

Access to Healthy Food in Florida

Presentation to the Senate Committee on Agriculture

Daphne Holden, Senior Legislative Analyst



OPPAGA

Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability

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Project Objectives

1

Describe what is known about food deserts (low-income, low-access areas) and their effects on residents

2

Describe the incidence of low-income, low-access areas (LILA)

3

Provide detailed information about LILA areas in Hillsborough, Pinellas, and Suwannee counties

4

Provide high level policy considerations to expand access to healthy food in LILA areas

Methodology



Literature Review



Quantitative data analysis: statewide and for Hillsborough, Pinellas, and Suwannee counties



Fieldwork in LILA areas: Southeastern Tampa, Midtown St. Petersburg, and Suwannee



Interviews with 28 stakeholders

Background

Background

Low-Income, Low-Access Food Area

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Low Income

A census tract where the poverty rate is greater than **20%** or the median family income is less than or equal to **80%** of the statewide median family income

Low Access

A census tract where at least 500 people, or **33%** of the population, is greater than **1 mile** (urban) or **10 miles** (rural) from a supermarket or supercenter

Food Swamp: a ratio equal to or greater than five unhealthy food retailers to one healthy retailer

Background



Market factors affect access to healthy food

Supermarkets perceive locating in LILA areas as more risky

- ✓ Supermarkets have slim profit margins and are risk averse
- ✓ Perceived risks in high-crime areas
- ✓ Perception that workers need more training

It is difficult to be profitable in LILA areas

- ✓ Fixed costs greater in dense urban areas
- ✓ High land costs and zoning restrictions

Increased consumption of food from non-grocery stores

- ✓ Dollar stores, convenience stores and pharmacies sell less nutritious food with longer shelf lives
- ✓ These stores may claim more market share

Background



Known Effects of the Food Environment

- Navigating access to food may be difficult, time-consuming, and expensive
- Limited availability of healthy food sources may adversely affect the local business environment
- Improving accessibility of healthy food may not lead to better health outcomes

Statewide Findings

Statewide Findings



The number of LILA tracts has decreased slightly, but barriers to healthy food access remain

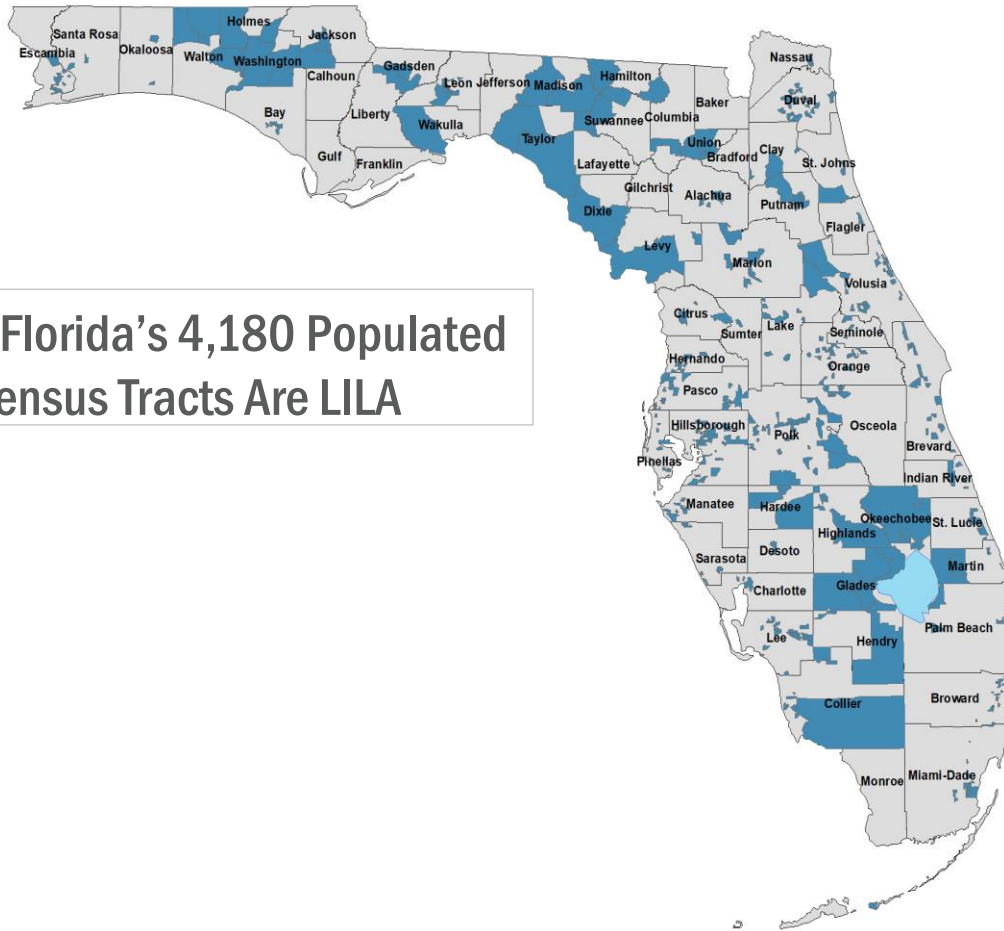
Trends since 2015

- ✓ Decline in number of LILA tracts
- ✓ Overall growth in retail sector
- ✓ Decline in share of population that resides in LILA tracts
- ✓ Decline in SNAP retailers

Population in LILA areas

- ✓ Approximately **13.5%** of Floridians live in LILA census tracts
- ✓ A larger percentage of urban residents live in LILA tracts compared to rural

Statewide Findings



**550 of Florida's 4,180 Populated
Census Tracts Are LILA**

Statewide Findings



Florida stakeholders report three main barriers to accessing healthy food

Residents may not seek healthy food, even when accessible

- ✓ Little interest or knowledge
- ✓ Unfamiliar foods
- ✓ Do not know how to cook or have a place to do so
- ✓ Cannot afford



Barriers to creating a better food environment

- ✓ Small profit margins
- ✓ Do not attract higher-income customers in some urban areas
- ✓ Do not have density to sustain food outlets in some rural areas
- ✓ Perishable food is not profitable

Lack of transportation

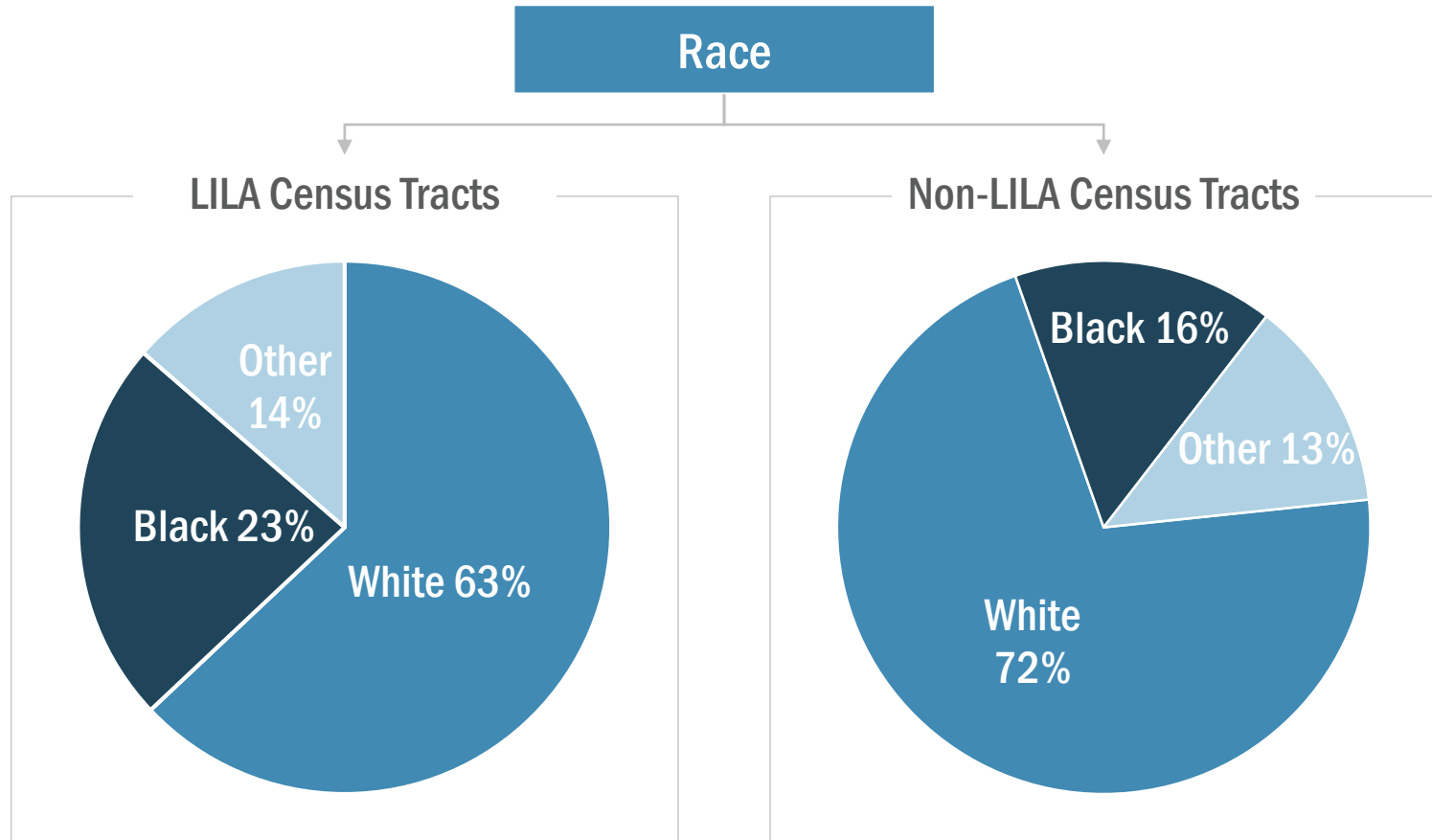
- ✓ Many residents do not have a vehicle
- ✓ Insufficient bus routes
- ✓ Accessible stores do not have healthy food



Hillsborough County Findings

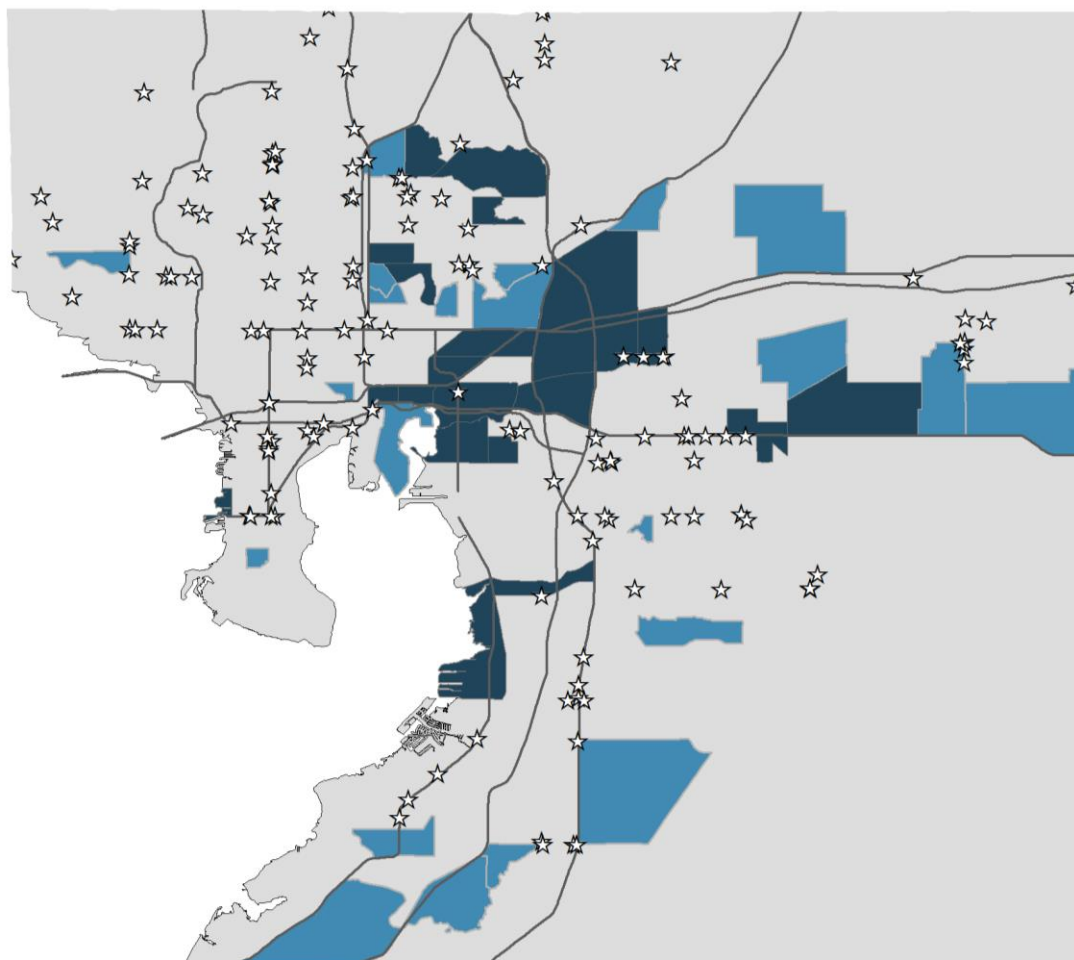
Hillsborough County Findings

Hillsborough County LILA tracts have a higher percentage of Black residents than non LILA tracts



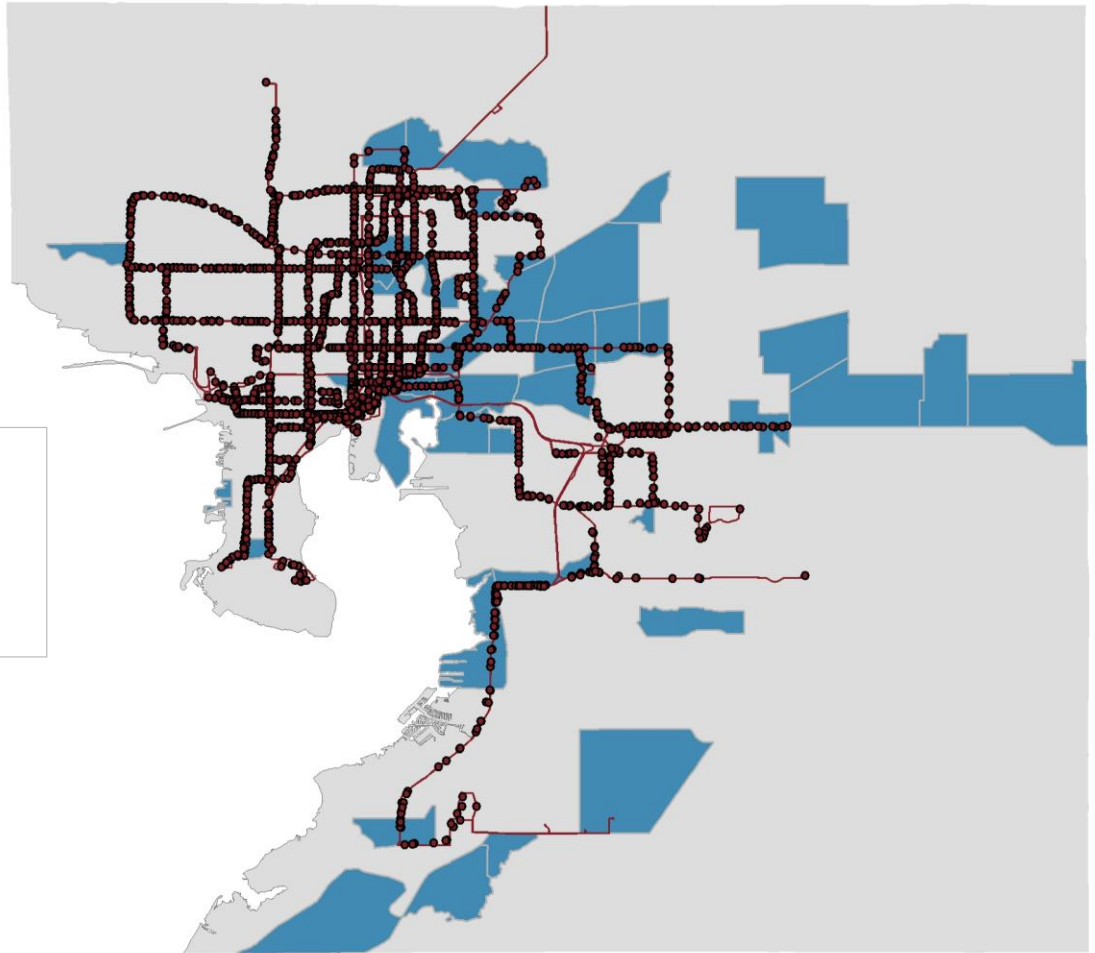
Hillsborough County Findings

- Approximately **13.8%** of the population lives in one of the 45 LILA census tracts
- Few large stores are in LILA/swamp census tracts
- About half of the county's LILA census tracts are also food swamps
- There has been a net gain of two LILA census tracts since 2015



Hillsborough County Findings

Many Hillsborough LILA tracts
have limited to no public bus
service



Hillsborough County Findings

Reported efforts to improve food environment

- ✓ Hiring Hillsborough county food systems program coordinator
- ✓ Screening for food insecurity in hospitals
- ✓ Providing charitable food options
- ✓ Helping people apply for food programs
- ✓ Creating community gardens and urban agriculture

Reported barriers to creating a better food environment

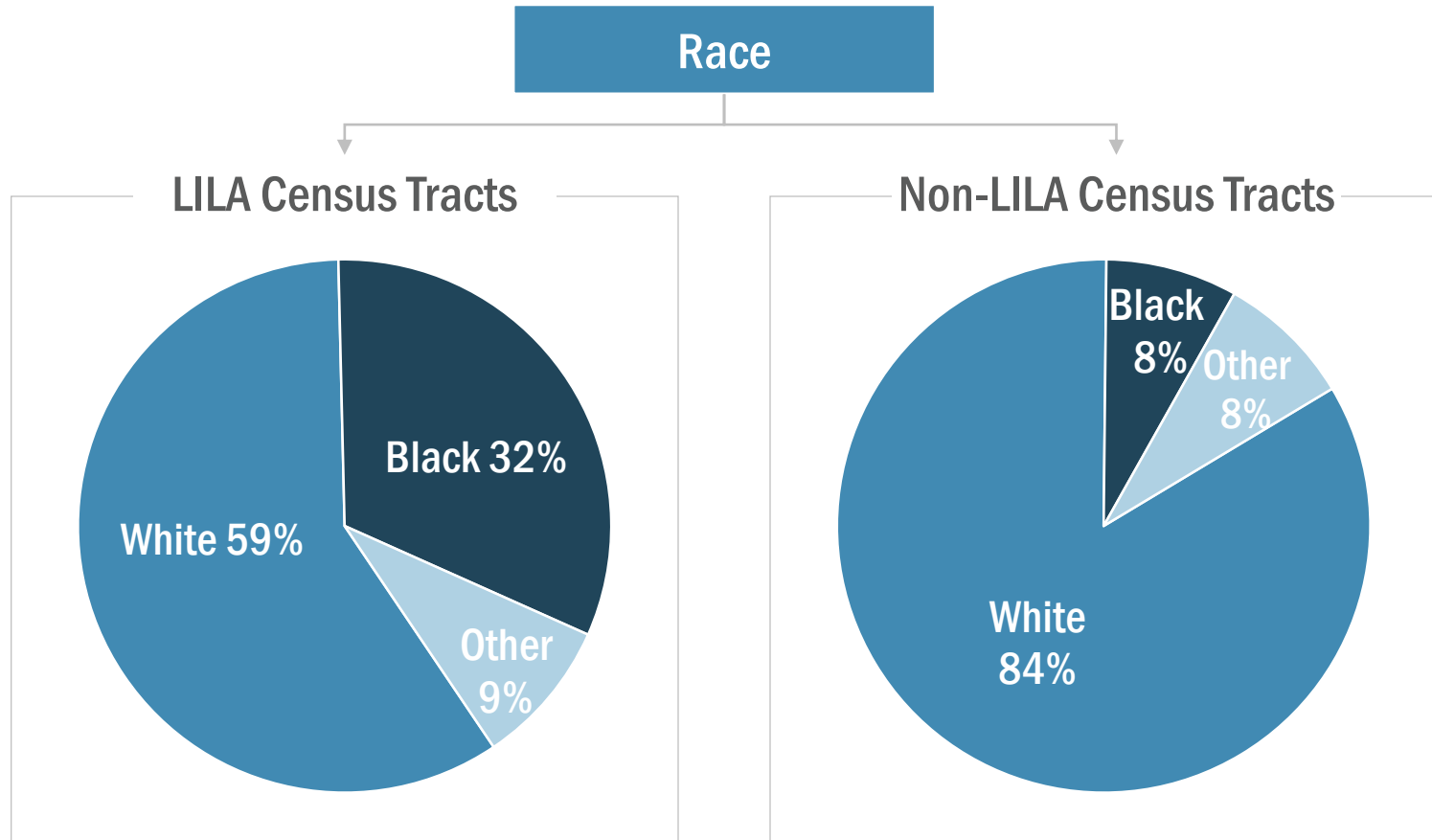
- ✓ Community gardens and urban agriculture often face high start-up costs



Pinellas County Findings

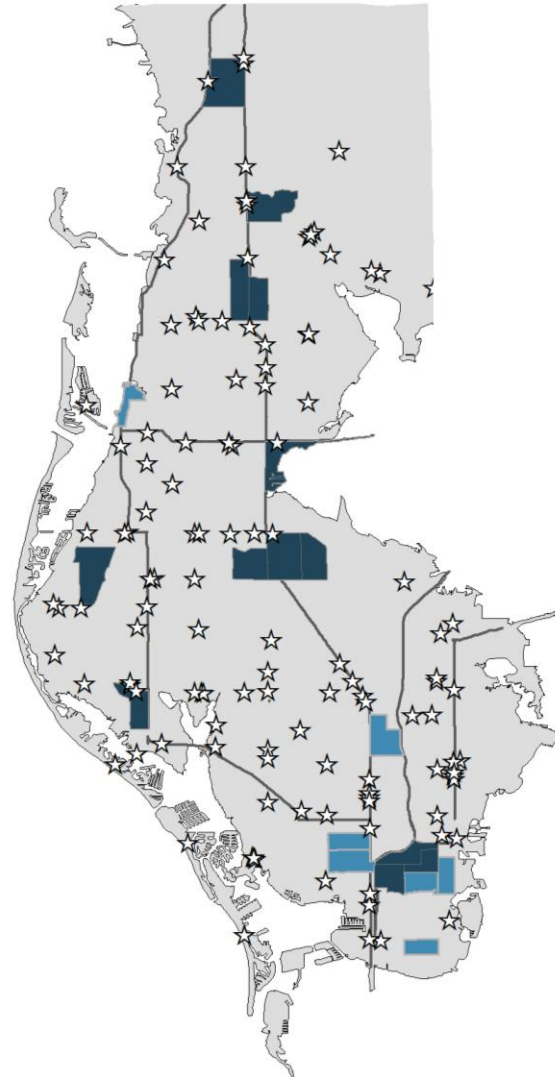
Pinellas County Findings

Pinellas County LILA tracts have a higher percentage of Black residents than non-LILA tracts



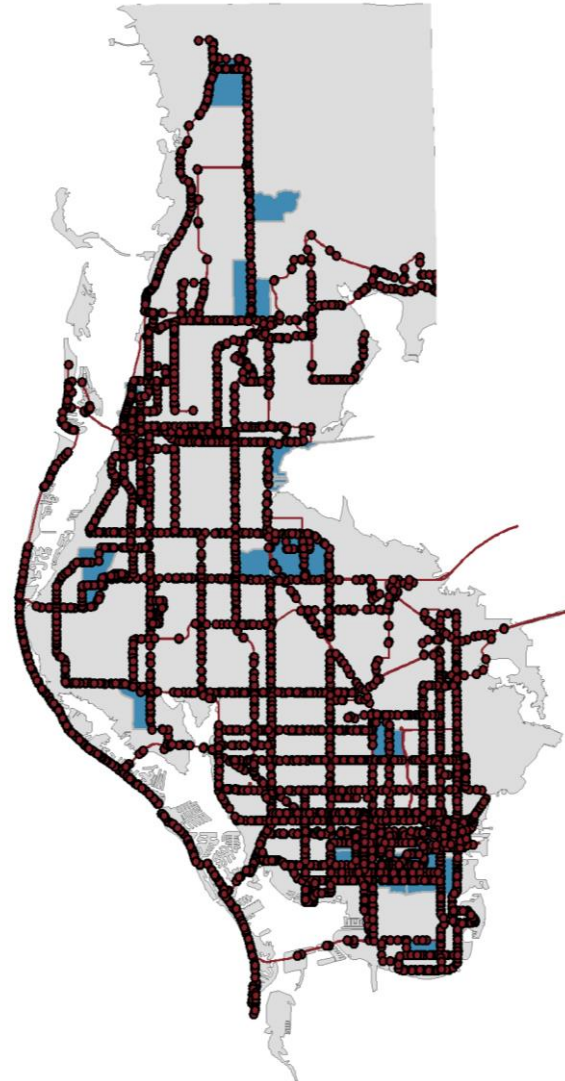
Pinellas County Findings

- 9.4% of the population lives in one of the 20 LILA census tracts
- The majority of LILA census tracts are also food swamps
- There has been a net gain of seven LILA tracts since 2015



Pinellas County Findings

Most Pinellas LILA tracts are well served by public bus service



Pinellas County Findings

Reported efforts to improve food environment

- ✓ Choosing retail grocer for a vacant property in Tangerine Plaza
- ✓ Establishing new city regulations to encourage urban agriculture
- ✓ Creating a food policy council
- ✓ Passing a food as a human right ordinance
- ✓ Creating urban agriculture programs

Reported barriers to creating a better food environment

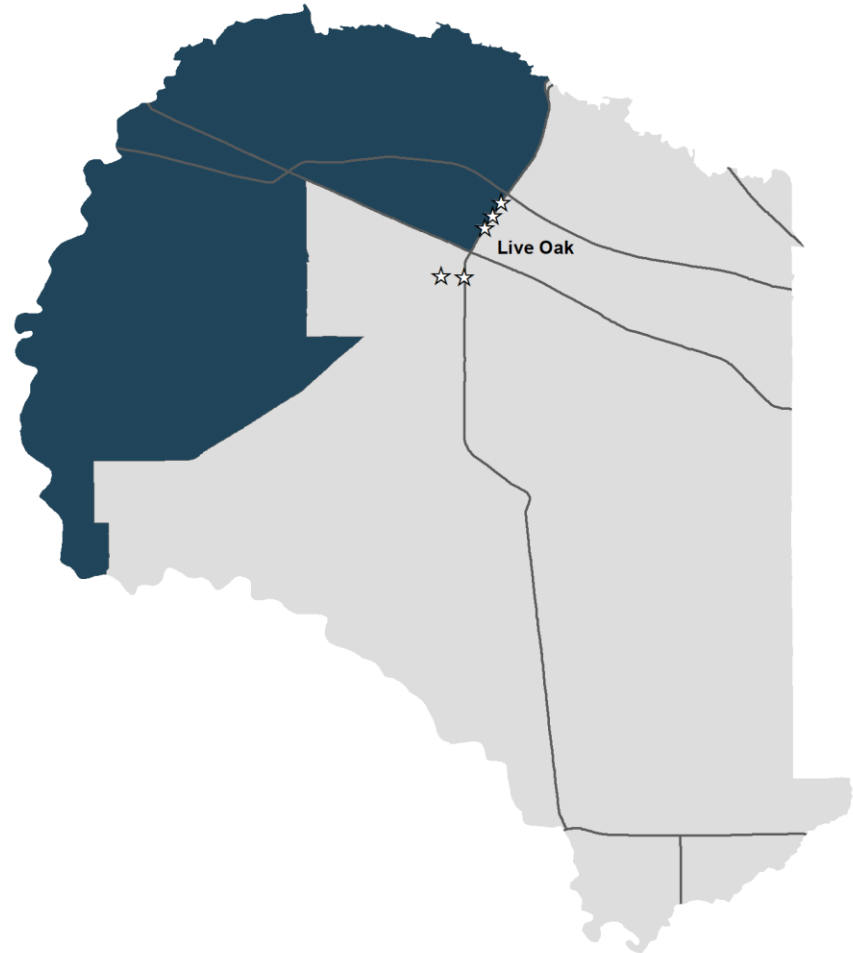
- ✓ High start-up costs
- ✓ Needs vacant property
- ✓ Marketing to consumers is difficult



Suwannee County Findings

Suwannee County Findings

- Suwannee County supermarkets are all located in or near Live Oak
- Two of Suwannee's seven census tracts are LILA, and 25% of Suwannee's population lives in those two census tracts



Suwannee County Findings

Reported efforts to improve access to food

- ✓ Using the food pantry in the northeast LILA tract
- ✓ Distributing food via churches



Reported barriers to accessing food

- ✓ Transportation barriers are primary
- ✓ Many residents do not have access to vehicles
- ✓ Stakeholders reported that many people do not know how to cook and healthy food is expensive

Legislative Options

Legislative Options

Enhance State-Level Planning

- Develop a comprehensive state food system plan
- Incorporate food access considerations into state agency strategic planning

Support Local Planning

- Develop model policies
- Provide local governments one-time assistance
- Guide and educate local officials on how to create land use plans that address hunger

Build on Existing Programs

- Expand highly effective programs

Support Targeted Initiatives

- Address root causes such as poverty with financial assistance and economic development programs
- Provide funding for local initiatives

Questions?

Contact Information

Emily Leventhal, PhD

Staff Director

 (850) 717-0525

 Leventhal.Emily@oppaga.fl.gov

Project Team: Michelle Ciabotti, Joseph Crupi, Daphne Holden, and Ana Prokos

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