

# None of Utah's new supermarkets filled a food desert

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**Nutrition » But other solutions, from urban gardens to food co-ops, can help residents access fresh food.**

Utah has two distinctly different kinds of food deserts: urban and rural.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture identifies 50 separate areas in 20 of Utah's 29 counties as places where residents don't have easy access to fresh, healthy and affordable food from nearby supermarkets or grocery stores. According to the USDA, food desert residents instead rely on convenience stores or fast food outlets, with fewer nutritious options.

That, in turn, can lead to poor diet and health problems such as obesity, diabetes and heart problems.

Utah's urban food deserts are small pockets that overlap heavily with areas where residents are socio-economically disadvantaged in other ways. The state's rural food deserts are immense, in some cases covering multiple adjacent counties.

But in both cases, "the issue of food deserts is intimately related to how people get around," said Sarah Hinnners, an urban ecologist and research assistant professor at the University of Utah's Department of City and Metropolitan Planning.

While rural residents are often more accustomed to driving long distances for their daily needs, Hinnners said, those living in impoverished urban areas are more likely to not own cars.

"So if there's not a supermarket within walking distance," she said, "they don't have access to food."

A new Associated Press analysis has revealed that none of the nine or so new chain supermarkets opened in Utah over a four-year period was located in food deserts, matching a national trend.

[Read the national story here: AP: Grocery chains leave food deserts barren](#)

The AP study included new supermarkets opened in Utah by Costco, Smith's Food & Drug, Sprouts Farmers Market, Target, Trader Joe's, Wal-Mart and Whole Foods between the end of 2011 and the start of 2015.

The AP analysis omitted Harmons Grocery, which has 15 Utah outlets, all but one of them on the Wasatch Front. Harmons opened only one Utah store, however, in the time period that the AP analyzed — its high-end City Creek store in downtown Salt Lake City.

A Salt Lake County official said looking solely at supermarkets misses the positive impact of a host of new farmers markets, urban gardens, community-supported local farming programs, ethnic and mom-and-pop grocery stores, curbside produce stands and other fresh-food outlets.

"Food deserts can be addressed in a variety of ways," said Julie Peck-Dabling, a county special-service manager overseeing open space and urban farming.

Many of Utah's federally designated nutritional deserts are adjacent to one another, creating contiguous areas that span multiple U.S. Census tracts, a Salt Lake Tribune analysis of USDA data indicates.

Weber County's deserts tend to fall within Ogden city limits, primarily at the city's north and west ends. In Salt Lake County, nutritionally challenged areas are centered in and around South Salt Lake, although there are also smaller ones in Taylorsville, West Valley City and Midvale. Utah County's food gaps are in Provo and Orem.

Rural food deserts in Utah often cover thousands of square miles. All three counties in the state's southeastern corner— Wayne, San Juan and Kane — meet the USDA's desert definition, together spanning roughly 14,507 square miles.

Nearly all of Duchesne and Beaver counties are in the same situation, as are large portions of Millard and Iron counties.

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