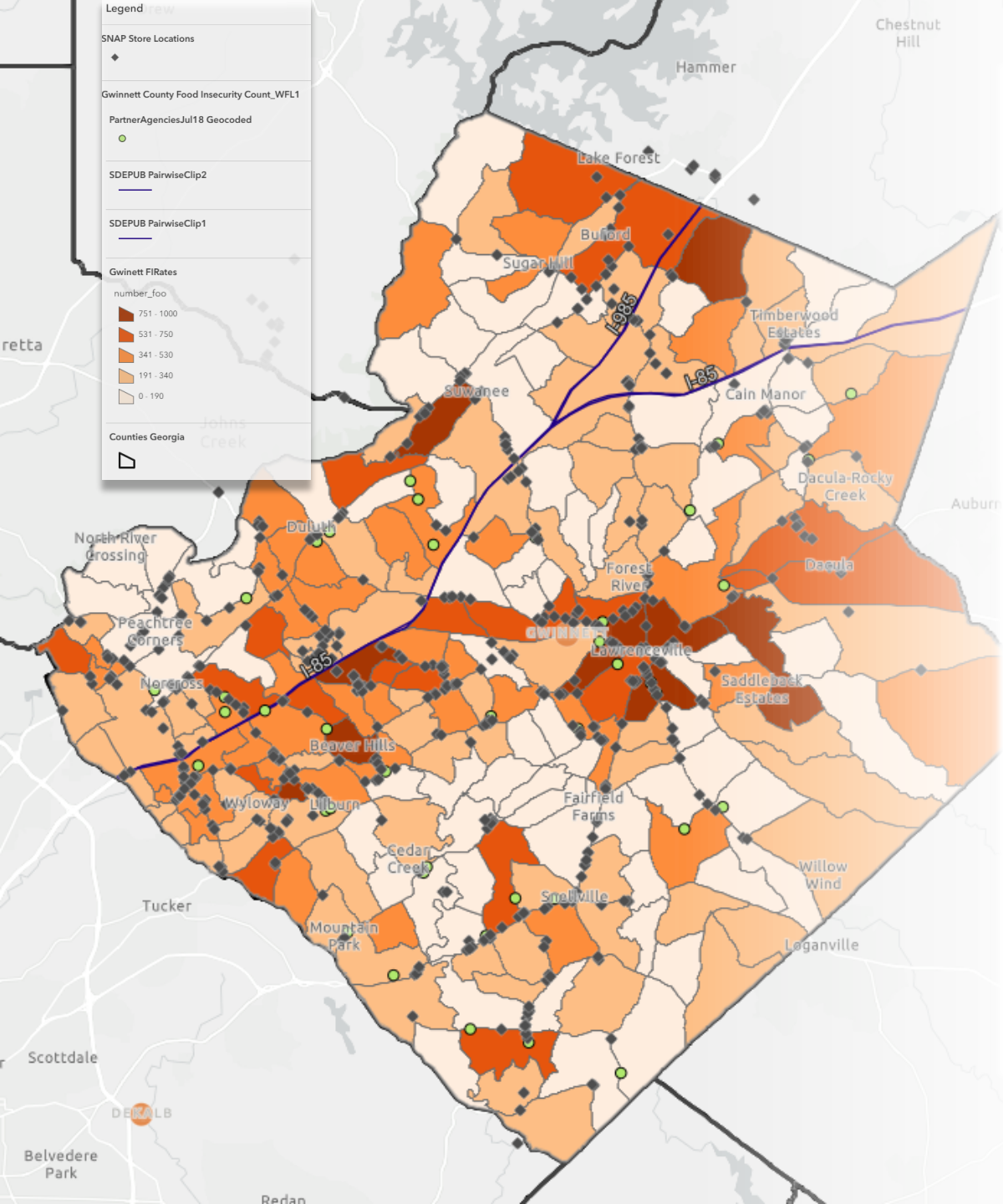
Examines how local farmers fit into the food system economy and environment.

- Market Creation: *Connecting local farmers to the community.*
- Nutritional & Economic Benefits: *healthy diet, reduced chronic diseases, reduced economic strain from healthcare services.*
- Policy & Institutional Support: *SNAP, food hubs, farmers markets, & government-backed procurement.*

2. Sustainable Livelihoods Framework

Focus on economic resilience and food security in vulnerable communities.

- Human Capital: *Food insecurity reduces productivity & health outcomes.*
- Financial Capital: *Job access, rising food costs, & local economic impact.*
- Social Capital: *Community-based solutions like food hubs and cooperatives improve resilience.*
- Physical & Natural Capital: *Expanding on sustainable farming practices that encourage/promote local food systems to ensure food security.*

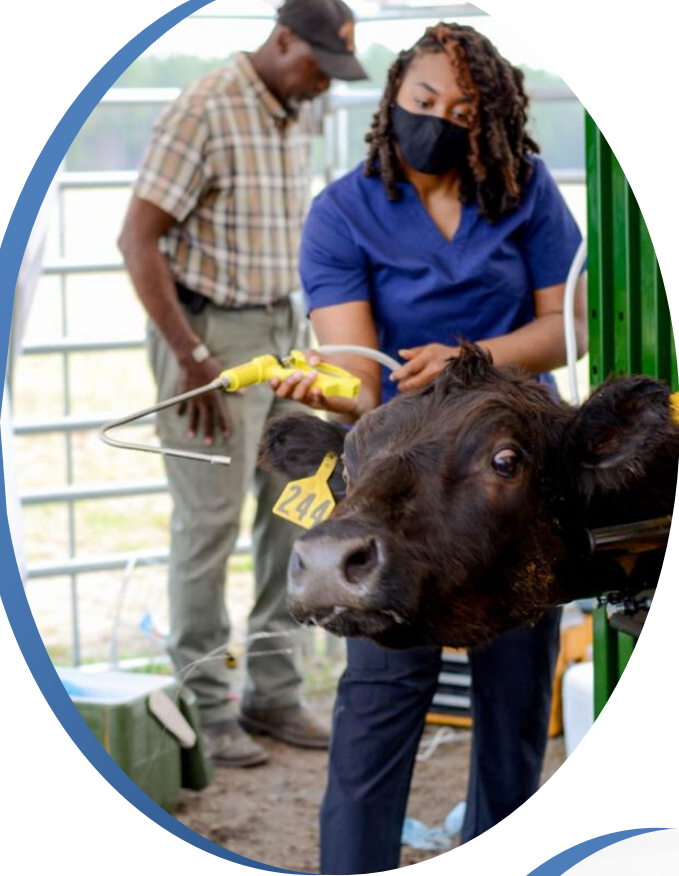


Mapping the Need - Identifying High-Impact Areas

This map highlights food-insecure areas and SNAP approved providers/partners addressing those with needs in Gwinnett County.

An estimated 67% of stores accepting SNAP identified on the map are convenience stores/gas stations, Dollar stores, pharmacies, and other small item providers.

Gwinnett partner agencies are primarily distributors



Proposed Strategy to Building a Sustainable Food Network

+

Recommendations: integrate local farmers into food assistance and healthcare programs.

•

Strengthen food hubs and farm-to-table initiatives.

○



Support improving infrastructure for distribution and storage to support fresh food accessibility.



Questions?

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