

# TOO MANY AMERICANS CAN'T AFFORD FRESH FOOD. SOLUTIONS ARE CLOSE TO HOME.

We asked Americans who live in food deserts how to fix the problem. Here's what they told us.

An Ipsos Point of View

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GAME CHANGERS



## TAKEAWAY POINTS:

1. Racism and rising prices both contribute to the food security crisis in the U.S., with lower-income Americans, particularly Black and Hispanic Americans, less likely to report that they can afford fresh foods.
2. People living in food deserts are most interested in local community-based solutions.
3. While majorities of Black and Hispanic Americans living in food deserts are interested in app-based delivery services to access fresh and affordable food or better public transportation to grocery stores, far fewer white Americans living in food deserts feel the same.

As Americans get together for the holidays, their dollar at the checkout counter doesn't go as far as it did last year. [Rising prices](#) and [the food crisis the pandemic worsened](#) are making it harder for people to access fresh and affordable food where they live. The consequences of not having access to healthy food options doesn't just stop at the dinner table—it has far-reaching implications. [How people eat](#) affects their physical and mental well-being, cognitive development, and educational outcomes.

Inflation and [systemic racism](#) are unignorable pieces of unequal access to affordable fresh food—what some experts call a food desert.\* Food deserts are geographic areas where communities have limited access to affordable, healthy food. Currently, [18.8 million Americans live in a food desert](#). Those communities tend to be low-income and underserved populations.

Food deserts are not a natural occurrence—historic racism and inequality often shape these neighborhoods from historical government-sanctioned redlining to restrictive housing covenants, the reverberations of which continue to play out every day in communities across the country.

New research from [Ipsos' KnowledgePanel](#) explores people's experience and knowledge around food deserts, finding that many Americans affected by this problem are enthusiastic about a wide range of solutions. Community-based solutions, like opening grocery stores with fresh affordable options or farmers markets, are some of the most popular fixes. Other options, like app-based delivery services, bettering transportation, or government subsidies, split Americans by race, with Black and Hispanic Americans largely more interested in these possibilities than white Americans.

\*The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines a food desert as a place where at least a third of the population lives greater than one mile away from a supermarket for urban areas, or greater than 10 miles for rural areas.

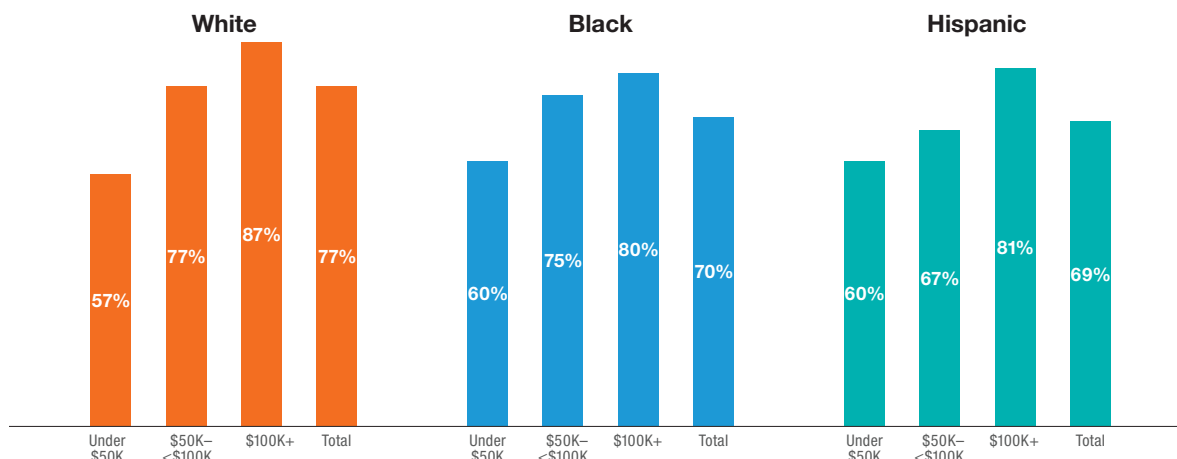


## The food desert landscape

Most Americans agree that they can afford fresh foods, though race and household income appear to influence whether they report being able to do so. For example, nearly all white Americans who make over \$100K (87%) report being able to afford fresh food. Compare that to white respondents who make under \$50K (57%). Similar discrepancies exist for Black and Hispanic Americans (Black Americans \$100K+ 80% vs. 60% Black Americans under \$50K, and 81% Hispanic Americans \$100K+ vs. 60% Hispanic under \$50K).

### Lower income Americans are less likely to agree that they can afford fresh foods

Percent who agree that they can afford fresh foods



Source: Ipsos polling

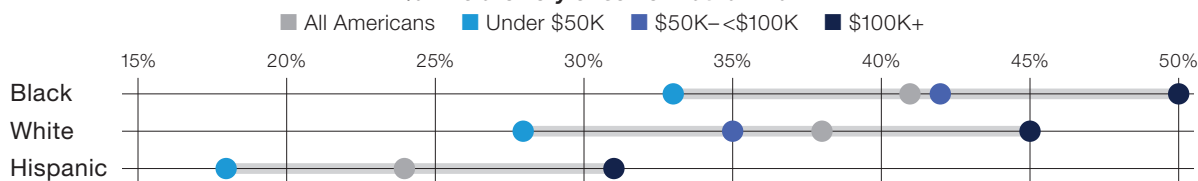
Even though most affluent Americans, regardless of race, can afford fresh food, higher-income Americans are more likely to be familiar with what a food desert is, pointing to a knowledge and communication gap around the issue. Hispanic Americans overall are least familiar with this term.

Other Ipsos research finds that familiarity with food deserts is particularly high among the Black community, in part because of the advocacy and awareness-raising work [Michelle Obama did on this issue as First Lady](#).

### Hispanic Americans least familiar with food deserts

How familiar are you, if at all, with the term “food desert”?

% who are *very or somewhat familiar*



Source: Ipsos polling



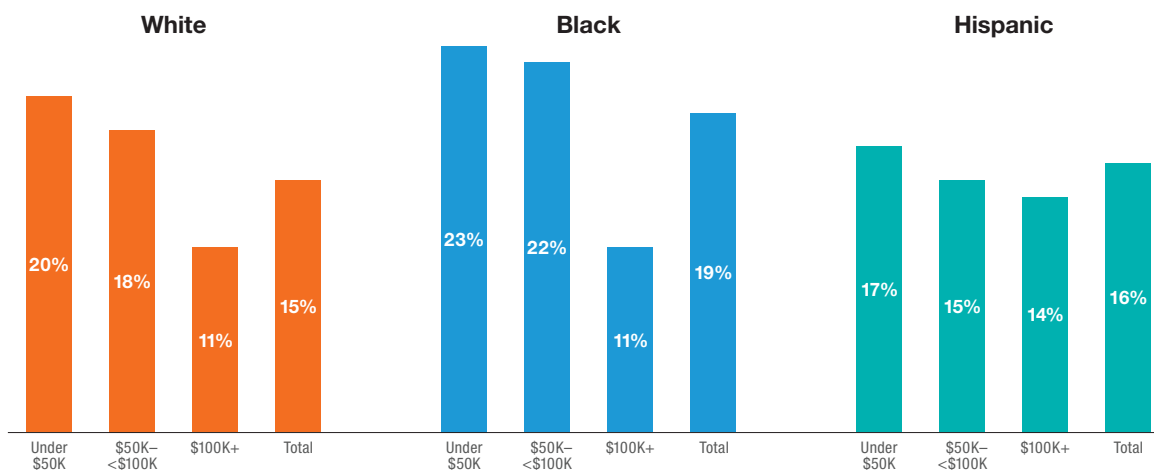
Building on that, a sizeable minority of Hispanic Americans, regardless of income, are equally likely to report that they live in a food desert.

This same pattern doesn't hold true for Black or white Americans. More affluent Black and white Americans are less likely to feel they live in a food desert than their less affluent counterparts. More qualitative research on how money and race intersect in food deserts may be needed to better understand these patterns.

Taken together, over one in ten white and Hispanic Americans and nearly one in five Black Americans report not living near grocery stores that sell fresh and affordable options. That translates to millions of Americans reporting that they live in a food desert—a glaring problem.

### Hispanic Americans, regardless of income, are equally likely to feel they live in a food desert\*

Percent who feel, based on the definition of food deserts by the USDA, agree that they live in a food desert



\*The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines a food desert as a place where at least a third of the population lives greater than one mile away from a supermarket for urban areas, or greater than 10 miles for rural areas.

Source: Ipsos polling.

Even as race and income play a visible role in access to fresh and affordable food, more higher income Americans report having access to potential solutions. Affluent Americans are more likely to live in areas where they have access to services that deliver groceries to their home, a possible solution to the problem of food deserts.

Racial differences are still present in people's ability to access delivery services. Namely, fewer lower-income Hispanic Americans report having access to these services. For example, 70% of white Americans making under \$50K have access to grocery delivery services, while about three in four Black Americans with household income under \$50K (74%) have the same access. By comparison, just 60% of Hispanic respondents who have household incomes under \$50K report the same access to delivery grocery services.



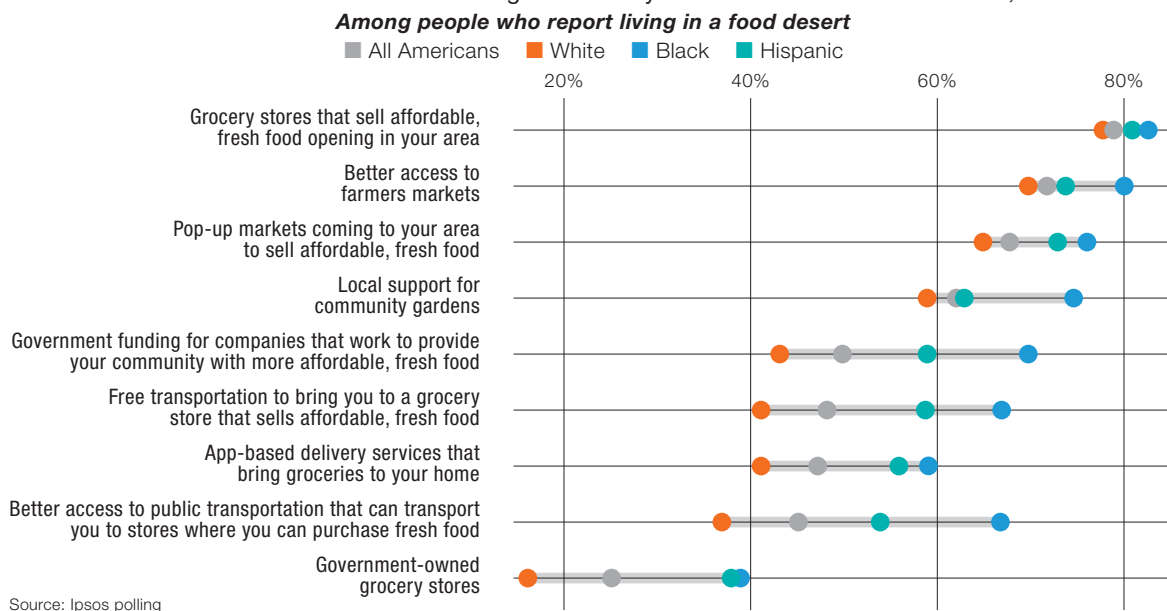
## Community-based solutions are most appealing to Americans in food deserts

Americans are open to many solutions. However, decisive majorities of people feel that solutions that make healthy and affordable groceries more accessible within a community would be the most effective answer to the problem of food deserts. That includes doing things like opening grocery stores that sell affordable, fresh food in their area, expanding farmers market access, and starting community gardens.

When Ipsos polling asked people who live in food deserts what solutions they'd be most interested in, many of the most effective solutions Americans identified are the fixes most people in food deserts are interested in, something that holds true across race. Some examples of what that could look like, includes opening grocery stores with affordable and healthy options (79%), giving people better access to farmers markets (72%), pop-up markets with affordable and healthy options (68%), and creating community gardens (62%).

### Americans most interested in local food desert solutions that expand access to affordable and fresh food

Percent who are interested in the following so that they have more access to affordable, fresh food



## More Black and Hispanic Americans living in food deserts than white Americans are open to app-based or transportation solutions

Even as there is a clear consensus among Americans in food deserts, regardless of race, for these solutions, other potential answers, like app-based or government support, divide Americans along racial lines, with Black and Hispanic Americans largely more interested in these options than white Americans.

White Americans living in food deserts are far more skeptical of some possible ways to alleviate food insecurity in the United States. Majorities of Black and Hispanic Americans living in food deserts are interested in either free or better public transportation to grocery stores that sell affordable, fresh food, government funding for companies that work to provide communities with more fresh and affordable food options, and app-based delivery services. Yet, only a plurality of white Americans in similar positions report being interested in these options.

This poll finds that white Americans living in food deserts are largely opposed to these solutions because they don't believe it will lead to affordable or fresh groceries for them. [Other polls](#) have found a similar lack of trust.

Still, there are many solutions to food deserts that majorities of Americans living in food deserts can get behind.

## WHAT'S NEXT:

- Opening new grocery stores is the most popular way people want to fix food deserts, but there are other options planners and leaders can try: Many want farmers markets and community gardens, as well.
- Platform-based offerings like food delivery services have people's interest, but not everyone thinks they're a long-term solution. There's opportunity to grow.
- Few Americans want direct intervention with government-owned grocery stores. People trust government subsidies for other solutions more.
- Regardless of the strategy, companies need to offer a strong communication plan that increases awareness and the benefits of access to healthy food options.

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