



The Black Belt Community Foundation

DATA IMPACT CENTER

# The Black Belt Bulletin

ISSUE 6 | MARCH 15, 2023 | FOCUS ON FOOD INSECURITY



## Food Insecurity in the Black Belt

“Food insecurity in the Black Belt is an issue that really hits home for us especially as it affects our children and their families across all of the areas we serve in 12 counties of the Black Belt,” said Felecia Lucky, BBCF president. Food insecurity is an ongoing and evolving dilemma that has detrimentally impacted the Black Belt region for decades and was exacerbated by the pandemic.

During the pandemic, BBCF shifted gears from running their community programs, to making sure residents in the region had meals everyday. They coordinated over 155,000 boxes of fresh produce, meat and dairy worth \$6.3 million to be distributed across 16 counties in the Black Belt. These efforts inspired an initiative called the Black Belt Sustainable Food Collective, whose goal is to develop a sustainable food collective in order to provide a permanent food presence across the Black Belt region. BBCF staff is helping to connect farmers, former USDA employees, higher education leaders, farming cooperative leaders, and concerned residents to serve on an action planning committee.

In 2022, the BBCF engaged in a food insecurity study involving a variety of methods, including surveys and community focus group meetings. They published the findings in a comprehensive report, which revealed not only a lack of overall production as a prevailing issue, but also highlighted problems and concerns with distribution and coordination of need relative to vulnerable populations; as well as a need for greater sources of fresh fruits and vegetables. In short, the report highlighted an overriding need for Local Food Source Sustainability.

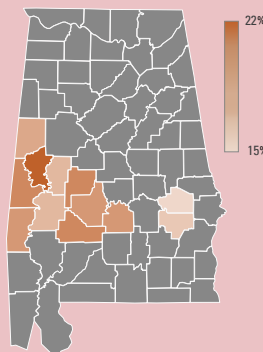
Through initiatives such as the Black Belt Sustainable Food Collective, the Community Grants Program, and the constant surveying of its constituents through surveys and group meetings, BBCF is making strides towards the alleviation of local food insecurity in the Black Belt.

Source: Alabama Education Lab online, September 2022

### FOOD INSECURITY IN ALABAMA

In the State of Alabama, an average of approximately 15% of the population lacks consistent, adequate access to food. In the Black Belt counties, this number reaches as high as 22%.

<b>Bullock - 16%</b>	<b>Hale - 17%</b>	<b>Perry - 20%</b>
<b>Choctaw - 19%</b>	<b>Lowndes - 19%</b>	<b>Pickens - 18%</b>
<b>Dallas - 19%</b>	<b>Macon - 15%</b>	<b>Sumter - 20%</b>
<b>Greene - 22%</b>	<b>Marengo - 17%</b>	<b>Wilcox - 20%</b>



### —LOCAL COMMUNITY-BASED PROGRAM— IV VETS: YORK, ALABAMA

“IV Vets” is a Local Food Source Sustainability program in York, Alabama (Sumter County) founded by La’Shun Wallace. It is a minority Veteran organization whose primary mission and focus is regenerative farming: to serve the food needs of communities in the Black Belt and fill vital entry point and distribution gaps—i.e., “food deserts”—that currently plague the region. Mr. Wallace says, “...This (sustainable food source) journey started from the moment I moved back home to York. We had nowhere in our community to get cost effective and healthy food. We must travel outside our own community to buy any type of fresh food just to make a decent meal: so, I contacted the Federation of Southern Cooperatives who guided me to become a farmer.”



Currently, IV Vets is in the process of purchasing a 120-acre ranch, which will allow the organization to facilitate USDA (et al.) endorsed technical training and to build USDA Commercial Meat processing and Commercial Fruits and Vegetables processing facilities; thus, enabling smaller local farmers to get their animal and produce harvests to market and distribution much easier. Operating with a mantra of “each one teach one”, IV Vets also endeavors to cultivate and empower the next generation of farmers by creating and promoting youth agricultural training programs throughout the county, with the assistance of 4-H.



Future leaders summer camp of 2022



Feeding cows in Sumter County



Farm visit to BDA in Uniontown, AL



Fabrication room at White Oak Pastures

