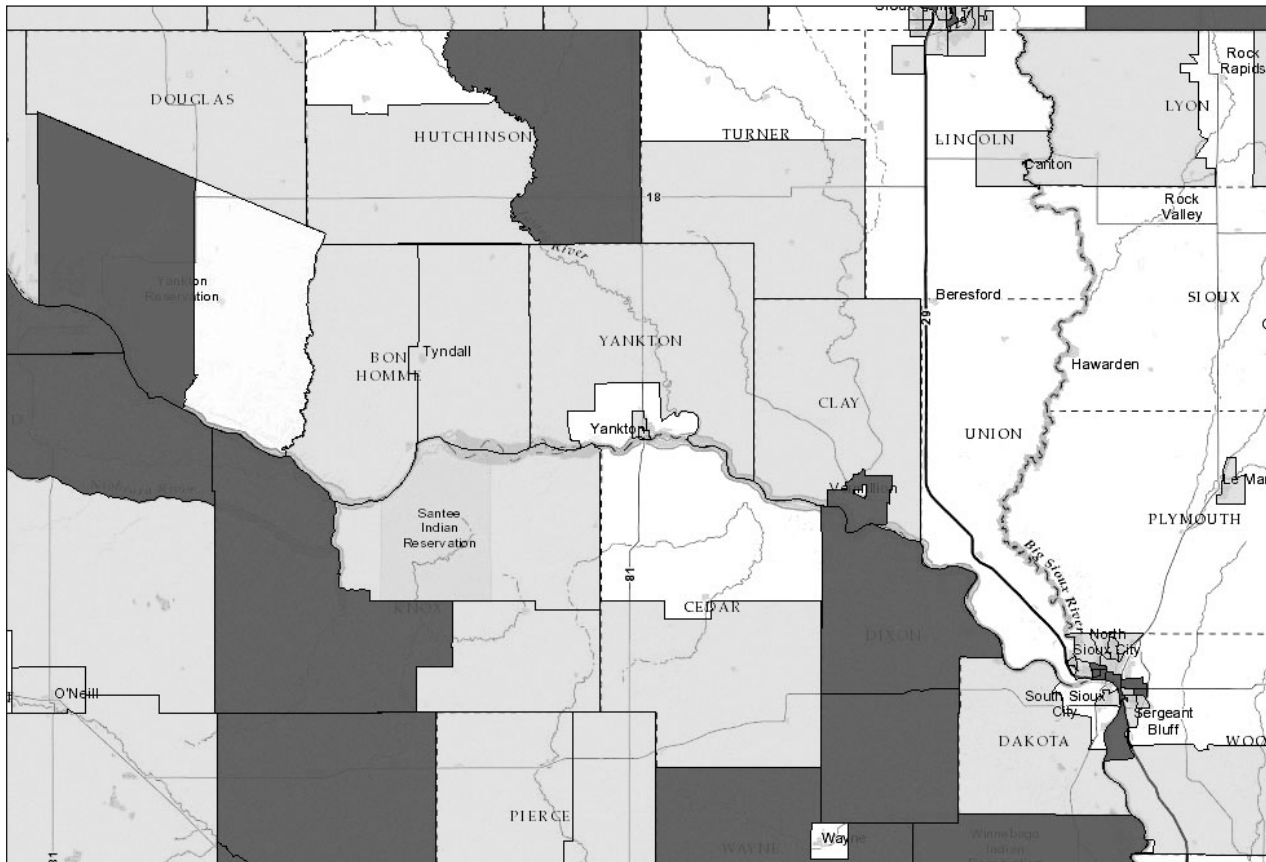


Coping With 'Food Deserts'



This map shows the presence of what the USDA calls "food deserts" — areas that lack access to healthy foods — and low-access food areas in the Yankton vicinity. The dark area show places classified as Food Deserts, while the shaded area show low-access food areas.



Cover Crop Term. Policy Webinar Set

The National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT) and the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC) will host an important national webinar on Jan. 23 to discuss the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) recent efforts to assure greater uniformity and clarity on its policy related to farmers who currently grow cover crops or may grow them in the future.

The webinar will address the critical question that the new policy is designed to answer:

When and how can cover crops be terminated without jeopardizing valuable crop insurance coverage of the cash crops grown with them?

This policy arose out of the concern that farmers planting cover crops could lose their eligibility for crop insurance coverage of the following crop. The new policy addresses this concern, using science-based cover crop management guidelines accepted across USDA agencies.

The webinar will feature speakers from the USDA task force that crafted the new cover crop termination policy, and there will be ample opportunity for farmers and other webinar participants to ask questions about how the policy will work on the ground.

The webinar is funded in part by the USDA Risk Management Agency through the Risk Management Education Partnership Program and will bring together four cover crop policy experts:

Rob Myers, Regional Director of Extension Programs for the North Central Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) Program, will introduce the topic by providing background on cover crop use and the need for termination policy change.

Tim Hoffmann, Director of Product Administration and Standards Division with the USDA Risk Management Agency (RMA), will discuss the policy as it relates to crop insurance coverage and compliance.

Norm Widman, National Agronomist with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), will walk participants through the new guidelines and how they implicate existing conservation practices.

Jeff Schahczenski, Agriculture Policy and Funding Research Director with the National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT), will kick off the extensive question and answer period by addressing some specific issues with the new policy's impact on grain farmers in the Great Plains, where wheat-fallow rotations remain a persistent practice.

Ferd Hoefner, NSAC Policy Director, and Sophia Kruszewski, NSAC Policy Specialist, will be on hand to moderate questions.

The Webinar will take place on Jan. 23 between 1-2:30 p.m. CST.

The first-half hour will consist of presentations by the four panelists, with the remaining time allocated for a question and answer session. The webinar is primarily geared toward providing answers to questions from farmers and farm organizations, but participation is open to all, including certified crop advisors, crop insurance agents, and others.

The webinar is free and accessible by visiting: https://attra.ncat.org/cover_crop

A copy of the cover crop policy can be found at this link: [Cover Crop Termination Policy](#)

Young Producers Conference Slated

HURON — South Dakota Farmers Union (SDFU) will host its 2014 Young Producers Conference Jan. 31-Feb. 1 at Deadwood. The two-day conference provides South Dakota's young farmers and ranchers with an opportunity to glean insight from industry leaders, network, and socialize. The conference is open to those who are 40 and younger.

"The average age of a producer in South Dakota continues to rise," said South Dakota Farmers Union President Doug Sombke. "This conference will bring together a diverse group of young producers and provide resources to assist them in their respective farming or ranching operation."

Conference speakers and presenters include motivational speakers, Malcom Chapman and Ryan Taylor; South Dakota Secretary of Agriculture Lucas Lentsch; South Dakota State Veterinarian Dustin Odekoven; Duwayne Bosse, marketing specialist; representatives from the Natural Resource Conservation Service and Farm Service Agency; and South Dakota Center for Farm Ranch Management Instructor David Koupal.

"We've brought together a lineup of experts to visit about a variety of relevant issues and topics on the minds of South Dakota's crop and livestock producers," said SDFU Rural Development Director Erin Wilcox. "This conference will also provide attendees with an opportunity to socialize and network with producers from all over the state."

To register, contact Wilcox by Jan. 24 at ewilcox@sdfu.com or 605-350-6365 ext. 118.

Food Banks, With The Local Foods Movement, Can Address Food Needs

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the first of a two-part series that looks at so-called "Food Deserts" and how local producers can address the needs of consumers in these areas.

BY RITA BRHEL
P&D Correspondent

Yankton County is fortunate in that most people have the income needed and the ability to access the local grocery store for healthy foods, but this is not the case for much of the rest of South Dakota or even the *Press & Dakotan* coverage area where fighting hunger means more than offering assistance to poor families.

Specifically in low-income areas, it's the types of food that matter most. Not all small towns have a fully stocked grocery store, and while convenience stores may offer bags of chips and pop, fewer offer milk or eggs and very few sell fresh produce. Consumers may have to drive sometimes considerable distances to buy a bag of apples. This lack of access to healthy food qualifies certain areas as "food deserts." Suzanne Stuka, director of South Dakota State University Extension's Food and Families program, says the average distance in South Dakota's food deserts is 50 miles to the nearest supermarket.

"Today, poor nutrition may not result in starvation but rather in obesity or other chronic diseases based on limited access to healthy food choices," said Barry Dunn, director of South Dakota State University's Extension service and dean of SDSU's College of Agriculture and Biological Sciences, which received a \$4 million USDA grant to lead a six-state effort to develop community-based programs to address rural food deserts. Stuka will be heading up the five-year project called Voices for Food.

"Our goal is to help communities identify solutions so everyone can have access to affordable and nutritious food in a socially acceptable manner," Dunn said. "Extension coaching, nutrition education and development of community food policy solutions are the tools which will help us achieve this sustainable goal."

The cornerstone of Voices for Food is the formation of rural food policy councils, which will bring farmers, school administrators, business owners, tribal members and others to the table to come up with ideas of what would work best in their local areas.

"We're doing more than educating the individual," Stuka said. "Our goal is to work with the residents of rural communities to understand what they see as opportunities to increase food access. If you want to make a bigger impact, you've got to work with the community. This will open the door for us to work in a bigger area."

The solution to food deserts is also more than providing food through nutrition programs such as SNAP or WIC, which continue to be important says Stuka, because one of the key elements of a food desert is lack of access to the places that provide healthy foods. Low-income people don't always have access to a reliable vehicle or public transportation.

"We're here to transition people beyond that, beyond just giving them food," Stuka added.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Access Research Atlas, the immediate area surrounding Vermillion, western Knox County and eastern

And most of these foods are provided through a mobile approach with drop sites at local churches and community centers.

"It introduces this idea that food banks are definitely a part of the local food landscape," Young said. "We find that once folks are introduced to these products, they really like it."

A key portion of the Sacramento Food Bank's new approach is education to empower those the program serves to change their habits and improve their lives through gardening, cooking, nutrition, English as a Second Language, GED and other classes.

"Another pillar of our food distribution program is not just focus on the distribution of foods in food deserts and challenged neighborhoods, but nutrition education," Young said. "Hand them a beet, for example, and people were like, 'What the heck do I do with this?' We grow a lot of kale here. We distribute a lot of kale here. We grow a lot of beets. I got to tell you that kale and beets are the hardest vegetables for people to know how to eat."

In addition to classes on growing, storing and cooking fresh produce, the Sacramento Food Bank hands out recipes to people to pick up foods, has a demonstration organic garden, has a community garden and offers volunteer mentors to consumers to help them through the learning curve of working with fresh foods.

"I had one person think that a red bell pepper was spoiled because she had only ever seen green bell peppers," Young said.

Foodlink in Rochester, N.Y., is another food bank that has shifted its focus from an emergency food source to a food hub. The change started during the recession when hunger rates increased exponentially, yet donations fell incredibly at the same time.

"That's when we changed the program to address the cause, poverty, rather than just the symptom: hunger," said Mitch Gruber, community food access manager for Foodlink. "Charity along will not end hunger. Hunger prevention requires more food access via market-based solutions, fostering an equitable food system and focusing on workforce and economic development. We believe all food banks should be involved in economic development activities."

Traditionally, food banks require people in need to come to the facility and rely on redistributing donations. Like the Sacramento Food Bank, now Foodlink offers programs to address the causes of poverty in addition to emergency hunger relief, such as classes and mobile drop sites.

"We're focusing on healthy instead of hunger," Gruber said.

"Our goal is to help communities identify solutions so everyone can have access to affordable and nutritious food in a socially acceptable manner."

BARRY DUNN

Hutchinson County all qualify through the original food desert measure, meaning that there is a significant low-income population and grocery stores are spaced more than 10 miles apart.

However, even if income thresholds are taken out of the equation, grocery stores are still located far enough apart to create accessibility issues in the entire region except for the immediate area surrounding Yankton, the northern half of Cedar County, the northern half of Turner County and Northwest Hutchinson County — so any low-income consumers in these areas may have difficulty finding healthy, affordable foods.

"Until now, urban food deserts have been the focus of most research," Stuka said. "As those of us in rural states know, a rural food desert in South Dakota or Nebraska looks much different than an urban food desert in Los Angeles."

Still, there may be some lessons to learn from. The National Good Food Network, a project of the Wallace Center in Arlington, Va., hosted a discussion on how the local foods movement has been able to help reduce hunger in some areas through innovative nutrition assistance programs like the Sacramento Food Bank and Family Services in Sacramento, Calif., led by Blake Young.

The Sacramento Food Bank offers more than emergency food to families but clothing and baby items. The food bank relies on just 2 percent government funding and 98 percent donations.

Seven years ago, the Sacramento Food Bank conducted a needs assessment, which led to the closure of a less-used transitional living program and the opening of a local foods program. This also transitioned the food bank from a solely emergency food source to an opportunity to affect their local food desert. Today, more than 60 percent of the foods given out through the Sacramento Food Bank are local foods grown in a 60-mile radius.

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